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Structure and Agency in the Making of Indian Foreign Policy

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Abstract

India's foreign policy since independence has evolved in three distinct phases. In the first phase, which lasted until 1964, it was mostly ideational. Between 1964 and 1990, it was a peculiar amalgam of ideational rhetoric and increasingly Realist behaviour. Since the end of the Cold War, it has all but embraced Realist premises with occasional rhetorical nods toward its ideational past. This paper traces the sources of these changes and attributes them to an interaction of structure and agency.

India's foreign policy has undergone a dramatic transformation since the country's emergence as an independent state from the collapse of the British Indian Empire in 1947. This paper will locate the sources of the shifts that have taken place in the country's foreign policy over the past six decades. To that end it will argue that the origins and evolution of India's foreign policy can be best traced to an interaction between the structure and agency.²

Specifically, it will argue that the country's post-independence political leadership had initially embarked upon an attempt to transform the texture of international politics through the pursuit of

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² For a useful discussion, see Andreas Bieler and Adam David Morton, 'The Gordian Knot of Agency-Structure in International Relations: A Neo-Gramscian Perspective,' *European Journal of International Relations*, Vol.7, no.5 (2001). The paper will also utilise the levels of analysis as spelled out in Kenneth N. Waltz, *Man, State and War: A Theoretical Analysis* (New York: Columbia University Press, 2001).

an ideational foreign policy. It will then show how the policy underwent a significant, though incomplete, transformation in the aftermath of the disastrous Sino-Indian Border War of 1962.

After this rude awakening, India's post-Nehru political leadership decided to acquire sufficient military capabilities to defend the country's territorial integrity. However, it refused to entirely abandon the Nehruvian legacy. Accordingly, the country did not dispense with the strategy of nonalignment and continued to support a range of global causes, on occasion to the detriment of its own national interests. Indeed it will be demonstrated that it was only the end of the Cold War that induced India to finally abandon its commitment to nonalignment. Faced with the Soviet collapse, the emergence of the United States (US) as the dominant global power and confronted with the dramatic rise of the People's Republic of China (PRC), India's policymakers were left with little choice, but to do away with the last trappings of the ideational world view. Nevertheless, key individuals within India's attentive public as well as its foreign policy establishment, continued to argue the case for adhering to India's ideational foreign policy orientation.³ In effect, the structural features of the global order ultimately induced India's policymakers to abandon their transformational agenda and adopt policies best suited to advancing India's core strategic and security interests.⁴

The Nehruvian Era: 1947-1964

The principal architect of India's foreign policy, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, had developed and pursued the strategy of nonalignment, as is well-known.⁵ The full dimensions of his foreign policy, however, are not adequately appreciated or understood, for the most part. Imbued with anti-colonial zeal and an ideational world view, he sought to bring about a transformation of the emergent global order. Under these circumstances, he campaigned for decolonisation, disarmament and the redistribution of global resources on a more equitable basis. He also reposed considerable faith in multilateral organisations and in their capacity to limit international conflicts.

The nascent quality of India's domestic foreign policy making institutions had given Nehru considerable leeway to pursue his transformational agenda at the global level. Two particular concerns had animated Nehru in his pursuit of an ideational foreign policy. At one level he was deeply concerned about the possible militarisation of Indian society. He feared that involvement

³ For a particularly clear statement see S. D. Muni, 'India and the Post-Cold War World: Opportunities and Challenges,' *Asian Survey*, Vol.31, no.9 (September 1991), pp.862-874.

⁴ The standard Neo-Realist statement about the significance of structure in shaping the choices of states in the international arena remains. See Kenneth N. Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (New York: McGraw Hill, 1979).

