

India's Aspirations in Global Politics

Competing Ideas and Amorphous Practices

Herbert Wulf

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ABSTRACT

Herbert Wulf: India's Aspirations in Global Politics - Competing Ideas and Amorphous Practices

India is an emerging power and its influence as well as the government's aspirations in global politics has steadily been growing in recent years. The economy has experienced impressive growth but India's political, social and economic development has neither been coherent nor smooth and millions of Indians still suffer from inequalities and poverty. The study looks at recent developments in India's global aspirations, at the history of India's foreign policy—with its shifts and changes—and at the ideological foundations of these different foreign affairs notions, namely idealism, realism and geopolitics, Hindu nationalism and the now predominant liberalisation and internationalisation concepts. In this report, the debate in India is reconstructed against the background of existing international relations theories. India has a great, but still largely untapped soft power potential and the capacity of integrating tradition and modernity, resulting in the creation of resilient institutions, a functioning federalism and an interesting amorphous character of the society with an aptitude for vagueness and improvisation to make things work. The report arrives at the conclusion that the Indian government is trying to play a greater role in global rule-making but does not want to change these rules fundamentally; it rather wants to enhance its status within the existing nation state oriented global governance system.

ZUSAMMENFASSUNG

Indien ist eine aufstrebende Macht und sowohl der Einfluss der Regierung als auch ihr Bestreben in der Weltpolitik eine größere Rolle zu spielen, sind in den letzten Jahren gewachsen. Die Wirtschaft hat ein beeindruckendes Wachstum erlebt, aber Indiens politische, soziale und wirtschaftliche Entwicklung ist weder kohärent noch glatt verlaufen; Millionen Inder sind weiterhin von Ungleichheit und Armut betroffen. Der Forschungsbericht befasst sich mit den jüngsten weltpolitischen Bemühungen Indiens, mit der Geschichte der Außenpolitik Indiens, ihren Veränderungen und ideologischen Grundlagen: dem Idealismus, dem Realismus und der Geopolitik, dem Hindu-Nationalismus und der jetzt vorherrschenden Liberalisierung und Internationalisierung. In diesem Report wird die indische Debatte vor dem Hintergrund der Theorien internationaler Beziehungen rekonstruiert. Indien hat ein großes, aber immer noch weitgehend unerschlossenes *soft power*-Potenzial. Drei funktionale sozio-kulturelle Faktoren verleihen der Gesellschaft Anpassungsfähigkeit und Widerstandskraft: die Fähigkeit zur Integration von Tradition und Moderne, die zur Schaffung von leistungsfähigen politischen und sozialen Institutionen geführt hat; ein weitgehend funktionierender Föderalismus und eine interessante, aber amorphe Begabung für Vagheit und Improvisation. Die indische Regierung versucht, eine größere Rolle in der globalen Norm- und Regelsetzung zu spielen. Dabei wird das existierende, stark nationalstaatlich orientierte *global governance*-System aber nicht grundsätzlich in Frage gestellt.

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*"We stand united in our efforts to address
the deficit in global governance."*
(Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister of India)¹



1. Introduction²

What role will India play in the changing global order and what is the historical, cultural, political and economic basis of the government of India's changing foreign policy approach? This study is largely based, though not exclusively, on recent publications (mainly reports and journal articles) from India and by Indian authors on Indian foreign policy and its perspectives. As far as their foreign policy evaluations, expectations and recommendations are concerned, the study reflects and refers to the assessments of a small but active group of foreign policy advisors, think tanks and research institutions that are primarily engaged in Indian foreign and security policy analysis. The report reconstructs the debate in India against the background of selected concepts of international relation theories.

One of the outstanding features of most of these publications is their focus on the nation state and its role in foreign policy in the neighbourhood, the region and in global politics. Non-state actors are usually perceived only as a threat to security (most obviously so as pirates in the Indian Ocean or as terrorists, usually suspected of Pakistani origin as well as localised insurgencies by Naxalites who threaten the internal security). This is somewhat surprising since India has a vital civil society and Indian NGOs do play an active international role in some fields of foreign policy, for example, in the debates on climate change and other ecological issues.

Indian researchers and strategic thinkers centre their analysis on Weberian-type governance, with the nation state or the system of nation states as the focus, while post-national perspectives are more or less absent. To be sure, the Indian government and its foreign policy strategists aim at changes in the global governance system or at least insist on their own interpretation of emerging or changing norms. The government has begun to formulate its own ideas on the evolution of global norms; but the Indian concepts do not envision fundamental or structural changes but instead an intensified role of the Indian government in the existing system. Global norms are contested in concert with

¹ Opening statement at the Plenary Session of the IBSA (India, Brazil, South Africa) Summit, Pretoria, 18.10.2011.

<http://pmindia.nic.in/speech-details.php?nodeid=1071> (26.03.2013).

² I would like to gratefully acknowledge comments and suggestions by colleagues at the Centre for Global Cooperation Research at the University of Duisburg-Essen on an earlier draft of the report.



other non-Western powers (e.g. within BRICS), but the emphasis is on the Westphalian state-dominated order rather than a new governance model.

The debate in India focuses predominantly on traditional security-related foreign policy and diplomacy: India's security in the region, conflicts in the neighbourhood, its role in peacekeeping, arms control forums, development of military power at home and abroad – these are focal points of the debate and most recommendations and advice from think tanks to the government address these kinds of issues. In recent years, however, two other areas have gained ground in the debate: India's role in the international debate on climate change³ and, more importantly, economic policy as a foreign policy tool.⁴ The trend to emphasise economic power emerged in parallel to the economic liberalisation policy of the last two decades (Wagner 2012) and is largely based on India's growing economic power. India's foreign economic and trade policy is reflected in promotion of foreign investments, in an enhanced role in international economic forums like the International Monetary Fund (IMF) and the World Bank and in India's ambition to engage in economic aid in the immediate neighbourhood as well as in Africa. As will be illustrated below, in addition to the focus on security, peace and conflict the government's concepts of foreign policy now include economic and trade issues. This is both the case with regard to economic relations with India's Asian neighbours and in the global economic architecture.

2. India as an Emerging Global Power

2.1 India's Star Is Rising

India's influence in global politics has steadily been growing in recent years and the government of India is keen to take responsibility for a major global role. This recent political constellation is partly due to a shift of global political interest and economic power towards Asia after the termination of the East-West antagonism and the decline of the previous dominance of the United States. But it is also a result of the government of India's rising political aspirations. Indian politicians, strategist and political scholars request an intensified global if not a great-power role: "India no longer wants to be mired in regional politics; rather, it wants to play a larger global role" concludes one researcher (Pattanaik 2010: 72), while others have since long requested that "India should break out of the claustrophobic confines of South Asia" (Gupta 1997: 309). A leading foreign policy commentator and opinion-leader in Delhi emphasises that "India has tried to take its place as one of the great powers, a key player in international peace and security" (Mohan 2006: 18) and others

³ This aspect is not discussed in this report.

⁴ Within international relations theory liberal perspectives do not ignore the importance of issues of war and peace. However, other issues like welfare, modernization and the environment are added to their focus of attention. See Holsti (1995: 43).



imply that India is on its way to become a superpower (Guha 2012) that should design strategies “to attain rule-making powers” (Singh 2011: 65).

India's phenomenal economic growth has contributed to the country's political ambitions and, at the same time, a number of global governance concerns — the financial crisis, climate change and energy supplies and their security, possibly also arms control issues — require Indian participation for their successful negotiation and management. Since the world is no longer bifurcated into two antagonistic systems, and since no single dominant superpower emerged after the demise of the Soviet Union, India, with its economic and political weight, can use its influence to facilitate shaping global politics under the consideration of its own interest. With the emergence of multiple power centres India takes its place in the concert of the big powers. This is seen as a “great historical opportunity for India” (Khilani et al. 2012: 69, see also Mishra 2012).

