

# The “Modi Doctrine” and the Future of China-India Relations

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In May 2014, the Modi administration took office in India. Over the past three years and more, India’s diplomacy has been vibrant and assertive, and has formed a distinctive and unique “Modi Doctrine,”<sup>1</sup> a strategy for the rise of India as a great power in the new situation. Fully understanding the characteristics and trends of the “Modi Doctrine” will be of great practical significance in maintaining the healthy and stable development in China-India relations in the long run.

## The “Modi Doctrine” Contributes to India’s Rise

The “Modi Doctrine” has inherited and further developed a major power diplomatic strategy for India since the end of the Cold War. It also reflects Modi’s personal political philosophy and style of administration with the following contents and characteristics:

### **Exhibiting authority and offering benefits in the neighborhood**

Relations between India and its neighboring countries in South Asia

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1 According to Indian media, the “Modi Doctrine” was first proposed by Nisha Desai Biswal, then US Assistant Secretary of State for South Asian affairs. Indian scholars generally focus on diplomacy when they talk about the “Modi Doctrine,” while Indian External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj summed up the “Modi Doctrine” as “India First, Neighborhood First, seeking to be a global power, valuing Indian diaspora, and putting emphasis on delivery.” See “‘Modi Doctrine’: Prime Minister’s Vision Gets a New Name in Washington,” *NDTV*, June 10, 2016, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/as-indo-us-ties-aim-for-global-good-us-calls-pms-vision-modi-doctrine-141761>; Anirban Ganguly, et al., “The Modi Doctrine: New Paradigms in India’s Foreign Policy,” *New Delhi Wisdom Tree*, 2016; “Remarks by External Affairs Minister at the Launch of the Book ‘The Modi Doctrine’ at IIC, New Delhi,” August 13, 2016, <http://www.mea.gov.in>.

have always been the focus of India's diplomacy. From the "Gujral Doctrine" to the peaceful diplomacy between India and Pakistan proposed by Atal Bihari Vajpayee, all previous Indian governments have regarded the South Asian region as their diplomatic priority. After taking office, the leaders of all neighboring countries in South Asia were the first to be invited by the new prime minister to attend his inauguration ceremony, and the first country he visited as Prime Minister was Bhutan, the smallest country in South Asia, again highlighting his policy of giving priority to the development of relations with neighboring countries in South Asia. In the past, India and Bangladesh relations have experienced continual discord as a result of disputes over enclaves. Modi finally resolved the situation through the joint efforts of both parties after he took power, thereby eliminating a major obstacle that has affected the relations between the two countries for several decades.<sup>2</sup> While continuing to provide massive assistance to Bhutan, the Maldives, Nepal and Afghanistan, the Modi government pays more attention to its control over them. If these countries do not heed the will of India, India will not hesitate to inflict heavy penalties on them. In 2015, India imposed an economic blockade on Nepal because of constitutional issues. In order to exert pressure on Pakistan, the Modi government was not averse to crossing the border to attack the base of the anti-Indian organization in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir.<sup>3</sup>

The starting point of Modi's South Asia diplomacy is to increase its control over small and medium-sized neighbors and to impede the presence or growing influence in the region of other forces outside South Asia. South Asia policy under the "Modi Doctrine" focuses on tightening the interest bond between India and neighboring countries, and better serving India's economic and social development strategy by promoting regional and sub-regional connectivity. In recent years, India has accelerated

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2 "More than 50,000 People to be Affected as India and Bangladesh to Interchange Enclaves," *Xinhua*, June 8, 2015, [http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2015-06/08/c\\_127887346.htm](http://news.xinhuanet.com/world/2015-06/08/c_127887346.htm).

3 Kanti Bajpai, "Narendra Modi's Pakistan and China policy: Assertive Bilateral Diplomacy, Active Coalition Diplomacy," *International Affairs*, January 2017, [www.chathamhouse.org/publication/ia/narendra-modi-s-pakistan-and-china-policy-assertive-bilateral-diplomacy-active](http://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/ia/narendra-modi-s-pakistan-and-china-policy-assertive-bilateral-diplomacy-active).

cooperation mechanisms such as the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Cooperation and the “Bhutan-Bangladesh-India-Nepal Connectivity Cooperation,” with a view toward forging an India-led regional and sub-regional cooperation framework. The concept and practice of the “Modi Doctrine” reflected in South Asia diplomacy, when compared to previous administrations, has highlighted both its own authority as well as the benefits it can provide to its neighbors, and is more concerned about its dominance in South Asia.

