

The evolving domestic drivers of Indian foreign policy

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■ Executive summary

India's landmark 2014 election brought Prime Minister Narendra Modi to power with a broad mandate to reshape the country's foreign policy. His sophistication in this realm has surprised many, but current Indian foreign policy is also influenced by both structural domestic factors that pre-date his term and new actors who seek to gain influence or expand their roles. This report explores the effect of domestic influence on Indian foreign policy by outlining the growing links between domestic dynamics and India's international aspirations. It highlights five new domestic determinants of foreign policy decision-making in light of the BJP election victory in 2014. It also discusses five significant challenges that domestic factors pose to India's ability to turn its international aspirations into reality. These factors indicate that even Modi's historic mandate may not be enough to insulate his government from domestic forces – both allies and antagonists – that wish to shape foreign policy. The report concludes with thoughts on how these aspirations and challenges influence the playing field on which foreign policy decisions are currently made in India and may manifest themselves in the policy realm.

“India is not just Delhi. Foreign policy should be decided by the people and not by some politicians sitting in Delhi.”

Narendra Modi (Press Trust of India, 2013)

And even though the “Modi Mandate” has appeared to reconsolidate power in the Office of the Prime Minister, those political and business actors who have gained foreign policy influence over the previous decade intend to retain and expand their power.

Introduction

India's landmark 2014 elections promised to herald a new era in the country's foreign policy, sweeping the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Prime Minister Narendra Modi to power with one of the largest mandates in decades. And in terms of both discourse and substance on foreign affairs Modi has surprised the pundits. Predictions of foreign policy directions under the new prime minister were based on extrapolations from perceptions of his time as Gujarat chief minister, a belief that his simplistic foreign policy statements on the campaign trail would manifest in policy¹ and assumptions that he would be beholden to the centre-right forces he principally represents. While perhaps not the paradigm shift that some claim,² India's institutions, centre-state relations, party system and political culture have all been markedly influenced over the past 18 months.

While it is tempting to view foreign policy through the lens of Modi alone, several slowly evolving structural factors have also deeply influenced India's foreign policy landscape. Despite the strong historical prime ministerial imprint on India's foreign policy, due as much to the country's constitution as to precedents set by leaders starting with Jawaharlal Nehru, domestic forces are finding new areas in which to operate in this realm. As the national narrative formed by combining anti-colonial and post-colonial nationalisms – also known as the “Nehruvian Consensus” – began unravelling in the 1970s, domestic actors gradually gained influence over foreign affairs, particularly in terms of the challenges of economic development, social change and regional disparities. Currently domestic forces are able to exert significant influence on India's external relations, and domestic

1 Most notably Modi's often-suggested idea that India's South Asia foreign policy decision-making process be divested to the chief ministerships of those states that physically border each of India's neighbours.

2 One leading foreign policy analyst sees in the BJP's victory the beginning of India's “Third Republic” (Mohan, 2015). For a host of commentators it marks the end of what the influential columnist Shekhar Gupta (2011) would call the “politics of grievances” and the start of the “politics of aspirations”.

politics frequently contradicts what policymakers consider to be India's core strategic and security interests.

This report explores domestic influence over Indian foreign policy in three sections. The first offers a concise outline of the growing links between domestic dynamics and India's international aspirations over the past decade, showing how the structure of Indian politics over the previous two decades has created space for domestic actors to exert considerable influence on the foreign policy sphere. The second section highlights five new domestic determinants of foreign policy decision-making in light of the BJP election victory in 2014, while the third section presents five significant challenges that domestic factors pose to India's ability to turn its international aspirations into reality. The report concludes with thoughts on how these aspirations and challenges may manifest in policy in the future, and – perhaps more importantly – how they influence the playing field on which decisions are made in contemporary India.

The rise of domestic influences on Indian foreign policy

Few aspects of contemporary India are as central to understanding how the country is currently poised internationally, and where it is likely to head in the near future, as the domestic forces that shape its foreign policy. Yet within the scores of publications that map India's relations with the world, only a handful of accounts discuss the role of domestic forces, and most study these drivers only superficially.³ The complexities of Indian politics are treated in a top-down way and the focus remains on New Delhi-centred variables – the prime minister himself, the Prime Minister's Office, the ruling party at the centre, the ministries involved in foreign policy issues, the elite, and opinion-making individuals and institutions. This approach fails to appreciate the immense influence that domestic forces have on India's foreign affairs and concepts of the "national interest".