Much of the change in India's external political and economic relations is driven by a small group of ambitious business people and political and military elite (Malik 2011). Their self-esteem and psycho-political dynamics are determining factors for India's new global push. This drive has an economic basis. Indian capital invests strongly in many countries of the world; exports from India have increased, although not as spectacularly as China's. Since its change towards a liberalised market after five decades of state-sponsored industrialisation the market still remains largely domestic. India has become one of the most interesting destinations for foreign investments.

The financial crisis has had its effects on the Indian economy as well. Times of almost double-digit economic growth rates are gone and the future seems uncertain, not only because of global factors but also due to an inability to reform an economic and political system thoroughly that suffers from bureaucracy and corruption and is unable to effectively fight poverty and social inequality. The Indian economy needs, according to the Prime Minister, “an aggregate growth rate of 8 per cent per annum to create new job opportunities for more than 10 million persons who are going to enter our labour force each year.”⁵ The government is optimistic, though the Reserve Bank of India states that the growth outlook for 2012-13 “remains weak” (Reserve Bank of India 2012: 8).

One problem is the structure of employment. The agricultural sector, with less than 20% of GDP, employs half of the Indian workforce. The service sector, with 59% of GDP, continues to grow. New jobs created in this sector are, however, less numerous since they are more productive than in traditional sectors. What is missing, according to The Economist, is a strong and large

⁵ Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister's address to the Combined Commanders' Conference of India, 19.10. 2012.
<http://pmindia.nic.in/speech-details.php?nodeid=1238> (26.03.2013).



manufacturing sector: “More than other sectors, it suffers from India’s entrenched bureaucracy and wretched infrastructure.”⁶

2.2 At the High Table of Global Affairs

Given India’s status and long-term record as a stable, secular society and multi-cultural democracy, the Indian political elite envisions its rank in global affairs in the top echelon. Accordingly, India’s wish to become a Permanent Member of the Security Council of the United Nations is in Indian perceptions not only legitimate but also long overdue (Khinlani et al. 2012: 34; Thakur 2011). Its insistence on being a nuclear weapons power and its annual high growth of investments in conventional weapons are instruments to underline India’s global ambitions and, at the same time, signal to its neighbours its claim for regional leadership, if not dominance.

India’s present prowess and diplomatic determination show an extraordinary degree of buoyancy and persistence. The government is pursuing a two-fold strategy to improve its global role and international recognition. It cooperates actively in such groupings as the G20 and is among the large contributors to UN peacekeeping operations, with over 8,000 police and troops out of a UN total of almost 100,000 at the beginning of 2012 (United Nations Peacekeeping Operations 2012; Bhatnagar 2011; van Rooyen 2010). At the same time the Indian government, in its tradition of non-alignment, does not shy away from forcefully voicing its discontent with the work and composition of many political and economic global forums.⁷

In the 1990s, India has been included in the BRICS initiative in which Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa offer their “partnership for global stability, security and prosperity”, the theme of the 2012 BRICS summit meeting in New Delhi.⁸ BRICS is a group of emerging economies, representing about 40% of the world population, which questions some of the global political and economic decision-making processes (like the handling of the financial crisis, the role of the IMF and World Bank, and politics *vis-à-vis* Iran and Syria) and wants to exert its influence more strongly. India and the other members of BRICS want to reform the largely western-dominated global architecture (Legro 2012: 643).

⁶ The Economist 2012: Express or stopping? India’s growth rate, supercharged for a decade, is falling back to older, lower levels, The Economist, 29.09.2012. <http://www.economist.com/node/21563420> (26.03.2013).

⁷ Manmohan Singh, India’s Prime Minister, said at the opening at the Plenary Session of the India, Brazil, South Africa (IBSA) Summit in Pretoria, 18.10.2011: “The United Nations Security Council must be enlarged in order to reflect present day reality and to make it representative and effective in responding to global challenges.” <http://pmindia.nic.in/speech-details.php?nodeid=1071> (26.03.2013).

⁸ <http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/19158/Fourth+BRICS+Summit++Delhi+Declaration> (26.03.2013)



However, BRICS is not a homogenous group and faces persistent challenges over whether it can unite on key issues. Given the diverse priorities of its members and their different political regimes, it is not surprising that their economic pull alone does not make a unified policy. Nevertheless, the Indian government is interested in increasingly defining its political role in order to match its economic clout. The Government engages in numerous other international forums at the regional and sub-regional level and tries to improve its relations to such institutions.

To gain recognition as an important global player, if not as an emerging superpower, the Indian government wants to rely on its traditional non-alignment policy and make use of the non-alliance movement. At the 2012 Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in Teheran the Indian Prime Minister said:

“Our Movement should take the lead in building global governance structures that are representative, credible and effective. It is my sincere hope that the Movement can agree on action to reform institutions such as the United Nations Security Council, the World Bank and the IMF. Existing problems cannot be solved effectively without a greater voice for developing countries on issues such as global trade, finance and investment.”⁹

However, recommendations by leading foreign policy gurus usually mention the non-aligned policy as an aside; their real attention focuses upon the big player forums.

2.3 India's Regional Role and Domestic Restrictions

India's role and status in South East Asia is complicated, for both politico-economic and security-related reasons. The complex and difficult relations are reflected in India's long-standing conflict with Pakistan and their stagnating political relations and India's often strained and fluctuating, almost competitive relations with China. In addition, the relations with smaller neighbours are not free of tension and domestic security concerns worry the society.

2.3.1 Pakistan: Unresolved conflicts

The relationship between the two countries is fraught with resentment and mistrust, and shaped by four wars. Since the partition of the country in 1947, which ended in war, India and Pakistan fought over Kashmir in 1965 and 1999 and over the separation of today's Bangladesh in 1971. The occasional glimmer of hope of improved political relations has repeatedly been disappointed. Successive governments have negotiated to resolve the outstanding conflicts and several issues were at least temporarily solved: like opening of an Indo-Pakistani bus connection and the Indus Water Treaty, but “the overall relationship never improved fundamentally for long” (Malone 2011: 107).

The unsettled Kashmir conflict, with territorial claims from both India and Pakistan as well as calls for autonomy from within Kashmir, has led to an arms race that absorbs enormous resources. More recently the war in Afghanistan

⁹ Manmohan Singh, 30.. 2012.

<http://pmindia.nic.in/speech-details.php?nodeid=1211> (26.03.2013).



has spread into Pakistan and Pakistan's territory serves as a base for terrorism; this and the government of India's engagement in Afghanistan has exacerbated the mistrust between the governments in Delhi and Islamabad. Pakistan is not a secular state; the government is politically not very stable and more or less permanently at the brink of failure. Attacks by Pakistani-based terrorists in India (with the major incident in 2008 in Mumbai) are now the major stumbling block for improvement of relations. In India the fear is that developments in Pakistan could "trigger a wave of political Islam" (Mennon/Kumar 2010: 143) with potentially serious consequences for India¹⁰ or alternatively leading instead to another military coup. The nuclear weapons in Pakistan, which could easily fall into the hands of the military, create a high security risk, not only for the neighbour India.

2.3.2 China: Between competition and cooperation

Sino-Indian relations have immensely fluctuated since the early Jawaharlal Nehru period of *Hindi cini bhai-bhai* ('Indians and Chinese are brothers'). In 1954 the two governments signed an agreement, known in India as Panchsheel,¹¹ in which they formulated principles of peace and co-existence. But territorial disputes (unresolved until today), conflict over China's occupation of Tibet and the war of 1962, in which India suffered a psychologically devastating loss, have produced tension and mistrust, alternating with occasional periods of closer, more cooperative ties. The period of ideological anti-imperialist similarity of the 1950s quickly gave way to the bitter border war, and it took a long period until the mid-1970s when cautious steps were undertaken to normalise relations (Malone 2011: 129-152).