### **Strengthening common interests in the larger periphery**

Since its launch of the Look East policy in 1992, India has expended much talk but little action, and in its relations with its ASEAN partners, India has failed to play a major role. After taking office in 2014, Modi proposed the strategy of Act East, emphasizing practical actions to enhance relations with ASEAN. After that, high-level exchanges between India and the ASEAN countries have been frequent, and India continues to voice its opinion on issues of concern to ASEAN. According to Indian media, India has identified ASEAN as the guest of honor during the 2018 “Republican Day” celebration. The ten leaders of ASEAN members will be invited to attend the celebrations and to visit India.<sup>4</sup> One of the priorities of India’s Act East is infrastructure connectivity, that is, accelerating the construction of transport corridors connecting the east and west, promoting road construction in the northeastern region, and removing the “bottlenecks” hindering connectivity within ASEAN. With the aid of Japan and other countries, the Indian section of the “Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport (KMMTT)” linking Calcutta of India to the Sittwe Port of Myanmar has been fully launched. The India-Myanmar-Thailand highway project has been advanced at a faster pace.

After Modi took office, India’s neighborhood strategy has accelerated markedly. He emphasized that India’s interest should no longer be confined

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4 “Can Act East Address Northeast India Isolation?” *East Asia Forum*, October 27, 2017, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2017/10/27/can-act-east-address-northeast-indias-isolation>.

to the South Asian subcontinent, but should be extended to a vast area from the Gulf of Aden to Malacca. India's "Neighborhood First" strategy has quickly pushed the country westward to the Middle East and Africa.<sup>5</sup> For over three years, Modi has not only visited major countries in the region such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar and Iran, but he has also become India's first Prime Minister to visit Israel. India has also opened up strategic channels to Afghanistan and Central Asia, and tightened its political and economic relations with the Gulf countries in the Middle East via Iran. It is true that his proactive moves in the Middle East are also aimed at isolating Pakistan diplomatically, but more importantly, Modi seeks to better safeguard India's strategic interests such as energy security in the Gulf region, thus serving the long-term need for the country to be a great power.<sup>6</sup>

### **Taking initiative to become an Indo-Pacific leading force**

After taking office, the Modi government has attached great importance to the affairs in the Indian Ocean region, accelerated its promotion of an Indian Ocean strategy, and proposed the five-pronged strategy on the Indian Ocean. India proclaims itself to be the "net security provider" in the Indian Ocean region. It focuses its efforts on strengthening maritime security cooperation with small and medium-sized Indian Ocean countries including Mauritius, Seychelles, Sri Lanka and the Maldives. Their cooperation includes building an Indian Ocean coastal radar surveillance network that reflects India's presence and influence.<sup>7</sup> India has also accelerated its construction of military facilities in the Bay of Bengal and invited Japan, Australia and other countries to participate in the construction of the

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5 Dhruva Jaishankar, "Actualizing East: India in a Multipolar Asia," *ISAS Insights*, No.412, May 2017, <https://www.isas.nus.edu.sg/ISAS%20Reports/ISAS%20Insights%20No.%20412%20-%20Actualising%20East%20-%20India%20in%20a%20Multipolar%20Asia.pdf>.

6 Kanti Bajpai, "Narendra Modi's Pakistan and China Policy: Assertive Bilateral Diplomacy, Active Coalition Diplomacy."

7 C. Raja Mohan, "Modi and the Indian Ocean: Restoring India's Sphere of Influence," Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, Center for International and Strategic Studies, June 18, 2015, <http://amti.csis.org/modi-andthe-indian-ocean-restoring-indias-sphere-of-influence>.