Good reasons can be found for this gap. As is the case with many developing states, for decades after independence India's foreign policy had remained remarkably contained in the capital, New Delhi. Analysts thus saw the country's foreign policy and international relations as both Delhi-centric and South Asia-focused (Buzan, 2011; Acharya, 2014; Naik, 2014; Sahni, 2007). But despite India's immense cultural diversity and social ties to its regional neighbours in particular, domestic factors – ranging from public opinion and developmental needs to competing ideologies and visions – were historically de-emphasised where foreign policy was concerned in favour of *realpolitik*-style actions. Over the last decade domestic actors⁴ – and

regional political elites in particular – began to demonstrate how other forces can determine (and perhaps even dictate) selected foreign policies.⁵ Three brief examples illustrate this.

Probably the best-known recent case is that of the India-U.S. nuclear negotiations. In 2005, as India was actively seeking a dramatic turnaround in its relations with the U.S. through an agreement on civil nuclear energy, it experienced strong U.S. pressure to condemn Iran's nuclear programme. Its votes at the UN against Iran in 2005 and 2006 were criticised by the then-United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government's major allies on the left, who saw in these votes the curbing of India's foreign policy autonomy. As the complex multi-staged nuclear deal progressed, the Left Front first protested and then eventually withdrew its support entirely in July 2008. Although the government survived and continued to make progress on the deal with the U.S., this was a major domestic blow to an aspirational foreign policy and arguably the first time since 1962 that foreign policy became a central issue in domestic politics.

Also, during the UPA's second term it encountered several situations where coalition politics thwarted international negotiations. In Bangladesh-bordering West Bengal, the Mamata Banerjee-led Trinamool Congress supported a range of bilateral agreements on river-water sharing, trade, transit rights for India through Bangladesh and border settlements. However, Banerjee protested the river-water-sharing agreement due to local interest group lobbying and withdrew her support just as then-Prime Minister Manmohan Singh was about to make a historic trip to Bangladesh to sign the agreements. Embarrassed, the UPA ultimately failed to sign the treaties and in September 2012 the Trinamool Congress walked out of the alliance in an action perceived to be deeply damaging to foreign policy (Stratfor, 2013). A similar process occurred in Tamil Nadu, where the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK) was a UPA ally. Between 2012 and 2013 DMK pressure caused India to censure Sri Lanka at the UN Human Rights Council (an action that contradicted India's long-standing principle of not voting for country-specific resolutions) and boycott a Commonwealth Heads of Government meeting.

Thirdly, the UPA government's dual-power structure hampered foreign policy aspirations during the final years of the coalition's second term in office. Under this model, one power node belonged to alliance chairperson and Congress president Sonia Gandhi and another to Prime Minister Singh. Singh had a vision for India as a liberal democracy with a strong, vibrant economy that worked towards a rule-based, liberal international order, while the Gandhis prioritised

3 Appadorai (1981) remains the pioneering work on the subject. See also Andersen (1983) and Varghese (2013).

4 This admittedly vague term encapsulates a wide range of individuals, interest groups, and business and political forces (among others) that attempt to influence foreign policy decision-making. Unfortunately, this report is unable to undertake a systemic typology of such actors, but instead highlights many that have made concrete overtures in this space.

5 The authors of course recognise the monumental roles that the rise of coalition politics and economic liberalisation have played as macro shocks affecting Indian foreign policymaking. However, it is beyond the scope of this report to analyse in depth the specific points of these two well-researched streams.

domestic issues supporting the socially and economically marginalised. But because Singh derived his power from Gandhi, his ability to initiate policies that disagreed with her views or those of Congress vice president Rahul Gandhi was in fact even more limited than a conventional power-sharing framework might be assumed to permit.

Moreover, Singh's model of development was designed to attract foreign investments for industry, infrastructure and economic growth. But to become investment friendly, India needed a welcoming legislative framework and state support for foreign capital investments. Here the contradictions surfaced very starkly during the second half of the second edition of the UPA government: whenever a major conflict developed between a large investment proposal and the social groups likely to be affected by it, the party's top leadership often publicly supported regional issues over policy prescriptions from its own government in New Delhi. For example, Rahul Gandhi supported opposition to multibillion dollar investment projects by metals majors such as South Korea's POSCO and the UK-based Vedanta Resources in Odisha.⁶ The growing perception in Delhi was that the UPA's two power centres were oriented in different directions and the leadership of the governing party was undermining the government's foreign policy aimed at increasing domestic economic growth.