⁵ For a slightly contrary view, see T. A. Keenleyside, 'The Inception of Indian Foreign Policy: The Non-Nehruvian Contribution,' *South Asia: Journal of South Asian Studies*, Vol.4, no.2, (1981), pp.63-78.

in the emergent superpower conflicts and pacts would invariably lead to a distortion of India's domestic political and economic priorities. Critical and scarce resources, he feared, would then be directed toward the military enterprise with considerable opportunity costs. At another level, Nehru abhorred the use of force in international politics and had profound reservations about the profession of arms.⁶

Not surprisingly Nehru sought to bolster the nascent United Nations (UN) and made India an active participant in UN peacekeeping operations. For this reason he sought to play a mediatory role in concluding the Korean War. India helped bring about the neutralisation of Laos and subsequently, along with Poland and Canada, served as members of the International Control Commission in Vietnam.⁷ Among other episodes, India played a vital role in the UN attempts to defuse the crisis in the Congo in the shambolic aftermath of Belgian colonial withdrawal from the country.⁸

Owing to Nehru's passionate opposition to nuclear weapons, India also introduced a resolution in the UN General Assembly as early as 1953, calling for a 'standstill' agreement on the testing of nuclear weapons. Nehru also commissioned the first public study of the radiological, blast and other effects of nuclear weapons.

His preoccupation with these global and multilateral initiatives, however, was not without cost to India's national security. He largely ignored the warnings of his Deputy Prime Minister Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel about the possible dangers that India might face from its behemoth northern neighbour, the PRC.⁹ This neglect, in the late 1950s, would have significant adverse consequences for India's defence policies and ultimately culminate in the military debacle of 1962.¹⁰

⁶ On Nehru's views about the profession of arms, see the discussion in Stephen P. Cohen, *The Indian Army: Its Contribution to the Development of a Nation* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991). For an early assessment of the possible risks of a military takeover in India, see Taya Zinkin, 'India and Military Dictatorship,' *Pacific Affairs*, Vol.32, no.1 (March 1959), pp.91-98.

⁷ D. R. Sardesai, *Indian Foreign Policy in Cambodia, Laos and Vietnam, 1947-64* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1968).

⁸ For a discussion of the political backdrop of the Congo crisis see Carole J.L. Collins, 'The Cold War Comes to Africa: Cordier and the 1960 Congo crisis', *Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.47, no.1 (Summer 1993), pp.243-256.

⁹ An early and important discussion of Indian defense policy in the Nehru years and immediately thereafter is Lorne J. Kavic, *India's Quest for Security: Defense Policies: 1947-1965* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1967).

¹⁰ An excellent account of the events leading up to the war and the intra-war decision-making process is Steven Hoffman, *India and the China Crisis* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990).

In the Aftermath of Nehru

On a personal level, the disastrous border war left Nehru a broken man and for all practical purposes spelled the doom of his ideational world view. His immediate successor, Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, though a competent politician, lacked Nehru's grand visions of domestic and international transformation. Furthermore, he faced more compelling quotidian tasks, including the urgent need to address India's severe conventional military deficits.

On a national level, his government undertook a drastic and much overdue modernisation of India's armed forces to render them suitable to cope with a future military threat from the PRC.¹¹ India was in the early stages of revamping its conventional military capabilities when the PRC tested its first nuclear weapon in 1964. The nuclear test generated a political firestorm within India and contributed to an important parliamentary debate about India's ability to cope with this new threat.¹²

Finally, on a global level, India embarked on an abortive quest to obtain a nuclear guarantee from the great powers.¹³ In the wake of this failure and aware that the global nuclear order would be shaped dramatically with the passage of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which was under discussion at the Conference on Disarmament (CD) in Geneva, India's policymakers authorised the Subterranean Nuclear Explosions Project (SNEP).¹⁴ The project proceeded apace, though not without setbacks and culminated in the first Indian nuclear test of 1974.

The country had barely recovered from the shock of the Chinese nuclear tests when another war erupted with Pakistan in 1965. The conflict, which was of a short duration and fought over the question of the disputed state of Jammu and Kashmir, ended mostly in a stalemate.¹⁵ Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri negotiated a post-war agreement at the then Soviet Central Asian city of Tashkent under the terms of which the two sides agreed to return to the status quo ante. Almost immediately after the formal completion of this accord, Shastri died of a heart attack.

¹¹ Raju G. C. Thomas, *The Defense of India: A Budgetary Perspective of Strategy and Politics* (Delhi: Macmillan, 1986).