Andaman Sea Naval Base aimed at building it into a strategic outpost in the Indo-Pacific region.<sup>8</sup> Since 2016, India has hosted the Indian Ocean International Symposium in its striving for a greater voice in the region. India made it clear that Indian Ocean affairs “should mainly be managed by the countries in the Indian Ocean region,” and has tried hard to exclude the strategic presence of other major forces there, in order to prevent any challenge to its dominance over the Indian Ocean.<sup>9</sup>

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*India proclaims itself to be the “net security provider” in the Indian Ocean region, and focuses its efforts on strengthening maritime security cooperation with small and medium-sized Indian Ocean countries.*

For a long time, India had adopted a rather vigilant and exclusionist attitude toward any incursion of other major powers into the Indian Ocean. Since Modi took office, India has adjusted its policy to put more emphasis on the strategic cooperation and coordination with the US, Japan and other countries, taking

advantage of the power of the US and Japan in an attempt to maintain its own advantageous position in the competition among the major powers in the Indo-Pacific region. In 2015, the military exercise Malabar between the US and India extended an invitation to Japan to participate. When Modi visited the United States in June 2016, he clearly demonstrated the strategic significance of bilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. India’s strategic sector responded positively to the initiative of the United States and Japan to construct an “Indo-Pacific Alliance”. The Indian government, while making a show of reluctance to join, was actually ready to embrace it. In the eyes of its domestic media, India has adjusted its strategic goal to become a

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8 Pranay VK, “Strategic Salience and of Andaman and Nicobar Islands: Economic and Military Dimensions,” National Maritime Foundation, <http://www.maritimeindia.org/View%20Profile/636373370167194335.pdf>; “India Committed to Preserve, Advance Regional Cooperation: Swaraj,” *Daily News*, September 1, 2017, <http://dailynews.lk/2017/09/01/local/126984/india-committed-preserve-advance-regional-cooperation-swaraj>; “Rearranging the BRICS,” *The Indian Express*, September 5, 2017, <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/raja-mandala-rearranging-the-brics-rics-summit-2017-brics-xiamen-narendra-modi-india-china-4828862>.

9 “India Committed to Preserve, Advance Regional Cooperation: Swaraj,” *Daily News*.

great power, and that “the construction of a ‘multipolar Asia’ — or balancing China — is turning out to be as important as the search for a ‘multipolar world,’ which for so long had been code words for hedging against American unilateralism.”<sup>10</sup>

### **Pursuing better position in major power interactions**

After taking over, Modi has continued the diplomatic policies of previous Indian governments which emphasized relations with the United States. In September 2014, during his visit to the United States, Modi and Obama jointly published an article in *The Washington Post* emphasizing the global influence of the strategic cooperation between the two countries and expressed the will to “ jointly work to maintain freedom of navigation and lawful commerce across the seas.”<sup>11</sup> In January of the following year, Modi invited Obama to attend India’s Independence Day celebration, during which the two countries issued a joint statement on the vision of strategic cooperation. India-US cooperation in defense and security has been further strengthened. The United States promised to help India build its aircraft carrier and transfer anti-submarine technology to India. The two countries also signed an agreement on logistics support, which further enriched their strategic cooperation, especially defense cooperation. After Trump came to power, India was initially quite skeptical about the trend of US domestic and foreign policies. Modi was concerned that Trump’s “America First” policy would undermine the momentum of India-US relations. In June 2017, after Modi’s visit to the United States, US-India bilateral relations continued on a stable footing. At the same time, India has also begun to actively expand its relations with the EU in order to hedge against uncertainties in the domestic and foreign policies of the US.

While increasingly promoting its strategic relations with the United States and other Western countries, India continues to maintain its

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10 “Rearranging the BRICS,” *The Indian Express*.

11 Narendra Modi and Barack Obama, “A Renewed U.S.–India Partnership for the 21st Century,” *The Washington Post*, September 30, 2014.

traditional relations with Russia and has attached great importance to strengthening cooperation and coordination with emerging powers. India has actively promoted the trilateral dialogue among China, Russia and India, striven to become a member of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, paid more attention to its strategic investment in the BRICS cooperation mechanism, and actively participated in such mechanisms as the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and the New Development Bank. India plays its role among the major powers such as the US and Russia, and strives to achieve benefits on all sides. Such an approach has not only maximized its political security and economic interests, but more importantly has maintained and strengthened its initiative in the interaction at the strategic level among the major powers.