The combination of coalition compulsions and a dual-power-centre arrangement undermined the prime minister and riddled the government with incoherence and contradictions. This crisis of governance came to be described as the UPA's "policy paralysis". India's foreign policy became beholden to the domestic constituency, coalition politics intensified, and the fallout affected both politics and policy (Schaffer, 2013). Apart from setbacks on the Sri Lankan and Bangladeshi fronts, the government could make little progress on relations with Pakistan, despite Singh's deep personal interest in resolving the conflict between the two countries. The sense of drift was palpable in India's regional security policy, with "ad hocism" defining relations with China and Pakistan in particular. This dysfunctional scenario emboldened both the BJP on the right and NGOs and civil society groups representing marginalised communities on the left that were opposed to a foreign economic policy that they saw as causing dislocation, suffering for the poor and environmental harm.

So dire was the domestic situation that commentators frantically reminded the UPA of the harm being done to the "national interest". Sceptics chided Singh, arguing that "When a government yields to every pressure group at home, its capacity to pursue national interests abroad inevitably erodes" (Mohan, 2013). But the "national interest" – that perpetually ambiguous concept – had ceased to

be the prerogative and preserve of the prime minister and the ministries directly associated with foreign policy development and conduct. This enabled regional parties, national opposition parties, states with stakes in neighbouring countries and social movements representing a range of social forces to become new participants in the debate over the meaning of India's national interest, opening space for new conceptualisations, but also feeding the growing perception of a crisis in Delhi.

These actions are part of a broader movement that has seen deeper engagement by peripheral actors in Indian foreign policy. Over the previous two decades, social movements, regional political parties, states that share international boundaries, and ethnic groups with transnational or international linkages (e.g. people from Tamil Nadu or Kerala) have all attempted to influence foreign policy concerns from local state settings, testing the centre's claim over the definition and pursuit of national interest through foreign policy. Some have argued that this challenges the traditional Indian top-down model of foreign policymaking (Brass, 1994; Kaviraj, 1988; Maini, 2012) and the quirks of federal democracy, heralding the emergence of local forces and coalition politics attempting to accommodate regional, subnational and caste identities (Miklian, 2011). The long-dominant Indian National Congress Party has been losing support over the past 30 years and thus has had to form ever-larger coalitions in order to stay in power. More partners have meant more interests to reconcile, and these dynamics increasingly encouraged junior partners to become more aggressive vis-à-vis the centre in terms of local and regional claims in the international arena.

In India, two competing visions of this change are emerging. The first is the traditionalist response. Its proponents express great scepticism over the desirability of allowing the country's constituent parts, sectional interests and regional forces any substantive say in foreign policy. They feel that these forces do not understand foreign policy or national interests and tend to jeopardise non-negotiable national interests for short-term parochial or in-group gain. The constitution guarantees foreign affairs as the exclusive domain of the centre, and this monopoly, they say, must not be allowed to be encroached on. Traditionalists⁷ feel that Indian national interests are determined by virtue of the country's history, location, capabilities and international factors. They worry that relinquishing control over foreign policy or involving more players makes India slow to react, seemingly confused and lacking in credibility internationally.

The second vision is the accommodationist or federalist response. Those associated with this view explore why

⁶ The story of POSCO's proposed investment demonstrates the challenges that foreign economic policy faces on the Indian domestic front. In 2005 POSCO signed an agreement for a \$12 billion steel plant in Odisha. This was to be the largest single foreign direct investment in India and a showpiece for the country's upscaling vision. The project has been delayed by a decade because of the maze of India's complex and erratic regulatory framework, environmental concerns, litigation, protests, and competitive politics. At the time of writing the future of the project remains unclear (see also Singh, 2015).

⁷ For a representative view, see Mohan (2013).

actors outside Delhi demand a say in Indian foreign policy and why their voices should be heard. The fact that only four states – Haryana, Chhattisgarh, Madhya Pradesh and Jharkhand – do not share borders with either a country or international waters means that states must be consulted by the centre and their concerns addressed (Chatterji, 2014; Sreenivasan, 2014; Joshi, 2013). This model, which Indian leaders proposed in earlier decades of independent India, was endorsed by Narendra Modi himself when he was campaigning as a federalist champion (Iyer, 2013). At the same time federalists agree that regional elites should not be allowed to arm-twist or blackmail the centre, in order to avoid policy confusion or paralysis. One analyst has even proposed an institutional mechanism – a subcontinental relations council comprising the external affairs minister and the chief ministers of the states that share external borders – to facilitate coordination between the two units of the Indian polity (Pai, 2013).