Today, the relations between the two countries are shaped by several contradictory factors: The still unresolved border disputes remain a source of anxiety in India (Bai 2012), as does China's preferential relationship with Pakistan, especially Chinese assistance for Pakistan's conventional armed forces (Mohan 2012: 48). Both countries are increasingly spending on their military, but the growth of Chinese military expenditures outpaces India's by far, as figure 1 illustrates.¹² At the same time the governments of India and China cooperate in such settings as the BRICS initiative as well as the G20.

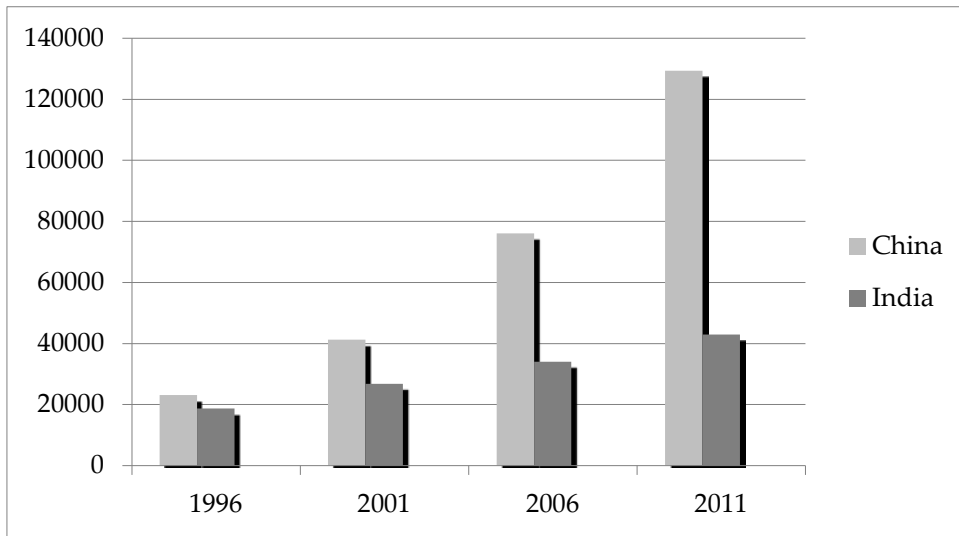
¹⁰ In their scenarios for the region Mennon and Kumar (2010) fear a similar development in Bangladesh.

¹¹ From Sanskrit = five principles: (1) mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, (2) mutual non-aggression, (3) mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs, (4) equality and mutual benefit and (5) peaceful co-existence. See Nehru (1961: 99-102) on the concept of Panchsheel.

¹² According to SIPRI (2012), China was the second-largest spender on its armed forces in 2011. India ranked 7th, at about the same level as Saudi Arabia and Germany.

Figure 1: Trend in Military Expenditures in India and China (1996-2011)

In constant US \$ million



Source: SIPRI Military Expenditure Data Bank.

<http://milexdata.sipri.org/files/?file=SIPRI+milex+data+1988-2011.xls>
(18.02.2013)

Strategists in India observe with great uneasiness China's approach to invest heavily in the modernisation of its naval force and the creation of what is called in Indian military circles a 'string of pearls', leaving a distinct footprint in India's sphere of interest, including in the Indian Ocean region (Kapoor 2012).¹³ Some even see a "deliberate Chinese strategic encirclement of India" (Kumar/Kumar 2010: 79). Foreign policy observers advise the government of India to invest into becoming "an eminent maritime power" and to observe its core maritime interests (Vasan 2012: 416). This is done with the goal of containing the Chinese presence by military diplomacy (Jha 2011) and investments in its naval forces (Athawale 2012; Parmar 2012).

Despite the fact that the bilateral trade between China and India has grown considerably since when Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi normalised the relations during a visit to Beijing in 1988, the two countries' perceived competition has intensified. India's nuclear power status and the 'nuclear deal' of 2005 between the United States and India are of great concern to China. Particularly the antagonisms with Pakistan and the continuing territorial dispute with China since the 1962 war have convinced all Indian governments during the last five decades to invest heavily into modern equipped armed forces, including a sea-going naval capacity that includes aircraft carriers. Today, the Indian government defines its interest in a broader regional and even global context. Despite mutually enforcing political signals from both China and India, the

¹³ Kapoor is a former Chief of the Army who raises his concerns about China's ambition in the region.





interest in Asia and the global ambitions of the two most populous countries of the world have turned them into fierce competitors.

Currently, India is often seen more as a competitor to China in political, economic and possibly even military terms beyond the region ('elephant versus dragon') (Chachavalpongpun 2011: 66-67). In the West, India is considered mainly as a potential strategic partner, given its democratic and cultural heritage, while China emerges as a dangerous competitor. On the other hand, there is also ample scope for cooperation, both in regional and global politics as well as in bilateral economic relations.

2.3.3 The regional environment: India – the reluctant leader

India's relations with the smaller neighbouring countries are intricate and regional cooperation is small and embryonic. Today, in contrast to many regions of the world, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) is not a well-functioning regional organisation. On the contrary, SAARC, with its members Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka, is a volatile conflict area. Of the countries in India's immediate neighbourhood six states (Afghanistan, Pakistan, Myanmar, Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka) were considered as failed states in 2011 in the Foreign Policy and Fund for Peace Failed State Index.¹⁴ Political, economic, ethnic, religious and territorial tensions haunt the region (Bhattacharjee 2012; Nayak 2012; Pattanaik 2012a; Pattanaik 2012b; Dahiya/Behuria 2012). The potentially large field of cooperation suffers from the bipolar rivalry and enmity between India and Pakistan.

India's comparative weight in important indicators illustrates the country's dominance in the region. About three-quarters of the region's population live in India; similarly, the Indian subcontinent makes up over 70% of the territory and India contributes 79% of the region's GDP; the armed forces of India make up 55% of the total (Destradi 2012: 59) and the country accounts for 81% of military expenditures in 2011.¹⁵ Because of India's overwhelming size, its economic and military potential, including its nuclear weapons, the neighbours usually perceive the Indian government's regional ambitions with suspicion and apprehension. Although South Asian countries have a long common history, traditional economic ties and a joint cultural heritage, the size of India (and perceived dominance), the insecurity and violence in the region as well as differences of political systems result in divergences and controversies over political values on questions of regional cooperation or integration. Part of the reality is that cooperation often fails due to the existing tensions; the other part is that in the past India has not really been a cooperative regional leader.

¹⁴ Foreign Policy (2013): Failed States. An Eighth Collaboration between Foreign Policy and Fund for Peace.
http://www.foreignpolicy.com/failed_states_index_2012_interactive
 (26.03.2013).

¹⁵ SIPRI military expenditure data bank.
<http://www.sipri.org/databases/milex/milex> (18.02.2013).



India's technical cooperation and aid program is of recent origin and still not very large but has risen by over 160% between the financial years 2006-07 and 2011-12 (Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs 2007: 177; Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs 2012: 209). The bulk of its aid goes to countries within the region as table 1 indicates.

Table 1: Principal Destinations of India's Technical Cooperation Programs (2011-2012)

Technical Cooperation Budget (InRupees crore*) Percentage of India's Total Aid & Loan Budget

	InR crore*	%
1. Bhutan	2030.00	59.31
2. Afghanistan	280.00	8.47
3. Maldives	273.00	7.98
4. Nepal	150.00	4.38
5. African Countries	124.00	3.62
6. Sri Lanka	133.00	3.89
7. Myanmar	111.82	3.27
8. Eurasian Countries	30.00	0.88
9. Bangladesh	8.00	0.23
10. Latin American Countries	0.50	0.01
11. Mongolia	2.00	0.06
12. Others	270.55	7.90
Total	3422.87	100

* one crore = 10 Million, 1 crore InR = US \$184,000 (2012)

Source: Government of India. Ministry of External Affairs (2012): 209.

Both India's unsteady and sporadic diplomatic efforts and political actions which have had fluctuating priorities on the importance of the neighbourhood, plus the sheer geopolitical size of India have "given rise to negative perceptions about India as a selfish hegemon, seeking to maximise its power at the cost of others in the neighbourhood" (Behuria/Pattanaik/Gupta 2012: 231).