¹² On the Chinese nuclear test, see John Wilson Lewis and Xue Litai, *China Builds the Bomb* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1991). On the Indian debate see G. G. Mirchandani, *India's Nuclear Dilemma* (New Delhi: Popular Book Services, 1968); also see Sisir Gupta, 'The Indian Dilemma', in Alastair Buchan (ed.), *A World of Nuclear Powers?* (Englewood Cliffs: Prentice Hall, 1966).

¹³ On this subject see A. G. Noorani, 'India's Quest for a Nuclear Guarantee,' *Asian Survey*, Vol.7, no.7 (July 1967), pp.490-502.

¹⁴ Stephen M. Meyer, *The Dynamics of Nuclear Proliferation* (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1986).

¹⁵ For an excellent treatment of the origins and conduct of the 1965 war, see Russell Brines, *The Indo-Pakistani Conflict* (New York: Pall Mall, 1968).

Following Shastri's abrupt demise the ruling Congress Party chose to install Nehru's daughter, Indira Gandhi, as the new prime minister. Indira Gandhi, unlike her father, had no intellectual proclivities and had little interest in pursuing any sweeping designs to transform India's domestic political order, let alone the global arena. Indeed, in retrospect, it is more than apparent that she had no viable, coherent vision for India's foreign policy, barring some crude notion of enhancing India's national interests as she and a handful of close advisers construed them. As one observer of her foreign policy has written, 'Where Nehru had articulated India's national interests in high-flown phrases of world peace and cooperation, Indira stressed security, territory and prestige as integral parts of national interest.'¹⁶

As a consequence, her foreign policy was one that was mostly ad hoc, reactive and lacking in strategic vision. When faced with a severe domestic economic crisis, she demonstrated little diplomatic finesse in negotiating with the US and multilateral donors.¹⁷ Indeed her inept handling of the issue, including her strident (and ineffectual) criticism of the US conduct of the war in Vietnam, led to a significant rift in Indo-US relations.

In fairness, however, she did manage the Indo-Pakistani crisis in 1971 in the subcontinent with consummate skill. The difference in her handling of these two crises requires a word of explanation. During the first crisis she had just assumed office, was (and remained) unfamiliar with key questions of economics and very possibly unsure about her standing at home and abroad. Five years later she had managed to strengthen her domestic position. Also, the 1971 crisis, unlike the one in 1966, was both political and strategic.¹⁸

India at the Margins

During much of the next two decades, systemic, national and decision-making factors contributed to India's near-complete marginalisation in the global order. At a global level, between 1966 and 1971, India's material weakness enabled the US to mostly ignore it. The Soviets also evinced limited interest in India. Indeed it was not until the 1971 crisis that they paid much heed to India. Ironically, despite India's limited material capabilities, they chose to court India because of a common concern about the PRC and the emergence of a PRC-US nexus, which had an underlying anti-Soviet orientation.

¹⁶ Surjit Mansingh, *India's Search for Power: Indira Gandhi's Foreign Policy 1966-1982* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 1984).

¹⁷ On this subject, see Sumit Ganguly, 'Of Great Expectations and Bitter Disappointments: US-Indian Relations Under the Johnson Administration', *Asian Affairs*, Vol.15, no.4 (Winter 1988/89), pp.212-19.

¹⁸ For two excellent and complementary discussions of the 1971 crisis see Robert Jackson, *South Asian Crisis: India, Pakistan, Bangla Desh* (London: Chatto and Windus, 1975); and Richard Sisson and Leo E. Rose, *War and Secession: India, Pakistan and the Creation of Bangladesh* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1991).

India also felt compelled to move closer to the Soviets because of on-going fears about a revanchist PRC, the US support for Pakistan during the 1971 war, and because it suited the Congress regime's left-wing orientation. Finally, the Indo-Soviet treaty of 'Peace, Friendship and Cooperation' signed in August 1971 provided the country with a tacit security guarantee.

Finally, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi's own predilections cannot be entirely discounted. Nixon and Kissinger sought to cow her during the 1971 crisis. Not surprisingly she developed a personal animus toward the US and particularly towards the Nixon administration.¹⁹ This hostility combined with the material benefits that accrued from the Indo-Soviet relationship, especially significant arms transfers, led her to tilt toward the Soviet Union all the while professing nonalignment.