The 2014 election appeared to upend these calculations. Despite Modi's previous stance supporting regionalism in foreign policy (in light of his words quoted at the start of this report), a perception has emerged that he controls – or even micro manages – most foreign policy decisions. The largest political mandate in three decades combined with Modi's populist draw (and reputation for top-down leadership) presents a dilemma: does the current landscape represent merely an exception that will revert to fragmentation and political turmoil in the next general election, thus further empowering regional and state-level actors in India's international policy arena? Or does it spell the beginning of something structurally distinct and enduring, a return to the foreign policy coherence of decades past?

Five new determinants of domestic influence on India's foreign policy

To inform answers to these questions, five broad categories of domestic influence that currently influence evolving Indian foreign policy decision-making processes are explored below: simple majority politics, the symbolism of Indian aspirations, the factor of Modi's personality, regional states' influence and business interests.

Firstly and most simplistically, the BJP's simple majority means a government that in theory is less constrained by regional political forces or alliance partners that can bring coalition politics to a grinding halt. Policy is then by definition allowed to be more rational and predictable in both the domestic and international environments. A related factor is that few in the BJP are seen to be able to challenge either Modi or BJP president Amit Shah. Like any

other party in India, the BJP has disgruntled elements, but they are unlikely to cause serious foreign policy disruptions in the short term.⁸ As a result, the party's projection of corporate unity and its marginalising of rebellious leaders can be expected to continue, especially given India's need for sustained economic growth and social development. This basic current political reality has set the stage for confronting the issues that the Modi government was elected to deal with.

Secondly, the symbolism of aspiration has acquired great substance through Modi. There has been a long-standing practice of paying occasional lip service to traditional Indian principles of foreign policy such as non-alignment, morality and human rights. But under Modi the hesitancy about India projecting itself as an aspirational and even aggressive international power is disappearing. For example, the BJP has sought to replace the five traditional international principles of *panchsheel* (a term associated with Buddhism) with the five new pillars of *panchamrit* or "five nectars" (a term unambiguously associated with Hinduism). These are: dignity, dialogue, security, shared prosperity and culture.⁹ While *panchsheel* sought to combine and balance the values of India and those of the West, *panchamrit* calls to mind the emphasis on non-Western, "Asian values" that do not necessarily fit well with the values of open, searching and public criticism, social equality, and radical dissent in politics. Further, Modi promises that India will now be guided by the "Three Cs" in its international relations: culture, commerce and connectivity (*Economic Times*, 2014). This is typified by the government's unapologetic use of its religious and cultural resources – primarily Hinduism – as elements of soft power on the international stage.¹⁰ The declaration that June 21st would be International Yoga Day and Modi's numerous religious/cultural gestures during his overseas visits support this perspective.

Thirdly, the personality factor has returned to the centre of Indian diplomacy. Modi has recast Indian foreign policy in a vigorous and purposive – and above all personal – light. His image is that of a simple and hardworking man who is clearheaded, decisive, and incorruptible. Like neoliberal leaders of China (primarily the late Deng Xiaoping) and Singapore (the late Lee Kuan Yew), he has been described as a pragmatist. Although the term is ephemeral and something of a misfit (principally because Modi is economically and politically ideological), it has been used to positively describe his business-like attitude to foreign affairs. He lends a personal touch to relations with powers greater than India, as was evident in the way India hosted U.S. president Barack Obama and Chinese president Xi

8 This is not to say that the BJP does not experience internal challenges, as the summer 2015 middle-class riots in Ahmedabad illustrated. Ultimately, it is likely that if there is a domestic schism in the BJP that influences foreign policy, it will be related to Modi's aspirational economic model.

9 BJP (2015). The new term was coined in the BJP's foreign policy resolution adopted at its Bengaluru National Executive meeting in 2015. That fact that this was its first-ever separate foreign policy resolution attests the importance the party – and by extension the government – attaches to foreign policy.