India does not only have security concerns abroad but faces also a few pressing security challenges at home: left-wing insurgencies of the Naxalites (Maoists-Communist Party India); Islamist extremism and terrorism (partly connected to Pakistan); and ethnically and religiously based political fundamentalism and militancy (Kumar/Kumar 2010: 17). The reasons for internal unrest are manifold: among them is the poor role of the state in providing basic services, the security forces' protracted and brutal suppression of the Naxalite violence and human rights abuses and the counter strategies of the state (Khilani et al. 2012: 43-49). Some of the security threats are closely connected to the contradictory political and economic developments in the society that have created the 'two Indias' of rich and poor, developed and underdeveloped which act as destabilisers, producing enormous friction and



conflict and resistance by opposing groups (Sahni 2012: 2). Many of the Indian states are affected.

3. India's Foreign Policy Practices and Concepts: From Non-Alignment via Hindu Nationalism to a Global Role

India's foreign policy has experienced several phases since the country gained independence in 1947. They range from the early idealism during the Nehru years to today's liberal and neo-liberal economic ideas. The underlying values and the ideological foundations of India's foreign policy are partly overlapping, and partly contradictory. I have delineated the strands that have been dominant in India's various governments' policies at different times.¹⁶ An overview of the chronology of Indian foreign policy and the conceptual and ideological basis is summarised in table 2.

Four broad concepts of foreign policy approaches can be distinguished:

First, the idealists,¹⁷ most prominently represented by India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, want India to be an independent, non-aligned actor that could also serve as a facilitator of disarmament and global peace. They emphasise the uniqueness of India and want the Indian government to perform foreign policy on a moral basis, in a principled fashion, and to set an example.

Second, the realists¹⁸ that have been prominent in government at different times strongly emphasise geopolitics and want to increase India's economic and military weight in the region and more recently at the global level. Not surprisingly, security and conflict, the issue *par excellence* of realism, is high on the agenda of the realists in India, today as in previous periods when realism was the dominant concept.

Third, the Hindu nationalists governed only from 1998 to 2004, but their ideology is much older and predates Indian independence. They yearn to make India strong in military and economic terms to defend and be proud of Hindu civilisation. Hindu nationalist do not shy away from alienating non-Hindu communities in India and in neighbouring countries. Possibly, during the period of economic liberalisation of the last two decades, which was interrupted by a Hindu nationalist government, the neo-liberals underestimated the

¹⁶ This section is inspired by Sagar (2009).

¹⁷ Idealism in international relations dates back to the period between World Wars I and II. Proponents of this school of thought wanted to overcome the classical 'balance of power' system and instead opted for a system of collective security. It was particularly proposed by Woodrow Wilson.

¹⁸ This school of thought is represented by such authors as the British historian E. H. Carr and the American thinker Hans J. Morgenthau.



potency of nationalism in India which is at the core of Hindu nationalists' concept.

Fourth, the internationalists and liberals (or more precisely: neo-liberals who focus on economics both domestically and in their foreign policy approach) started to dominate politically in India with the economic liberalisation at the beginning of the 1990s. Genuine liberals see the source of power in the world in the authority of values and economic strength and seek freedom, development, prosperity and peace through increasing economic interdependence. A complex network of relations would clearly exceed the conventional Westphalian nation state system (Keohane/Nye: 1977). In contrast, the concept applied in India is akin to neo-liberal economic thoughts (of deregulation of the economy). Their emphasis is on strengthening India's global role in the concert of nations and at the same time its military power.

Three of these four concepts (idealism, realism and liberalism) are based on ideas and terms prominently used in international relations theory. However, I do not strictly follow the concepts of international relations theory that emphasise realism, liberalism and constructivism as the dominant and most popular notions. None of these three terms constitutes a homogenous school of thought. On the contrary, all three have been refined and criticised and a host of terms and subcategories have been added, such as neo-realism, neo-liberalism, post-liberalism, structuralism and post-structuralism, post-modernism etc. My aim is to broadly classify how the various Indian governments have focused on certain conceptual ideas, without, however, claiming that they have pursued these concepts in pure form.

A common denominator of all these four concepts (including Hindu nationalism) and the various Indian governments implementing them is that they are state-centric, which is so typical for the classical realists' school. In that sense the strong current of Indian foreign policy can well be described – with the exception of Hindu nationalism – by 'positivist/rationalist' theories. The Hindu nationalists' position is based on ideology rather than rationality. During the most recent era of Indian foreign policy non-state economic actors (business, trade, and investors) have played a role in Indian foreign policy considerations as well.¹⁹ In parallel to the expansion of actors, the agenda of issues is gradually being widened, in as far as economics plays an increasing role in Indian foreign policy. But today's foreign policy does not focus on 'post-positivist' reflections that incorporate other meanings of security (like human security, environmental security etc.), except for economic security. In other areas, particularly in global negotiations on climate change and other environmental issues, the government of India continues to be caught up in the classical North-South controversies.

¹⁹ This policy is very much along the lines described in the seminal work of Robert Gilpin (within the realist school) who argued that differential economic growth rates among nations are an important explanation for the rise of great powers (Gilpin 1981).



Table 2: Indian Foreign Policy: Concepts, Eras and Policies					
		Idealism	Realism and Geopolitics	Hindu Nationalism	Liberal Internationalism & Economic Neo-liberalism
I	Period	1950s and 1960s	late 1960s–1980s	1998–2004	1991–1996
	Prime Minister	Jawaharlal Nehru	Indira Gandhi, Rajiv Gandhi	Atal Bihari Vajpayee	P. V. Narasimha Rao
	Ruling Party/Coalition	Indian National Congress	Indian National Congress	Bharatiya Janata Party, National Democrat. Alliance	Indian National Congress
	Concepts and Policies	non-alignment, exemplary India, peaceful coexistence, moral principles	Soviet friendship, assertive politics, military intervention, nuclear tests	Hindu nationalism and chauvinism, independent strong India, strengthening military capacities	Economic liberalisation, internationalisation, pragmatism, regional aspirations
II	Period	1996+	1992+		2004–today
	Prime Minister	Inder Kumar Gujral	P. V. Narasimha Rao		Manmohan Singh
	Ruling Party/Coalition	Janata Dal, United Front	Indian National Congress		Indian National Congress, United Progressive Alliance
	Concepts and Policies	unilateral concessions, non-reciprocity with neighbours	'Look East', pragmatism, economic and military cooperation in Asia		Economic liberalisation, internationalisation, pragmatism, regional and global aspirations
III	Period		Today		
	Prime Minister		Manmohan Singh		
	Ruling Party/Coalition		Indian National Congress, United Progressive Alliance		
	Concepts and Policies		strengthening economic and military capabilities, Indian Ocean naval policies, nuclear policies		



3.1 Nehru's Idealism: Non-aligned and Exemplary

India's first Prime Minister and Minister of External Affairs, Jawaharlal Nehru, was the architect of a foreign policy strongly stressing Indian autonomy and independence. Nehru emphasised his distaste for the great power blocs:

"What does joining a bloc mean? After all it can only mean one thing: give up your view about a particular question, adopt the other party's view on that question in order to please it and gain its favour" (Nehru 1961: 36).

He was a politician with a modernist background and approach, but had a sceptical view of the United States and was more attracted by the Soviet Union's anti-colonial and anti-imperialist policies. His own socialist notions and his admiration for the economic progress of the Soviet Union influenced the economic and industrial policy of India during the 1950s and beyond. Still, he wanted to keep at a distance from the big powers and shape international relations by emphasising India's uniqueness:

"India is too big a country herself to be bound down to any country, however big it may be. India is going to be and is bound to be a country that counts in world affairs, not I hope in the military sense, but in many other senses which are more important and effective in the end" (Nehru 1961: 47).