### **Actively forging Indian “footprint” in global governance**

Limited by its present stage of development and the influence of domestic politics, combined with the country's dissatisfaction with the current international system dominated by developed Western countries, India had for a long time played the role of “spoiler” in multilateral negotiations. Stephen Cohen, a South Asia expert from the United States, once said that India has often been seen as a “nay-sayer” in multilateral negotiations.<sup>12</sup> For a long time, India was accused of insisting on its own position in the global climate change debates and in the Doha round of WTO negotiations based on its domestic political and development needs. Robert Zoellick and Susan Schwab, both US trade negotiators, have criticized India's negative stance. Zoellick called India a ‘do-nothing country,’ and for Schwab, Indians are ‘elephants hiding behind mice’ in their reluctance to share greater responsibility for providing global public goods.<sup>13</sup>

After taking office, Modi surprisingly adjusted the Indian position on global issues such as climate change, the Doha round of WTO

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12 Amrita Narlikar, “India's Role in Global Governance: a Modi-fication?” *International Affairs*, January 2017, Vol.93, No.1, [www.chathamhouse.org/publication/ia/india-s-role-global-governance-modi-fication](http://www.chathamhouse.org/publication/ia/india-s-role-global-governance-modi-fication).

13 *Ibid.*

negotiations and sustainable development. When Modi visited Germany in 2015, he made it clear that India would actively promote global issues including climate change negotiations.<sup>14</sup> India has actively participated in the negotiations while overcoming domestic difficulties and has played an important role in the conclusion of the Paris Accord. In June 2017, after US President Trump announced the withdrawal of the Paris Agreement, India clearly expressed its opposition and stressed its adherence to relevant international obligations. India has also been actively participating in international agenda-setting to address climate change. It proposed to create an international solar alliance to make full use of renewable energy for sustainable development. India's positive attitude towards global issues and its role in the transformation of the global governance system have attracted the attention of all parties.

### **Seeking changes to create a personal diplomatic style**

After taking office, Modi's strong and decisive governing style and pragmatic governance philosophy began to affect the diplomatic field. Modi paid special attention to enhancing delivery in diplomatic efforts. External Affairs Minister Smt. Sushma Swaraj said that the Modi doctrine is "led by vision and implemented through delivery".<sup>15</sup> In the past three years since Modi assumed power, India's diplomatic delivery has indeed improved. Many foreign aid projects have been promptly implemented and the projects that had been delayed for many years have also been completed in time. India-supported projects such as the Parliament building and the Salma Dam in Afghanistan, the Duriappah Stadium in Sri Lanka, and the trauma center in Nepal have been completed and put into operation as scheduled, which fully reflects the shift of India's diplomatic style under Modi's government.<sup>16</sup>

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14 Narendra Modi, "India Will Set Climate Change Conference Agenda," *The Indian Express*, April 14, 2015, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/india-will-set-climate-change-conference-agenda-narendra-modi>.

15 "Remarks by External Affairs Minister at the Launch of the Book 'The Modi Doctrine' at IIC, New Delhi."

16 *Ibid.*

Under the influence of Modi's governing style, the risk-taking and practicability of India's diplomacy are also on the rise. In order to clear out separatist rebels, Indian troops crossed the border into Myanmar.<sup>17</sup> In 2016, India risked a conflict with Pakistan and crossed the border to attack a militant camp in Pakistan-controlled Kashmir, at one point causing great anxiety both at home and abroad. Modi has adjusted the diplomatic philosophy of non-alignment. While insisting on advancing all-round diplomacy, Modi has adopted a "coalition not alliance" strategy on many major regional and international issues so as to increase India's bargaining chips in the great power games. This clearly reveals the relative pragmatism of his policy with shades of strategic speculation. Modi has also made it clear that India should position itself in a leading power globally, rather than simply serving as a balancing force.<sup>18</sup> While adhering to strategic autonomy, India should determine its position on issues based on its own interests and pay more attention to safeguarding its economic interests. Modi stresses that India should strive to maintain its strategic independence while playing a role among major powers. India will not become a vassal of any other country and will not rely on security guarantees from others.<sup>19</sup>

## New Issues for "Modi Doctrine"

The "Modi Doctrine" is the product of India's rapid economic growth and consequent increase of its overall national strength over the past 20 years. As an emerging power, India has been supported in recent years by the international community, especially the United States and other Western countries. This has not only enhanced India's international status but has also

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17 "Myanmar Covert Operation: The Inside Story of the Surgical Strike," *NDTV*, June 11, 2015, <https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/myanmar-covert-operation-the-inside-story-of-the-surgical-strike-770318>.