The most significant test of this relationship came after the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in December 1979. Contrary to popular belief, there is little questioning that Indira Gandhi cared little for the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan.²⁰ Her concerns were mostly based upon pragmatic security considerations. The Soviet invasion, as she feared, would bring the US into South Asia, renewing an arms transfer and security relationship with Pakistan. In the event, her concerns proved to be entirely justified as the Reagan administration in a strategy to dislodge the Soviets from Afghanistan came to utilise Pakistan as a conduit for training, organising and supplying the Afghan resistance.²¹ The US obtained access to Pakistan through a program of significant economic and military largess that inevitably affected the conventional force balance in the subcontinent. Not surprisingly, India immediately turned to the USSR for military assistance to restore the conventional balance in its favour. The Soviets, keen on ensuring India's public acquiescence on the Afghan question, unhesitatingly complied with India's requests for arms transfers.

Under the circumstances, Indo-US relations simply could not dramatically improve. Some minor, and mostly cosmetic, changes did take place after President Reagan and Prime Minister Indira Gandhi met at a North-South summit in Cancun, Mexico. In an effort to wean India away from the Soviet Union, the Reagan administration did make some limited overtures. To that end, it allowed the transfer of some high-technology items which India desperately needed to boost its indigenous weapons industries.²²

¹⁹ See the analysis based upon declassified State Department documents in Debasish Roy Chowdhury, 'Indians Are Bastards Anyway,' *Asia Times* (23 June 2005).

²⁰ For two detailed discussions of the impact of the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan on India and South Asia, see G. S Bhargava, *South Asian Security After Afghanistan* (Lexington: Lexington Books, 1983) and Bhabani Sen Gupta, *The Afghan Syndrome: How to Live with Soviet Power* (London: Croom Helm, 1982).

²¹ Mohammed Yousaf and Mark Adkin, *The Bear Trap: The Defeat of a Superpower* (London: Casemate, 2001).

²² Linda Racciopi, *Soviet policy toward South Asia since 1970* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1994).

In the aftermath of Indira Gandhi's assassination in 1984, her son, a political neophyte, assumed office. Since he had belatedly entered politics after a career as an airline pilot, he lacked the necessary political acumen to bring about substantial changes in India's foreign policy. Consequently, in the absence of bold new initiatives at the level of India's political leadership, there was a substantial continuity in India's foreign and security policies.

National-level factors also militated against significant changes. Given the Reagan administration's willingness to work with and support the military dictatorship of General Zia-ul-Haq, India could ill-afford to weaken, let alone end its on-going relationship with the Soviet Union. It relied on the Soviets for diplomatic support on the Kashmir question, for arms transfers and for substantial markets.

Finally, the global distribution of power was such that India benefited from its quasi-alignment with the Soviet Union as it inhibited any serious prospect of Chinese revanchism. In effect, forces at all three levels offered few incentives for any dramatic shifts in Indian foreign policy.

What did change, however, was the regional security situation in South Asia. The changes in the regional security order stemmed mostly from the exigencies of India's domestic politics and more specifically from the shortcomings of India's federalism. As a consequence, the country faced ethno-religious insurgencies in both the Punjab and Kashmir in the early and late 1980s, respectively.²³ Though both uprisings had quintessentially domestic origins, Pakistan quickly became involved in both. Pakistani involvement in both rebellions increased their intensity, prolonged their duration and made their resolution more difficult. Throughout much of the decade, India remained preoccupied with the suppression of the Punjab insurgency and then had to devote substantial efforts to the containment of the uprising in Kashmir.

Despite these domestic preoccupations because of geopolitical, national and leadership considerations, India also became embroiled in the civil war in Sri Lanka in the mid-1980s. At a geopolitical level, India looked askance toward Sri Lanka's increasing closeness with the US. At a national level, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi felt compelled to intercede in Sri Lanka's domestic conflict because of the growing concerns about the plight of the country's Tamil minority within the Indian state of Tamil Nadu. Finally, he also visualised a more active role for India within the region. Unfortunately, his decision to send in an Indian military contingent to enforce the Indo-

²³ For a thoughtful analysis of the origins of the Punjab insurgency, see Hamish Telford, 'The Political Economy of the Punjab: Creating Space for Sikh Militancy,' *Asian Survey*, Vol.32, no.11 (November 1992), pp.969-87. On the Kashmir insurgency, see Sumit Ganguly, *The Crisis in Kashmir: Portents of War, Hopes of Peace* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1997).