10 Some have explored Modi's previous tenure as chief minister of Gujarat as a potential window into how as prime minister he would negotiate the interaction effects that link the local, regional and global, such as the role of prioritising Hinduism in an era of globalisation, urbanisation and liberalisation (Bobbio, 2015; Chatterjee, 2009; 2011), but findings in this regard are still inconclusive and contradictory.

11 In terms of U.S.-Indian relations in particular, Modi also enjoyed the tactical advantage of working with a U.S. administration that was forced to de facto apologise for banning him due to his earlier reported ties to deadly riots while he was chief minister of Gujarat in 2002.

Jinping,¹¹ giving the impression that all the parties involved are at the same level and thus hiding power disparities. Modi breaks protocol, becomes informal when the occasion demands, and ably sells India as an investment and cultural destination. Although previous Indian leaders have historically promoted business with “strong” leaders whose democratic credentials are suspected by the international community, Modi has prioritised economic interests rather than democratic ideals and is at ease with such leaders. Finally, unlike other Indian leaders who conducted themselves in deference to established Indian traditions on international conduct built over decades, Modi comes across as unburdened by this legacy. He is neither understated nor regards himself as the leader of a post-colonial country who is conscious of his country’s lack of international clout. He has positioned himself as the leader of a young, aspiring country that has much to offer in terms of culture and human potential.

Fourthly, the influence of India’s states on foreign policy has continued to rise, but in new ways. Structurally, the country’s increasing interest in economic interconnectedness dictates that the centre must involve states more deeply in economic policy, and much of India’s foreign policy is economic. This reality has underpinned Modi’s political promise to include states in foreign policymaking, and he has indeed taken states on board to project them as investment and culture destinations during his overseas tours. This is in many ways the opposite of the regional relationships that the UPA failed to secure during its foreign policy negotiations, as Modi looks to offer regional carrots that are not necessarily tied to regional relations as such. Or, in other words, Modi wishes to be a federalist, but in traditionalist terms.

Two regions in particular – the eastern belt of India comprising eastern Uttar Pradesh, Bihar, Jharkhand and West Bengal, and Northeast India comprising the states of Sikkim, Assam, Arunachal Pradesh, Manipur, Mizoram, Meghalaya Tripura and Nagaland – have taken centre stage. Unsurprisingly, these two regions are central to India’s new policy of subregionalism both within and outside the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation framework. The two regions are also the least developed in terms of basic infrastructure such as roads, ports and regular electricity supply. In an attempt to overcome these challenges the government has commercialised Hindu and Buddhist tourist circuits comprising holy sites in these regions and sought to popularise them in East and South-east Asia. In the Northeast the elevation of the Look East Policy into the Act East Policy recognises the geopolitical and economic reasons for augmenting the North-east’s capacity for trade and transport with South-east Asia and China, reiterated by Modi’s federalist stand that the region cannot be developed from New Delhi (NDTV, 2015).¹² The August 2014 agreement with Japan on upgrading

Varanasi to a “smart city” and the proposal to build another smart city near Allahabad with U.S. help are also illustrative. In the run-up to Bihar elections (October–November 2015), which the BJP lost, a prominent party campaign theme was that it was ideally poised to develop Bihar via foreign investments if it won, because coordination between the state and the centre would be easy. This plank is likely to continue in the crucial upcoming elections in the states of Assam, West Bengal and Uttar Pradesh. And should the BJP succeed in these states, more foreign investments would be directed towards these regions as carrots both to local elites and international investment partners.

Fifthly, the fact that business interests have been increasing their influence on Indian foreign policy is not new. But Modi’s rise has supported a much larger umbrella of business interests that are driven by two expectations of the government: promoting their overseas operations and inviting foreign businesses to partner in expanding locally through joint ventures. These overtures are also aimed at restoring India’s image as a legitimate place to invest in, reflecting the withdrawal of corporate India’s confidence in the UPA government during its second term and the resultant skittishness on the part of international firms. The lurking concern is of over-expectations leading to foreign policies that promote corporate interests over national ones (or corporate interests as national interests). Modi came to power with the overwhelming confidence of the corporate sector, and his challenge is to sustain this confidence through policies that encourage inclusive growth and reduce bureaucracy – two major stumbling blocks of the past year. The effect of corporate lobbying in New Delhi on both elections and policymaking is still deeply understudied,¹³ but anecdotal evidence suggests that both national and multinational firms have a greater degree of access to and influence over Indian foreign policy than ever before.