By that he meant the persuasion and strength of values and ideas.

At the same time he stressed the need to cooperate among the Asian and other developing countries. The Non-aligned Movement, which was favoured and shaped by Nehru, was — in his understanding — not a rival bloc but "an experiment in co-existence, for the countries of Asia and Africa" (Nehru 1961: 70). Non-alignment became a distinguishing mark of India's foreign policy and an effort to shape the international order to both overcome the military blocs and underline India's quest for leadership in the world. Nehru strongly believed that "a deliberate policy of friendship with other countries goes farther in gaining security than almost anything else" (Nehru 1961: 79).²⁰

But Nehru's internationalist foreign policy and India's friendship with China, a cornerstone of Indian foreign policy during the 1950s, experienced a crisis as it "left India utterly unprepared to cope with a serious security threat from China and culminated in a disastrous border war in 1962" (Haokip 2011: 230). Nehru was strongly criticised for his soft foreign policy approach, but he countered before the outbreak of the war: "[...] (O)ur foreign policy is as firm as rock and it will remain so. The present Government will hold to non-alignment because it is a matter of principle, not of opportunism or the convenience of the day" (Nehru 1961: 348). But the military defeat in the 1962 India-China war resulted in a trauma that is still palpable today when Indian foreign policy gurus analyse Sino-Indian relations.

The idealist notions of foreign policy with a strong preference for moralist ideas are based on the conception that India should be independent and serve

²⁰ At the 1955 Bandung conference, the 'mid-wife' of the Non-Aligned Movement, the five principles of co-existence (Panchsheel), referred to above, were also adopted.



as an example by setting standards for peaceful behaviour. The basis for such an approach can be found in India's non-violent freedom movement. Mahatma Gandhi and the leaders of the Indian National Congress were fighting against colonialism and for India's independence, for the noble cause of the dignity and freedom of India's citizens by *satyagraha*, non-violent or civil resistance. Nehru asked:

"What are we interested in world affairs for? We seek no domination over any country. We do not wish to interfere in the affairs of any country, domestic or other. Our main stake in world affairs is peace, to see that there is racial equality and that people who are still subjugated should be free" (Nehru 1961: 39).

He was not against building up the Indian armed forces but did not want to spend too many resources on the military. He detested military-based power politics and asserted in a speech in Parliament in 1956:

"I am not saying that the military approach can be given up in this world. I am not speaking like a pacifist. But I submit that thinking of the world's problems in terms of military power and trying to solve them only in terms of military power are doomed to failure and have failed" (Nehru 1961: 96).

This idealistic foreign policy concept rested on the successful Indian freedom movement's non-violent civil disobedient experience, which had led to the expulsion of the British colonial masters.

His approach was profoundly different from the notion of power politics or the gunboat diplomacy of the time of imperialism and colonialism. Nehru's policy of independence, his aversion against military blocs, his concept of brotherhood among underdeveloped countries, and his drive for the creation of the Non-Aligned Movement were the counter-example to the West's politics of dominance as well as the East-West military bloc politics.

Nehru's policy was

"a balanced blend of idealism and enlightened self-interest [...] marked by autonomy and independence in strategic decision-making, preference for democratic socialism, strengthening of defence without compromising on the principles of non-alignment, and universal nuclear disarmament as a means to world peace [...]" (Behuria/Pattanaik/Gupta 2012: 233-234). These ideals transformed domestically into the ambition to create a democratic and secular state and eradicate poverty.

The idealist foreign policy was not restricted to the Nehru years (as indicated in table 2). In 1996 the Foreign Minister and later Prime Minister, Inder Kumar Gujral, announced in a speech in London what became known as 'Gujral Doctrine'. The doctrine emphasises less the moral high ground, so typical for the Nehru era, but tries to improve the poor relationship with the countries in the region by providing unilateral concessions. It is composed of five points: *First*, India does not insist on reciprocity with the smaller neighbours "but gives and accommodates what it can in good faith and trust."²¹ *Second*, no South Asian country should allow its territory to be used against the interest of other countries in the region. *Third*, no interference in the internal affairs of others.

²¹ Text of the speech by I. K Gujral, Prime Minister "Aspects of India's Foreign Policy" at Colombo, Sri Lanka 20.01.1997.
<http://www.stimson.org/research-pages/the-gujral-doctrine/> (26.03.2013).



Fourth, respect for the territorial integrity and sovereignty of other countries. *Fifth*, settlement of disputes through peaceful bilateral negotiations (Malone 2011: 326). While these policy announcements were made in good faith, the reality of conflicts in the region prevented a substantial improvement of the complicated neighbourhood relations. In the words of Bhashin: The doctrine “proved to be too mild in the face of the impregnable perceptual framework of India’s neighbours” (Bhashin 2008: 13).

Some of this idealism and moralists’ approach can still be found in contemporary Indian foreign policy, namely the “desire to act in a principled fashion [...]” and “argumentative diplomacy” (Sagar 2009: 805). The wish to act in a ‘principled fashion’ in foreign policy becomes apparent when international regimes seem to undermine the interest of developing countries. For example: “[...] India views proposals by developed countries for mandatory universal caps on greenhouse gas emission as ‘green imperialism’” (Sagar 2009: 805).

3.2 Realism and Geopolitics: Strengthening Economic and Military Capabilities

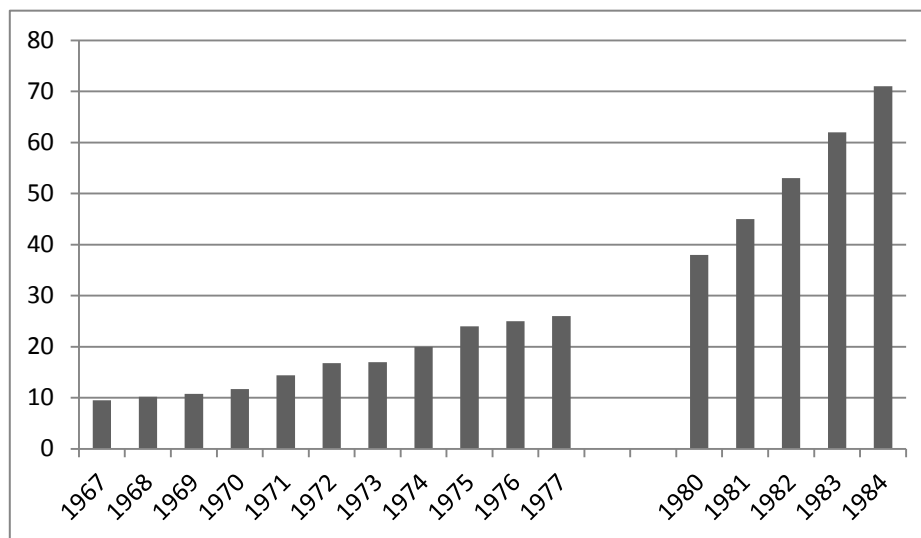
For realists economic strength and military force is the *ultima ratio* in the concert and competition of nations, and it is the power that largely determines international relations. Realist and neo-realist models have emphasised both military power and economic strength as defining characteristics of state capabilities in the international arena to exploit opportunities and to collect gains for the country. In the matrix on the concepts and eras of Indian foreign policy (table 2) I delineated three periods with explicit policies or at least tendencies towards realist concepts and geopolitical policies. The first period under Indira and Rajiv Gandhi was clearly based on assertive politics, particularly with regard to neighbouring countries. The second phase (with the so-called ‘Look East’ policy) and the third phase of today are a mixture of neo-liberal economic policies with an Asian and today with a global focus. At the same time there are strong tendencies to emphasise the strength of India’s military and economic power.

3.2.1 Soviet friendship and assertive politics

India’s foreign policy concept underwent substantial changes under Nehru’s successors (Lal Bahadur Shastri, 1964–66; Indira Gandhi, 1966–77 and 1980–84; and Rajiv Gandhi, 1984–89), which can be described as a transformation from idealism towards realism. Realist approaches of foreign policy in India came to the fore under Indira Gandhi’s premiership when she pursued an assertive, power-oriented policy *vis-à-vis* India’s neighbours. Among the changes, a higher priority than before was given to the size, strength and modernisation of the Indian armed forces.