Sri Lankan Accord, which had been designed to end a fratricidal civil war, ended mostly in a fiasco.²⁴

The Post Cold War Era

It was not until the end of the Cold War that all three forces again converged to contribute toward a fundamental re-appraisal and eventual transformation of India's foreign policy. A leadership change came about as a consequence of Rajiv Gandhi's assassination on the campaign trail in May 1991. A stalwart of the Congress Party, Narasimha Rao, became the new prime minister. Quite early in his term, he confronted an unprecedented national financial crisis.

A number of factors contributed to this crisis. First, under Rajiv Gandhi, India had pursued a policy of piecemeal economic liberalisation. As a consequence, it had loosened regulations on imports and had also engaged in considerable deficit spending. Resultantly, it had amassed considerable external debts with multilateral institutions payments on which came due at a most inopportune moment.

Second, the timing of these debt payments was less than propitious for India because they coincided with the aftermath of the first Gulf War. The war had a disproportionate impact on India because over a hundred thousand Indian expatriate workers in the region had to be repatriated. Third, the Indian exchequer also faced an abrupt loss of their remittances.²⁵ The severity of the crisis was such that at one point India had only two weeks' worth of foreign exchange available to purchase essential edible oils on the global market.

Fortunately, the Indian political leadership under Prime Minister Narasimha Rao along with his Finance Minister Manmohan Singh used this crisis to dramatically alter the orientation and content of India's domestic and foreign economic policies.²⁶ In effect, India steadily abandoned its commitment to import-substituting industrialisation (ISI) with its emphasis on high tariff walls. Simultaneously, it started to dismantle the labyrinthine set of controls, quotas and licenses that had throttled economic growth, stifled innovation and curbed competition.

Prime Minister Narasimha Rao not only showed considerable dexterity in handling this crisis, but also managed to change the direction of India's foreign and security policies in the wake of

²⁴ On the politics of the Indian involvement in Sri Lanka, see S. D. Muni, *The Pangs of Proximity* (New Delhi: Sage, 1993). For a military analysis of the Indian Peace Keeping Force and its fate see Lieutenant-General Depinder Singh, *The IPKF in Sri Lanka* (Noida: Trishul Publications, 2002).

²⁵ Sumit Ganguly, 'Between Iraq and a Hard Place: The Developing World and the New Oil Crisis,' *The International Executive*, Vol.32, no.4 (January-February 1991), pp.37-8.

²⁶ Jagdish Bhagwati, *India in Transition: Freeing the Economy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1993).

the Soviet collapse. He was acutely aware that the principal successor state to the Soviet Union, Russia, was simply unwilling and unable to assume the same role that the Soviets had played vis-à-vis India during the Cold War.²⁷ Yet important differences remained with the US on questions of human rights in Kashmir, on international trade and on nuclear proliferation. Consequently, while attempting to mend fences with the US, he nevertheless emphasised India's preference for a multi-polar world order, a sentiment echoed both in France and Russia, albeit for their own reasons.

In his attempt to improve Indo-US relations, Rao changed India's long-standing policy of keeping Israel at some distance. The successful conclusion of the secret Israeli-Palestinian negotiations in Madrid also provided him sufficient political cover at home and abroad to pursue a new relationship with Israel. Such political protection was deemed vital because virtually all political regimes in India had long been staunch supporters of the Palestinian movement for self-determination and were acutely sensitive to Muslim political opinion at home.²⁸

In addition to his attempts to improve relations with the US and Israel, Rao initiated what came to be known as India's 'Look East' policy. This policy entailed engaging the dynamic economies of Southeast Asia after a long period of neglect.²⁹ Despite India's early and initial engagement with the region, during much of the Cold War, it had been at odds with most of the states of the region because it had seen their regimes as little more than stooges of American global power. The liberalisation of the Indian economy made it imperative to end the ideologically-based neglect of this economically vibrant region of the world.