18 Zheng Ruixiang, et al., *The Rise of India and China-India Relations*, Contemporary World Press, 2006, pp.231-242.

19 "PM to Heads of Indian Missions," Indian Press Information Bureau, Prime Minister's Office, February 7, 2015, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=115241>.

provided ample room for Modi's government to play a role in foreign affairs. With its rapid economic growth and rising international influence, India's sense of being a major power and self-confidence has soared to an all-time high. It is generally felt that India has become one of the world's powers with a major say in international affairs. People feel that their country is no longer a "second-class" country, one that "has neither the money to buy anyone nor the strength to influence any one."<sup>20</sup>

The "Modi Doctrine" reflects the influence of India's traditional strategic culture. India's diplomacy not only stresses strength but also morality. While holding high the banner of idealism, it follows the path of realism. It is a result of the India's traditional pluralistic strategic culture. Modi strives to strike a balance in the strategic interplay of the major powers, and seeks to seize the initiative in the checks and balances among major powers, so as to hedge any changes in the power structure and seek tangible strategic benefits. This is an adept skill of India's diplomacy.

The "Modi Doctrine" serves India's rise to a leading power. Since taking office, Modi has proposed to make development and good governance the goal, and to promote major revolutionary changes, so as to fundamentally change India and establish a grand ideal of a new political culture for India to rise in an all-round way.<sup>21</sup> In his speech at the 70th anniversary of independence in August 2017, Modi put forward a vision of "New India", a clean and beautiful country by 2022 when the country will be celebrating the 75th anniversary of its independence. He proposed the idea of "Sakha Saath, Sakha Vikas", which literally means "collective efforts and inclusive growth".<sup>22</sup> The "Modi Doctrine" is becoming a booster for building New India.

The "Modi Doctrine", nevertheless, also faces many new problems and challenges.

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20 Zheng Ruixiang, et al., *The Rise of India and China-India Relations*, p. 225.

21 Ashley J. Tellis, "India as a Leading Power," April 4, 2016, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, [http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP\\_268\\_Tellis\\_India\\_final1.pdf](http://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_268_Tellis_India_final1.pdf).

22 "India's Prime Minister Modi Made a Speech on Independence Day," *India Today*, <http://jinriyindu.in/index.php?m=&c=Index&a=show&at=29&id=20>.

## **Task of development remains complicated and arduous**

The vision is ever beautiful, but the reality is somewhat threadbare. Despite its rapid development and remarkable achievements, India starts with a very weak foundation. It suffers from a large poor population and backward infrastructure, and the economic driving force is sluggish. India's manufacturing competitiveness is weak. And whether it can maintain its rapid growth in the next two or three decades has always been a big issue. In India, ethnic groups, religions, caste and class issues are all over the country. Social and economic development has brought about a gap between the rich and the poor. At the same time, the expectations of all walks of life for greater development have also been constantly raised, putting pressure on Modi's government.

India's economic growth has shown signs of slowing down recently, with poor macroeconomic indicators. Economic growth slowed to 5.7% in the first quarter of fiscal 2017, the lowest in three years.<sup>23</sup> After Modi took office, he undertook bold measures to push forward with reforms such as demonetization and tax reform, all of which left a profound impression. However, there are still many important reforms that need pursuing. India's current macroeconomic difficulties have already raised concerns in various sectors both at home and abroad. Former Indian Finance Minister Yashwant Singh expressed his particular concern in an article. He believes that the Modi government's diplomatic performance has exceeded people's expectations, but progress in economic reform has hardly been satisfactory. Ashley J. Tellis, the Indian-American scholar at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, says that India cannot be considered a "leading" power unless it consolidates its economic foundation, improves the governance ability and realizes its military capabilities.<sup>24</sup>

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23 According to the original statistical method, the economic growth rate of India in 2016 is estimated to be only 3.7%. For details, see Yashwant Sinha, "I Need to Speak Up Now," *The Indian Express*, September 27, 2017, <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/yashwant-sinha-arun-jaitley-gst-demonetisation-narendra-modi-economy-bjp-i-need-to-speak-up-now-4862716>.