Five domestic challenges to foreign policy coherence

The evolving Indian domestic landscape also brings a set of growing challenges: the gap between India’s aspirations and capabilities, the demands of the new Indian electorate, the role of the opposition, local tensions regarding regional initiatives and the international perception of Hindu nationalist policy.

Firstly, a wide gap remains between India’s rapidly growing aspirations at the international level and its capabilities to support them. The country is not yet invited to great-power diplomacy on many top-level international issues, such as negotiations on Iran’s nuclear programme or a political solution to the Syrian crisis. Many Indians increasingly consider these exclusions as slights that show where the

¹² However, one could argue that in all other matters (particularly security) New Delhi wishes to maintain a considerable degree of control, particularly with regard to ongoing tensions, riots, and curfews in the region and a number of militant groups still active there.

¹³ Kochanek (1996) is one of the few resources available, although it is rather dated.

country actually stands in terms of power attributes. But as has been noted (e.g. Markey, 2009; Tharoor, 2012), two major problems characterise the current domestic institutional structure responsible for foreign policy: it is understaffed and resistant to initiatives that would scale up India's global activities. Many Indian Foreign Service officers struggle to grapple with complex, technical issue areas like climate change, but this is less an issue of sophistication than of capacity. While a number of talented individuals are working on trade and negotiations, their capacity is currently far outstripped by India's rapidly expanding interest in participating in multilateral forums, and further hampered by issues of institutional culture and centralised bureaucracy across the Indian government. Another problem is that of pace: at the top a strong leader can jet-set the world announcing initiatives. On the lower rungs of power his deputies must ensure execution and follow-up. If the volume of work exceeds staff capacity to deliver, the dynamics between the two levels could be marked by friction and other malaises that often plague institutional hierarchies.

The second major challenge of the new domestic landscape is the new Indian electorate. Not much about this evolving social force can be said with any degree of certainty, principally because it is amorphous, but those who claim to have their finger on its pulse figure prominently in political discourse.¹⁴ The new Indian electorate is said to be largely young, aspirational, and proud of India's cultural traditions (especially Hinduism); is to be found in several tiers of upwardly mobile urban India; and is eager to see less politics (read: bureaucracy and corruption) and more governance (read: efficiency). It eschews ascriptive identities such as those of caste and region, and believes instead in a more aggressive nationalism that is consistent with India's growing economic and cultural stature. While it is unclear to what extent this is a social reality and to what a creation of political discourse, this social force is important because policymakers' belief in its existence can determine the kinds of moves India makes on the world stage. Perhaps more importantly, it is exactly this group to which Modi's most ambitious promises are aimed, and if tensions in Ahmedabad among educated middle-class Hindus in the summer of 2015 over a lack of economic and employment opportunities are any indication, it may be the quickest group to turn on Modi, regardless of any cultural promise of a "Power Hinduism" that he offers to demonstrate to the world.

Thirdly, the BJP's emphatic election victory, its successes in several state elections and its quest for hegemony over Indian politics have alarmed political competitors, including national parties like the Indian National Congress and regional/state-level parties like the Samajwadi Party, the Bahujan Samaj Party and the Janata Dal (United). From a

federalist perspective many avenues are available for resistance, and the experience of the BJP's first year in office has shown that these parties have both the capacity and the willingness to make relentless attacks on Modi's foreign policy initiatives, regardless of their individual merits. As in many other countries, the "glass wall" insulating India's foreign policy decision-making political leadership from its domestically oriented houses of Parliament (the Lok Sabha and Rajya Sabha) has long since shattered and is unlikely to return. Despite minority parties' small numbers in Parliament, especially in the lower house, their resistance can be effective because these parties can also influence large social forces. As a result, any foreign policy initiative that requires legislative approval – as key economic and strategic proposals do – has been, and will likely continue to be, strongly resisted. Indeed, the government's ability to initiate reforms at the pace it set for itself has already derailed because of the successful opposition it has faced to, among others, a proposed law on acquiring land for development purposes.