Apart from these initiatives, the Rao regime also continued support India's nuclear weapons program. The program had received a significant boost in 1989 under Rajiv Gandhi, when he had been advised of the growing threat to India's conventional capabilities because of the growth of the PRC-aided Pakistani nuclear weapons program. Rao's willingness to support the nuclear weapons program was not difficult to fathom. India, for all practical purposes, had lost the tacit security guarantee from the Soviet Union that it had enjoyed since 1971. Consequently, it made much sense for the country to acquire a viable nuclear deterrent to ward off possible nuclear blackmail at the hands of the PRC. In fact, it is now known that Rao had authorised a nuclear test in 1995. However, American spy satellites had detected the preparations at the Pokhran test site leading Ambassador Frank Wisner to confront Rao with the evidence thereof. Fearing significant

²⁷ For a particularly comprehensive and thoughtful discussion of the impact of the Soviet collapse on India's military capabilities see Ramesh Thakur, 'The Impact of the Soviet Collapse on Military Relations with India,' *Europe-Asia Studies*, Vol.45, no.5 (1993), pp.831-50.

²⁸ On this subject, see Nicolas Blarel, 'Indo-Israeli Relations: The Emergence of a Strategic Partnership,' in Sumit Ganguly (ed.) *India's Foreign Policy: Retrospect and Prospect* (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2010).

²⁹ Frederic Grare and Amitabh Mattoo, (eds.) *Beyond the Rhetoric: The Economics of India's Look East Policy* (New Delhi: Manohar, 2003).

American and multilateral sanctions which could have derailed his careful program of economic reform, Rao chose to defer the tests.³⁰

Despite the emergence of a Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) led regime following the Indian general elections of 1998, the foreign and security policies of the country did not undergo a fundamental transformation. Such continuity was remarkable given that much of the BJP's leadership were known for their hawkish dispositions. The BJP-led government, however, did lead India to cross the nuclear Rubicon. Once again the explanation underlying the decision to test nuclear weapons can be found at three distinct levels. First, India's policymakers were alarmed at the ease with which the US managed to ensure the indefinite and unconditional extension of the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) in 1995. Shortly thereafter, they failed to prevent the preferred draft text of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) from being reported to the UN General Assembly from the Conference in Disarmament (CD) in Geneva. They were especially concerned that a clause in the draft treaty would require some 44 states with on-going nuclear power programs to ratify the treaty before it entered into force. In turn, they were acutely aware that the global community cared little about the vast majority of the 44 states. The real object of pressure, indubitably, was going to be India.³¹

Confronted with the possibility of encountering significant constraints on its on-going nuclear weapons program, the BJP-led coalition chose to conduct a series of five nuclear tests on 11 and 13 May 1998, thereby effectively ending India's posture of nuclear ambiguity. In the wake of the tests, a spate of the US-led multilateral sanctions followed. However, the bulk of them were lifted in about a year as their efficacy proved questionable as India managed to deftly weather their impact.

Was the decision to cross the nuclear Rubicon solely a function of the hawkish BJP's presence as the dominant partner of the ruling coalition as some have alleged? The evidence does not seem to support that facile conclusion. Narasimha Rao had actually contemplated a set of tests but faced with American pressure had chosen to defer them. Consequently, the tests cannot be attributed primarily to the BJP's assumption of political office.

The BJP-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA) lost the national elections in 2004 and a Congress-dominated United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government came into office. The UPA regime did little or nothing to alter the course of India's nuclear weapons program. Indeed the UPA regime expended significant domestic political capital to negotiate and successfully reach a

³⁰ C. Christine Fair, 'Learning to Think the Unthinkable: Lessons from India's Nuclear Tests,' *The India Review*, Vol.4, no.1 (March 2005), pp.23-58.

³¹ For a discussion of India's pathway to the 1998 tests, see Raj Chengappa, *Weapons of Peace: The Secret Story of India's Quest to Be a Nuclear Power* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2000).

civilian nuclear accord with the US which all but recognised India as a de facto nuclear weapons state.³²

The Challenges Ahead

India's foreign policy has undergone nothing short of a fundamental transformation since the end of the Cold War. It has, for all practical purposes, abandoned its hoary commitment to nonalignment though some elements of India's political leadership deem it necessary to continue to pay public homage to the doctrine. In practice, however, the country has adopted a policy that is mostly pragmatic and designed to promote its conception of key national interests.