24 Ashley J. Tellis, "India as a Leading Power."

## **Translating geostrategic advantages into economic progress**

At present, India enjoys a favorable position in the geopolitical game of the major powers and has conducted strategic and in-depth cooperation with western countries, the United States in particular. However, the biggest issue for India's rise is its development, which neither geopolitical speculation nor assistance of others can help. After taking office, Modi had raised the concepts of "Make in India," "Digital India," "Skill India" and "Smart City" in an attempt to attract Western capital and technology transfer and get management expertise. His efforts however have not been as successful as expected.

India's development needs a favorable environment of global governance. Currently, anti-globalization prevails in the West and the economic and trade conflicts between India and the United States are on the rise.<sup>25</sup> US media once commented that this is an encounter of "America First" and "India First."<sup>26</sup> India and the United States remain close on a strategic level, but their economic and trade frictions have not diminished. Issues such as the H-1B visa and trade deficits are still there. If India seeks to promote the reform of the global governance system and make the process of globalization more open, inclusive and universal, it still needs to unite with developing countries, especially emerging ones, in order to better safeguard its own interests.

## **Mismatch of diplomacy for neighborhood and great powers complicates strategic security environment**

The contrast between India's diplomatic approaches to South Asia and that of the great powers has caused reflection and raised criticism from

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25 "Modi's First Three Years: Some Wins but Breakthroughs Yet to Come," *East Asia Forum*, September 24, 2017, <http://www.eastasiaforum.org/2017/09/24/modis-first-three-years-some-wins-but-breakthroughs-yet-to-come>.

26 "Trump Meets Modi: America First Meets India First," *The Washington Post*, June 25, 2017, [https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2017/06/25/trump-meets-modi-america-first-meets-india-first/?utm\\_term=.181359fd9a37](https://www.washingtonpost.com/news/global-opinions/wp/2017/06/25/trump-meets-modi-america-first-meets-india-first/?utm_term=.181359fd9a37).

India's domestic strategy circle. Although some people think that India's diplomatic achievements ought to be judged more from its diplomacy with the big powers than with its South Asian neighbors, it is also a reality that India has not fundamentally improved its position in South Asia.<sup>27</sup> Pakistan is an important country in South Asia and a key neighbor of India, and the current tension between India and Pakistan is not in the interest of either country. The Modi government has made a big shift of its policy on Pakistan by insisting on countering terrorism as the primary issue for bilateral talks. This is a major readjustment of the comprehensive dialogue framework that was launched in the 1990s.<sup>28</sup> India is also perceived to make attempt to exert pressure on Pakistan's western front by increasing strategic cooperation with Afghanistan to squeeze the space for Pakistan's strategic security.

The policy of maintaining military pressure and cracking down on Pakistan through international isolation could be counterproductive.<sup>29</sup> Tension between India and Pakistan will not only consume India's energy and diplomatic resources, but could also create new problems for India in South Asia and prevent it from becoming a real global power. To resolve the security dilemma between India and Pakistan, a comprehensive dialogue is a must. In addition, India's emphasis on geopolitical diplomacy and active steps to enhance its influence in the Indo-Pacific region may further aggravate the geopolitical competition in South Asia and shift the strategic balance there. Eventually India will lose its favorable position in the interplay among major powers and undermine the strategic security environment necessary for its own development.

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27 "Me-First, the Core of Modi Doctrine of Foreign Policy, Damaging for India?" *Outlook*, July 29, 2017, <https://www.outlookindia.com/website/story/me-first-the-core-of-modi-doctrine-of-foreign-policy-damaging-for-india/299892>.

28 Kanti Bajpai, "Narendra Modi's Pakistan and China Policy: Assertive Bilateral Diplomacy, Active Coalition Diplomacy."

29 Ashley J. Tellis, "Are India-Pakistan Peace Talks Worth a Damn?" *Carnegie Endowment for International Peace*, September 20, 2017, <http://carnegieendowment.org/2017/09/20/are-india-pakistan-peace-talks-worth-damn-pub-73145>.