Figure 2: Military Expenditure (Billion Rs., during Indira Gandhi's terms in office)



Source: SIPRI Yearbooks (several) and SIPRI Military Expenditure Data Bank

A number of unrelated political factors have facilitated the intensification of relations between the Soviet Union and India. Their economic cooperation helped to weave a close net of bilateral economic relations. Bilateral trade increased and India imported technology from the Soviet Union, including military technology (Wulf 1979). The split between the Soviet Union and China made it more or less natural for the Indian government to re-orientate its foreign policy towards the Soviet Union. India's foreign policy, with the priority on non-alignment and independence, was not formally given up, but the ties between India and the Soviet Union grew stronger, despite existing ideological differences.

The Bangladesh War in 1971, a result of an internal crisis in Pakistan, worsened the relations between India and the United States (Malone 2011: 160-161). The US government tried to put pressure on the Indian government not to support the liberation movement in East Pakistan (Bangladesh). As a reaction to and as a result of the US military assistance to Pakistan, the governments of India and the Soviet Union signed the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation in August 1971. This treaty, just short of a formal military alliance, was a clear departure from the non-alignment policy that had guided more than two decades of Indian foreign policy.

It was a fundamental shift to what is often called *realpolitik* from the value-based foreign policy that Indira Gandhi's father Jawaharlal Nehru had preached and practised. The military intervention in Bangladesh, a proactive measure to stop the inflow of refugees from East Pakistan in the same year, was a sign of the government's willingness to use the armed forces for settling conflicts. As early as 1967, during her first period as Prime Minister, Indira Gandhi authorised the development of nuclear weapons as a reaction to China's nuclear test program, leading to the first nuclear test in India in 1974. The period of Indira Gandhi's government was "characterized by lip service to anti-



imperialism, Third World solidarity, and non-alignment abroad [...]. However [...] there was a marked drift in practice towards power politics [...]" (Malone 2011: 50-51).

Rajiv Gandhi, Indira Gandhi's son who succeeded her after her assassination, also practised her assertive style. In the 1980s, during a crisis and civil war in Sri Lanka, Indian troops intervened between 1987 and 1990 in the conflict. Rajiv Gandhi pushed through an accord with the Sri Lankan government to enable the Indian armed forces to stop the refugee flow into India and to disarm the insurgents. The aim to enforce peace in this civil war was not achieved and the military operation was an important factor that led to the ousting of the Rajiv Gandhi-led Congress (I) government in 1989 and to Rajiv Gandhi's assassination in 1991. The successor government began withdrawing Indian troops in 1989.

3.2.2 'Look East'

The end of the Cold War required another turn-around of foreign policy or, more positively, it gave India the freedom "to reinvent its foreign policy" (Mohan 2006: 19). What turned out to be the start of a new and thriving foreign policy period was at the time actually a collapse of the most important parameters of India's foreign affairs. "The collapse of its only real strategic partner during the Cold War, the Soviet Union, forced New Delhi to start rebuilding its great-power relations from scratch" (Mohan 2012: 29).

The so-called 'Look East' policy was an outcome of an entirely changed world. In 1992 Prime Minister P. V. Narasimha Rao initiated a strategic shift in the government's perspective of the world. He focused India's foreign policy after the end of the bipolarity and the demise of the Soviet Union on the neighbourhood in Asia (Malone 2011: 202-223; Gaur 2011). The intention was to strengthen the political, economic and also military ties in the wider region in a multipolar world.

A certain realist disposition, perhaps a mixture of realist and internationalist positions, was and is India's 'Look East' policy which combines ambitions of regionalism and a more general Asian outlook (Mishra 2011). The 'Look East' policy is certainly less idealistic than the Nehru-dominated foreign policy of India with the emphasis on values, but it is also much less assertive than Indira Gandhi's approach. Thus it has been called "cautious *Realpolitik*" (Chachavalpongpun 2011: 59). This policy shift was not accompanied by a declaration of an official doctrinal definition. The 'Look East' policy was a new approach to foreign, security and trade policy with Asian countries in the focus.

A former Indian Ambassador, Ranjit Gupta, enumerates in hindsight the reasons for India's precarious situation in the post-Nehru and post-Gandhi era and the need to formulate a new foreign policy outlook:

"The dynamics of Cold War politics and India's insular economic policies ensured that India had marginalised itself from the international mainstream. India never conceived a long term strategic vision of its future beyond being the leader and spokesman of the emerging Third World; this gave India very considerable international prestige and influence but started waning from 1955 or so and after 1962 went into free fall. Thus, India



progressively lost clout even within the Third World while ensuring a poor relationship with the powerful Western World" (Gupta 2011: 12).

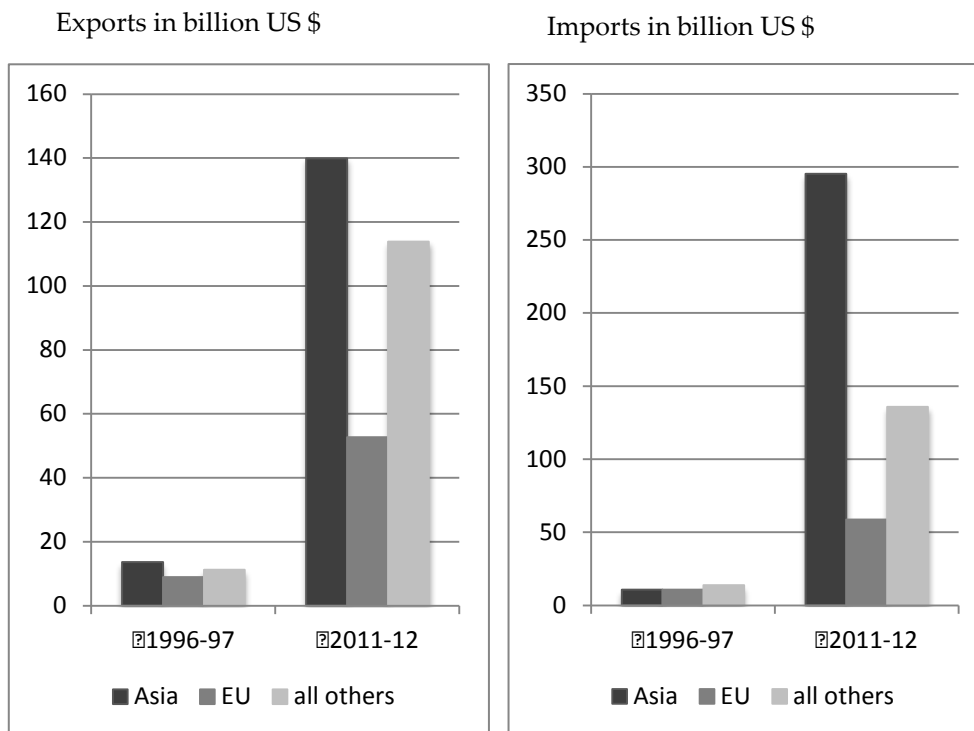
Prime Minister Manmohan Singh confirmed the extraordinary swing of this foreign policy move:

"This was not merely an external economic policy, it was also a strategic shift in India's vision of the world and India's place in the evolving global economy. Most of all it was about reaching out to our civilizational Asian neighbours in the region" (quoted by Gupta 2011: 13).

Asian countries, particularly the ASEAN countries, have experienced exceptional economic development. It was therefore plausible for Indian policy makers to look towards the east in trying to adjust its foreign policy and foreign trade outlook. Actually, India's former Ambassador to China, C. V. Ranganathan, points out that the 'Look East' policy was "really an attempt at restoring in a modern context India's traditional age old links in commerce, ideas and culture with a vast populated region with which India has historically, socially, culturally enjoyed close contacts" (Ranganathan 2011: 9-10).