The abandonment of the pursuit of world order on an ideational basis is, without question, a move that will facilitate India's long-held dream of achieving great power status. Despite this welcome development, the country still confronts a set of challenges in its efforts to transcend the region and emerge as a significant actor in global politics. Four challenges in particular can be identified.

First, India's policymakers have not been able to articulate an alternative grand strategy for the country to replace its prior commitment to nonalignment. At best, Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has stated that India's foreign policy is based upon 'enlightened self-interest'. This formulation, however, does not amount to even a semblance of a grand strategy. A country that hopes to play a major role in global affairs cannot be so bereft of ideas to guide its foreign policy. In effect, India's policymakers need to spell out a new vision of a global order barring a vague preference for multi-polarity.

Second, India's institutions of foreign policy making are not adequately equipped to deal with the demands of the enhanced role that it hopes to play in the international order. As it has been commented on elsewhere, even the size of the Indian diplomatic corps is miniscule given the tasks that it is increasingly expected to perform. A country of India's size and significance cannot operate an effective foreign policy with a diplomatic service, which has a mere 700 odd officers.³³ Additionally, the diplomatic corps does not have sufficient numbers of personnel with adequate training in either functional issues or regional knowledge. Such a paucity of adequate training is bound to hobble the country's efforts to effect changes in the global system.

In a related vein, India also lacks a cadre of university professors, independent analysts in think tanks and analysts who can proffer timely, reliable and policy-relevant advice to the foreign

³² Sumit Ganguly and Dinshaw Mistry, 'The Case for the US-India Nuclear Agreement,' *World Policy Journal*, Vol.23, no.2 (Summer 2006), pp.11-9.

³³ Daniel Markey, 'Developing India's Foreign Policy "Software"', *Asia Policy*, (8 July 2009), pp.73-96.

policy making apparatus. High quality training institutions in international relations and strategic studies are sorely lacking in the country and so the products of even major universities are, for the most part, downright mediocre. Few of these individuals possess the requisite training to provide careful, considered alternative perspectives, based upon thorough research, to policymakers. Consequently, even if the policymaking apparatus were so inclined its ability to tap into external sources of knowledge and advice are sorely limited.

Third, this inadequacy of functional competence and regional expertise will also adversely affect the country's ability to influence, let alone shape, at least three vital emergent global regimes. These are in the realms of non-proliferation, international trade and climate change. Negotiations over the future of all these three regimes will require extremely skilled, knowledgeable and professional personnel. It is far from clear that India has a surfeit of negotiators of such quality.

Fourth and finally, on a more substantive note, India will have to fashion long-term strategies to handle its fractious neighbour Pakistan, deal with its nettlesome smaller neighbours, cope with the rise of the PRC and fashion a stable relationship with the US. The successful management of these relationships is nothing less than pivotal for India's rise to great power status. The reasons thereof are not far to seek. In the absence of a working Indo-Pakistani rapprochement, the continuing differences will dissipate a significant amount of India's time and some material resources. Similarly, contentious relations with its smaller neighbours, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal will also keep India mostly confined to the region. Also, on-going differences with the PRC on the long-standing border dispute, competition with it over hydrocarbons in distant parts of the world and the quest for influence in Southeast Asia will require the forging of a coherent strategy and not a series of ad hoc and idiosyncratic responses.

Eventually, no relationship, for good or ill, is more important to India than that with the US. Despite hasty and ill-considered analyses of imminent US decline it will, in all likelihood, remain one the most significant actors in global politics over the foreseeable future.³⁴ Fortunately, thanks to India's willingness to dispense with its tired and rank anti-Americanism the relationship has acquired some ballast. Unlike during the Cold War, when it was all but bereft of substance, today it has important military, diplomatic and economic foundations. Changes in regimes in New Delhi or Washington, D.C. may well propel the relationship forward or retard its progress. However, barring some unprecedented setback, it is now hard to visualise how it could revert to the past. That said, a productive working relationship with the US on a host of global issues can facilitate India's rise.

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³⁴ Fareed Zakaria, *The Post-American World* (New York: W.W. Norton and Company, 2008).