## Future of China-India Relations: Remaining True to Original Aspiration with Stronger Confidence

Since Modi took office, the development of overall relations between China and India has maintained steady momentum. Both leaders attach great importance to bilateral relations. The regular high-level visits and meetings and the existing multiple dialogue mechanisms are conducive to maintaining strategic communications between the two countries and continually enhancing strategic mutual trust. The pragmatic cooperation between the two countries has been steadily progressing and the areas of cooperation have greatly expanded, adding a new impetus to the steady development of bilateral relations. However, with the rise of competitive factors in recent years, and the increasing challenges and complexity at the global, regional and bilateral levels, a situation has developed in which new problems keep emerging while old ones remain. The “Dong Lang (Doklam) Incident” taking place at the Sikkim section of the China-India borders has not only highlighted the border issue, but also for a time seemed to imperil the overall relationship between the two countries.

The complicated changes in China-India relations in recent years are largely due to the readjustment of international structure, which has not only aggravated geopolitical competition among the major powers, but also shifted the balance of power between China and India and damaged the strategic trust between them.<sup>30</sup> Recently, Indian policy circles have complained more about China, seeing China’s diplomacy as “assertive” and regarding China as standing in the way of India’s rise. Therefore, when dealing with China, India believes that “fight is a need when necessary while cooperation is a choice where possible.” India also believes that it should continue to strengthen its strategic relations with the United States and Japan

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30 Alka Acharya, “The Strategic Stasis in the India-China Relationship,” *Economic & Political Weekly*, Vol.48, No.26-27, June 19, 2013, <http://www.epw.in/journal/2013/26-27/commentary/strategic-stasis-india-china-relationship.html>.

in order to seek a stronger position in dealing with China.<sup>31</sup> For Chinese academia, what concerns them most is India's strategic orientation toward China, in particular they are wary of India's defense and security cooperation with the United States and Japan.

To develop China-India relations in the future, both sides should first and foremost keep in mind the original aspiration and the significance of simultaneous rise of China and India.

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*India and China should stick to the strategic consensus of mutual support for each other's development.*

India and China should stick to the strategic consensus of mutual support for each other's development. In recent years, leaders of the two countries have not only established a strategic consensus

in support of each other's development, but also defined the orientation and the thinking regarding the bilateral relations. They pointed out that "China and India should be closer developmental partners and jointly realize national rejuvenation. China and India should be partners in leading growth, and join hands in promoting the prosperity and rejuvenation of Asia. China and India should be global partners in strategic coordination so as to promote a more just and reasonable international order."<sup>32</sup> These were the original aspirations in developing China-India relations. In order to remember why we started, both countries should draw right lessons from the past history of China-India relations. Since the end of the Cold War, and, in particular, over the past 10-plus years, the relations between China and India have continued to improve, creating a favorable external environment for the two countries to concentrate their energy on construction and development.<sup>33</sup>

To develop China-India relations, we also need to build and strengthen

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31 "Non-Alignment 2.0: A Foreign and Strategic Policy for India in the Twenty-First Century," Center for Policy Research, February 29, 2012, <http://www.cprindia.org/research/reports/nonalignment-20-foreign-and-strategic-policy-india-twenty-first-century>.

32 "Xi Jinping's Speech at Indian Council of World Affairs (full text)," Chinese Ministry of Foreign Affairs, September 19, 2014, [http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq\\_676201/gj\\_676203/yz\\_676205/1206\\_677220/1209\\_677230/t1192744.shtml](http://www.fmprc.gov.cn/web/gjhdq_676201/gj_676203/yz_676205/1206_677220/1209_677230/t1192744.shtml).

33 Zheng Ruixiang, et al., *The Rise of India and China-India Relations*, pp.336-374.

the trust. The report of the 19th CPC National Congress put forward the strategic judgment that socialism with Chinese characteristics has entered a new era, and set forth the goals of completing the construction of a well-off society in an all-round manner and striving for a victory in socialism with Chinese characteristics in the new era.