Since the initiation of the 'Look East' concept India's involvement in several Asian regional multilateral forums has intensified and India has started a campaign of diplomatic initiatives, including military cooperation. Naval visits, joint manoeuvres, military training assistance, joint weapon development and production are intended to strengthen the 'Look East' policy as well as "to balance China's influence in the Indian Ocean region (Indonesia, Malaysia, Thailand, Myanmar etc.) and in western South Asia" (Jha 2011: 49).

India's foreign trade with Asian countries, particularly the Indo-ASEAN trade and the trade with the Middle East (West Asia in Indian government terminology) grew over-proportionally (see Figure 3). Largely due to India's policy and trade focus on ASEAN as well as its energy imports from Middle Eastern countries, these countries alone accounted for 30% of all Indian exports and 37% of its imports in 2011-12. These percentages stood at only 18% and 11% respectively in 1996-97. The trade with China experienced a similar growth (Government of India, Department of Commerce and Industry 2012).

**Figure 3: Foreign Trade of India**

Source: Government of India, Department of Commerce and Industry. <http://commerce.nic.in/eidb/irgnq.asp> (26.03.2013).

As envisioned by the 'Look East' policy, the relations with the Asian neighbours became the backbone of India's foreign policy as well as foreign trade. The geographical proximity with the Asian neighbours, the presence of a large Indian origin population and Indian diasporas in many countries and the fast-growing Asian markets provided a rationale for the new policy thrust (Haokip 2011: 231).

3.2.3 Today's geopolitical outlook

Geopolitical perceptions and strategies are suggested in recent years, both to clearly show no sign of weakness towards China and to underline India's ambition for a more global role and for a part in global norm- and rule-making (Kumar/Kumar 2010: 28). Prioritising such strategies leads to the desire to promote India's economy and to strengthen and modernise military capacities. Raja C. Mohan, the doyen of strategic debate on Indian foreign policy, concludes:

"Two decades after India launched reforms to promote economic globalisation, the rapid improvement in its relative economic weight in the region, its growing trade volumes, more intensive regional diplomacy, and an expanded military diplomacy have made India a



noteworthy actor on regional security in different parts of Asia and the Indian Ocean littoral" (Mohan 2012: 42).

Strategists and high-ranking officers of the armed forces suggest that the attention regarding the armed forces should be directed towards naval capacities and on strengthening India's nuclear capabilities. Arun Prakash, a retired Admiral, wants to bolster India's pre-eminent maritime power in the Indian Ocean for "sustained operations in our area of interest, including power projection" (quoted by Singh 2012: 8). Abhijit Singh, a researcher at the National Maritime Foundation in New Delhi, suggests taking the Chinese navy as an example: "which is in the nascent stages of becoming an expeditionary force" (Singh 2012: 8).

Rajiv Kumar, the former Chief Economist of the Confederation of Indian Industry and Santosh Kumar, a former Ambassador, (2010: 15, 79) are quite outspoken and state that India needs a blue water navy in the Indian Ocean, and a nuclear triad with thermonuclear warheads and intercontinental ballistic missiles. Others come to similar conclusions: "India's maritime strategy, if pursued with vigour, could give it considerable strategic advantage in Asia" (Khilnani et al. 2012: 12) and "(w)e should be in a position to dominate the Indian Ocean region" (Khilnani et al. 2012: 41). Strengthening nuclear capabilities is an unquestioned strategy in almost all of India's political quarters; there exist hardly any reservations. The assumption is "that nuclear weaponry will remain a permanent feature of international politics and an integral element of Indian security for several decades" (Singh 2011: 61), but the government "should be ready for disarmament if other nuclear powers do so" (Khilnani et al. 2012: 56). Unabashedly, Z. D. Singh, a research fellow at the New Delhi Institute for Defence Studies and Analysis, requests that

"Indian diplomats need to ensure that India's de facto nuclear weapon status is reflected in future adjustments to the global non-proliferation and strategic arms control systems to enable India to ultimately acquire rule-making powers as a de jure partner in the global nuclear system. At home, resources would be better spent by investing in assured second-strike capabilities to deter present and future adversaries" (Singh 2011: 62).

How should the Indian government respond to the grand global power shifts with both the United States and China claiming a stake in Asia-Pacific policies? Policy recommendations fluctuate between strong efforts towards autonomous military- and economically-based geopolitics and more internationalist positions like "building robust political and economic links with both China and the U.S." (Mohan 2012: 46). It seems that there is absolutely no disagreement among the Indian foreign policy professionals that India needs to strengthen its military capabilities (Dahiya 2012) and to build up "competitive coercive capabilities [...] to exercise a level of influence [...] while dissuading extra regional actors from pursuing unilateral agendas" (Singh 2011: 58).

3.3 Hindu Nationalism: Independent and Strong

The sharpest critique, actually the counter strategy, to the idealist foreign policy vision is the Hindu nationalist view. In contrast to the Nehru period, when India achieved a status as an important leader among the countries of the developing world, primarily by emphasising the moral high ground in foreign affairs, the governments in the 1980s and 1990s were no longer convinced of the



“moral uniqueness” of the country (Malone 2011: 52). Too many economic and political failures had destroyed the dream of India as a shining example in the world: the malfunction of the economy and the continuing underdevelopment and poverty, the wars with China and Pakistan and conflicts with other neighbours as well as the authoritarian measures against democratic freedom under Indira Gandhi when she declared a ‘state of emergency’ in order to rule by decree.

During the years 1998-2004 the central government was formed by a coalition called the National Democratic Alliance, headed by Atal Bihari Vajpayee, a member of the Hindu nationalist party Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). After victories in the first half of the 1990s in several state elections (Gujarat, Maharashtra and Karnataka) the BJP was also recognised as an important national party. The National Democratic Alliance tried to put into practice what their ideologues had been preaching for decades. As early as in their 1991 election manifesto they rejected the relevance of non-alignment and unambiguously promoted the *Hindutva*-based, Hindu identity, nation-building strategy and a tough line against Pakistan (Gosh 1994: 810-12). In contrast to the concept of non-alignment, international cooperation, good-neighbourly relations and peaceful settlement of conflicts, the ambition of Hindu nationalism is to make India a strong and independent country that does not need to be afraid of any rival.

The most comprehensive and influential societal concept of the nationalist ideology is the *Hindutva* manifest by Vinayak Damodar Savakar written in 1923. He proposed creating an Indian nation based on its heritage and identity that is strong enough to defend its independence (*swaraj*) in the international competition. To achieve this, it would be essential, according to Savakar, to create a homogenous Hindu society that excludes all heterogeneous elements (Wolf/Schultens 2009: 167). Neither Buddhism, nor Sikhism nor Islam has a place in such a society. Particularly the Buddhist concepts of spiritual brotherhood, “meal-mouthed formulas” according to the *Hindutva* strategist Savakar, have led to “invasions from Central Asia around ad 500 and brought the so-called Hindu Golden Age to an end” (Sagar 2009: 807, paraphrasing Savakar).

The National Democratic Alliance with its nationalist ideology had pledged to make India a power centre of the world that would no longer bend under the pressure from neighbouring countries or big powers (Behuria/Pattanaik/Gupta 2012: 238-239). The rise of political Hinduism had already become an important factor in religious conflicts between Muslims and Hindus before the BJP came to power (Malone 2011: 52).

The BJP and its alliance were serious about strengthening India's military capabilities. In May 1998, only a few weeks after the inauguration of the new government, the Indian nuclear experts tested five nuclear devices. While the technological preparation had already been done long before the Hindu nationalists came to power, the government gave the green light for going overtly nuclear, a political act that provoked many governments in the world who had unsuccessfully tried for years to convince India to join the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Nuclear-Test-Ban Treaty. Two days later Prime Minister Vajpayee declared “India is now a



nuclear weapons state" (quoted by Kundu 2004: 9). Reactions from Pakistan did not take much time. Two months after the Indian test, Pakistan tested six nuclear devices and declared itself a nuclear power.