Fourthly and relatedly, the two regions at the centre of Modi's most ambitious subregional initiatives face numerous local challenges. Corruption, warped governance systems favouring local strongmen with little concern for the "national interest" and law-and-order issues all factor into the difficulty of foreign policymaking, regardless of a Delhi mandate. To use the example of the Northeast, entrenched corruption and forbidding distance from Delhi (in both real and conceptual terms) have delayed connectivity projects such as the Imphal-Mandalay bus service, the trilateral highway connecting India and Thailand through Myanmar, and the Kaladan Multi-modal Transit Transport Project – all highlighted as key regional initiatives to bring trade and development to the area (Downie, 2015). Political rivalries among Northeast states, local resistance to development projects, violent transnational actors operating through Myanmar and Bangladesh, and the more general concern of the securitisation of space in these sensitive areas all restrict the implementation of the Act East policy. Modi was elected as a living example of how one individual can seemingly cut through India's pervasive bureaucracy and corruption, but it is unlikely that his skills will carry over to other parts of the country while he is prime minister, thus jeopardising the effectiveness of such large-scale initiatives with regional implications.

Finally, while Hindu nationalist elements may not influence particular Indian foreign policy initiatives to a great degree,¹⁵ their influence on Indian domestic policies that have international implications may lead to tensions. A growing perception that the government is uncomfortable with leftists of all stripes has been buttressed by action against hundreds of civil society activists and international NGOs that are seen to be opposed to or critical of the

¹⁴ The authors argue that this social force overlaps quite substantially with the aspirational "neo-middle class" that the BJP mentioned in its 2014 election manifesto. Also, a virtual sea of books and articles on this topic are likely to appear in short order, in addition to the rich material available from Indian pundits.

¹⁵ Although analysts argue that these elements do enjoy disproportionate influence over neighbourhood policy, pointing to India's inconsistent policies on Nepal and Pakistan as illustrations.

government's energy, security, development and/or economic policies. This resistance is often couched in terms of these policies' alleged disrespect for tradition or India's cultural heritage – as defined by the Modi administration – and has created a limited (but real) chilling effect on some state-state exchanges. For example, a major latent factor in India's relations with the Islamic world – i.e. India's Muslim population – has all but disappeared. Opposed to what it calls the politics of appeasement, the BJP is pursuing a politics that is effectively blind to the presence of minorities of any sort, but particularly religious minorities. The implication of this is that the sentiments of India's vast Muslim population no longer matter in the same way as they once did. The openness with which India has moved on its relations with Israel, with Modi likely to be the first Indian prime minister to visit that country, illustrates how this approach manifests internationally (Roche, 2015). A major challenge for Indian policymakers remains how to accommodate Hindu nationalist actors in foreign policy decision-making and – perhaps more importantly – knowing which sectors are most vulnerable to pressure in this regard. The crackdown on international NGO activities surprised many, and an atmosphere of continued surprises in this regard may continue in the near future. Finally, social and communal relations in India have come under strain in recent months due to acts of violence against minorities and the marginalised by what are called “fringe elements” associated with the regime in New Delhi. While intellectuals and artists have protested against growing violence and intolerance, both they and ordinary critics of the Modi government have been subjected to unsavoury comments from BJP legislators and government ministers. A new low in public discourse and international concern over events in India have caused the image-conscious government in New Delhi to attempt damage control lest these issues drive potential investors away. But given the contradictions within the ruling regime, with one side focused on making the country a Hindu majoritarian polity and the other on economic development through foreign investment, this challenge to India's foreign policy is likely to remain salient in the foreseeable future.

Conclusion

India's core friction between domestic factors and foreign policy – one representing realities on the ground, the other marked by aspirations to achieving a specifically Indian form of international respect for the country – illustrates the uniqueness of the country's current foreign policy atmosphere. It is simply a matter of time before this tension is broken by a major crisis of foreign policy, but to predict the nature of such a crisis or the ultimate victors in such a scenario would be presumptive. The report's intent in offering five new determinants and five future challenges is intended to be more illustrative than comprehensive in scope. What can be stated with certainty is that in light of the greater number of powerful actors looking to influence Indian foreign policy, even Modi's historic mandate may not be enough to insulate his National Democratic Alliance

government from domestic forces – both allies and antagonists – that wish to shape policy. Like the process seen in developed federal democracies such as the U.S., India is transiting to a domestic playing field where even the most minute foreign policy decisions are increasingly on the parliamentary table and groups focusing on particular issues have disproportionate influence on topics that are not of much concern to the general public. The battle between coherence and fragmentation will be an existential challenge to Indian prime ministers both current and future, and domestic actor interest in foreign policy in the future is likely to strongly correlate with India's growing importance on the international political and economic stages.

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