The goals set by the 19th CPC National Congress and the vision of “New India” are born in the same period, which has opened up broad prospects for the cooperation between the two countries. It is clear that China is not a “hurdle” but a major opportunity for India. It will not and cannot stop the rise of India. The biggest obstacle to India’s development is India itself.

For China, India is an important neighbor and a big emerging country, as well as an important partner in promoting the reform of the international system. China welcomes the rise and development of India. India’s huge market potential will bring about opportunities for the successful transformation of China’s economy, especially for Chinese enterprises going global. The rise of India is conducive to further enhancing the international influence of developing countries, especially the emerging forces.

Looking forward to the development of China-India relations, we should focus on the following three aspects.

First of all, we should adhere to a positive view of each other’s development, deepen strategic communication and enhance strategic mutual trust. We must face up to the reality. As each other’s neighbor, it is impossible that there exist no problems between us. Both China and India are major countries on the rise. They are both partners and competitors. There is competition in cooperation and cooperation in competition. The coexistence of cooperation and competition will become the norm. This is the status quo of China-India relations, which cannot be evaded. Second, we must implement the strategic consensus of the two leaders. We should continue to conduct strategic communication at all levels and enhance its effectiveness. Both sides

should continue to positively view each other's development and adhere to the theory of development opportunities. We must uphold the concept of inclusiveness and openness and explore new ways of cooperation in such areas as South Asia, East Asia and Central Asia. We should also actively carry out dialogue and cooperation in safeguarding

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global and regional strategic stability and strengthening new areas such as cyberspace, the oceans and outer space. We must continue to take account of each other's core interests and major concerns and properly handle the sensitive factors and issues that affect bilateral relations. We must strive

to seek common ground while putting aside and, more importantly, resolving differences. We must enhance the effectiveness of existing communication mechanisms. Efforts should be made to strengthen the role of internal communication mechanisms to prevent the interference of "microphone diplomacy." It is necessary to formulate rules and regulations, and manage and control differences and competition in a constructive manner, so that new problems and conflicts can be controlled and dealt with promptly.

Second, it is necessary to actively expand and deepen coordination and cooperation so as to enrich the developmental partnership between China and India. As both China and India are large economies, the coordination and connectivity of their development strategies are highly important. China has already proposed to open up its western region to match the "Act East" policy of India, so as to make their respective advantages complementary to each other, and resolve the structural problems of bilateral trade on a broader basis.<sup>34</sup> The differences in the stage of development of China and India have complicated the bilateral trade structure, but cooperation still exists. China

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34 "Xi Jinping's Speech at Indian Council of World Affairs (full text)."

and India should jointly seek new ideas that will lead their respective regions to achieve sustainable security and win-win cooperation, so as to prevent a situation in which both sides are the losers.<sup>35</sup>

After arduous efforts and active exploration, both China and India have found development paths and modes that are in line with their respective national conditions and both have set clear development goals and strategic measures. Achieving these goals requires a relatively stable and fair environment of global governance. China and India have had fruitful cooperation in actively promoting balanced and inclusive globalization and pushing forward the reform of the global governance system, especially within the frameworks of the AIIB, the BRICS cooperation and the G20. As emerging forces, China and India can continue to increase cooperation and coordination and support each other in making global governance system more fair and reasonable, and better reflect the requirements of developing countries.

Third, China and India should continue to promote cultural and people-to-people exchanges and strive to consolidate the social basis of their bilateral relations. It is imperative to promote exchanges and interaction between the two societies, and change the competition-dominated mindset into a cooperation-driven one. The two countries should encourage deeper cooperation between their think tanks and media, promote more understanding and dialogue, gradually adapt to each other's system of discourse, get rid of the geopolitical competition paradigm of the major powers, and explore a new framework for strategic interaction, so as to provide intellectual support for the common rise of China and India. Great importance should be attached to the exchange of young people. And China and India both need to do adopt a future-oriented mindset and strive to consolidate social and public foundation so as to achieve their lofty goal of rising in a simultaneous way. 🌐

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35 Hu Shisheng, "Resolving the Security Predicament of China, India and Pakistan through the Belt and Road Initiative," *China-India Dialogue*, No.2, 2017, pp.14-19.