After the government failed to win a vote of confidence in Parliament in April 1999, general elections had to be held in October 1999 since the opposition led by the Congress Party was not able to form a new government. Together with a regional party the BJP and coalition parties secured a large majority in parliament. Four factors were decisive: *First*, the so-called Kargil War of 1999 between India and Pakistan increased the popularity of the BJP. *Second*, Sonia Gandhi, the Italian-born wife of the late Rajiv Gandhi, challenged the BJP. The issue of Gandhi's foreign origin led to a discussion and conflict on *videsi* (foreign) versus *swadeshi* (home-grown, self-reliance) within the Congress Party on which the BJP could capitalise. *Third*, the BJP had started at the local level and was able to serve local and regional demands by aligning with other regionally-based parties in several federal states. *Fourth*, in contrast to its Hinduism focus in domestic social and political policies, and to the surprise of many political observers, the BJP subscribed fully to the economic liberalisation policies that the previous government had initiated under Manmohan Singh, then Finance Minister. This is insofar interesting since the rightist government favoured *swadeshi*. *Swadeshi* was originally an economic strategy of the Indian independence movement, boycotting British products with the intention of removing the British colonial power. Since economic growth and the economic liberalisation policies were popular domestically, the BJP subscribed to the economic liberalisation policy.

In concrete foreign policy actions the NDA government spent most of its energies on changing India's foreign relations with Pakistan (Behuria/Pattanaik/Gupta 2012: 238-239). The Prime Minister inaugurated the famous bus service between the Indian capital Delhi and the Pakistani town Lahore. However, the Hindu-nationalist domestic and foreign policy did not really match. Not surprisingly, foreign policy relations to the neighbouring Muslim-majority states of Bangladesh and Pakistan did not improve. This concept, fixated exclusively on Hinduism, is not in congruence with other fundamental beliefs and ambitions of the BJP. There is, as Partha S. Ghosh has already pointed out before the BJP actually formed a government,

"an inherent contradiction in the BJP's *Hindutva* stance and its Pakistan policy. An avowedly Hindu chauvinistic India left little room for any emotional integration of Sikh-majority Punjab and Muslim-majority Kashmir into the Indian Union" (Ghosh 1994: 813).

The domestically popular Hindu chauvinist policy clashed with foreign policy realities. And domestically, over the last three decades, Upadhyay and Robinson soberly conclude, "Hindu communalism has been deepening and growing. In fact, it has transformed into fundamentalism" (Upadhyay/Robinson 2012: 52).

The emphasis on military strength by the Hindu nationalists resembles some of the realist concepts. While realists pursue a rational, though power-based policy, Hindu nationalism has a strong ideological underpinning and is based on exclusion of non-Hindus. Hindu nationalists are, according to Sagar

"driven by contradictory impulses of pride and shame: pride in what they consider the self-evident importance of Indian civilisation, and shame at its past subjugation by Muslim and

British invaders, and at its continuing weak response to security threats. From this potent mix of motives comes a burning desire to resurrect the glory of India and to prevent the recurrence of humiliation" (Sagar 2009: 806).

3.4 Value-oriented Liberal Internationalism and Neo-liberal Economics and Pragmatism

The early 1990s were not only a turning point on a global scale with the end of the bipolar world, it was also the beginning of a more global outlook in India's foreign as well as economic policies, also classified as an 'era of pragmatism' (Malone 2011: 51). Two periods are mentioned under this category in the matrix on foreign policy (table 2): the 'Look East' policy during the 1990s with the focus on Asia and the period of economic liberalisation under Prime Minister Manmohan Singh after the end of the Hindu nationalist government with a more global focus.

The 'Look East' policy, initiated at the same time and in parallel to the economic liberalisation, was in line with both the economic liberalisation policy and the broader more globally oriented foreign policy approach. The economic liberalisation policy pre-dated the Hindu nationalist government and was continued after its termination. When India faced an economic crisis at the end of the 1980s and beginning of the 1990s the government introduced reforms to liberalise the economy. India faced a serious balance of payment crisis in 1991, with the government close to default. This financial crisis was partly due to growing energy import bills resulting in large trade and fiscal deficits that affected the entire economy. At the same time, India faced the loss of its former prime political and economic partner, the Soviet Union.

Until the introduction of liberalisation reforms key features of Indian economic policy had been protection of the domestic industry, import substitution, state-supported industrialisation, nationalisation of key industries, central planning in five-year plans, a complex license system and bureaucratic regulations, often referred to as *license raj*, indicating the elaborate state planning and red tape. The economic reform policies included some of the typical neo-liberal deregulation features that were popular in other parts of the world at the time, like giving up the fixed exchange rate system for the national currency, divesting some of the state enterprises and privatisation of industries, tax reforms etc. as well as opening up of the economy for foreign direct investments in India as well as enabling Indian big business to go global. Some economic changes requested by the IMF, however, like cuts of agricultural subsidies, were not addressed by the reform measures.

Measured in growth performance of overall GDP, the liberalisation of the economy was quite successful. Between 1950 and 1980, annual GDP growth fluctuated between 2 and 4 %, at times below the population growth. The economic growth rate picked up during the 1980s and the Reserve Bank of India reported an annual average growth of 5.5 % for the period 1980-85 and 5.7 % for 1985-1990. The rate of growth increased substantially from that level after 2002, reaching almost 10% during the last few years before the global financial crisis began to affect the Indian economy. The peak was reached in 2005 to 2008 (Reserve Bank of India 2011). With these rates, India became one of the fastest-





growing economies in the world. This is probably the most important single reason for the Indian government and foreign policy strategists to rethink India's global standing.

Liberals argue that economic interdependence of nations and groups of nations is not only beneficial for the economy but is also likely to increase security and reduce the probability of war among states. In contrast to the realists who stress power, liberals focus on interdependence and the pervasiveness of democratic institutions.

In India, the close relationship between internationalism and idealism is probably most clearly encapsulated in Nehru's personality and foreign policy. He was both a moralist and favoured peaceful international cooperation. However, those politicians and economists who initiated the liberalisation of the Indian economy at the beginning of the 1990s did not primarily look at the liberal argument of the positive effects of interdependence. They were disillusioned and disappointed with the Nehruvian vision of an exemplary peaceful India as well as with the assertive policies of Indira and Rajiv Gandhi. They were frustrated about India's economic and social development. India's early foreign policies, which were based on moral principles, were no longer appropriate tools to place India among the big global players, nor did the Soviet style economic planning model have any attraction left.

India's quest for autonomy and its non-aligned foreign policy have partly been perceived as disengagement, as a barrier to international co-operation. Its focus on the Non-Aligned Movement and its Third World solidarity "provided little material benefit and fostered a confrontational attitude vis-à-vis the West" (Sagar 2009: 813).

Nevertheless, after more than two decades of neo-liberal economic policies has India reached a stage in which some of the political Nehruvian internationalist ideas (rather than the moral prestige) are again updated but without the narrowness of the anti-West developing world outlook. Behuria, Pattanaik and Gupta conclude: "The neo-liberal emphasis on building mutual economic interdependencies has become the hallmark of India's foreign policy" (Behuria/Pattanaik/Gupta 2012: 240).

Amidst the neo-liberals (and the realists) there are also occasionally advocates for a more moral prestige-based policy. The group of distinguished experts who want to shape India's global position with the 'Nonalignment 2.0' concept believe: "The fundamental source of India's power in the world is going to be the power of its example" (Khilnani et al. 2012: 7), if the government does its homework and starts a sustainable development process.

With the economic liberalisation reforms, the government threw over board many constraints, enabling India as a rising power "to take its rightful position on the world stage" (Mohan 2012: 27). The optimistic perspective among liberals is to have "an enormous economic footprint" despite being "a poor and developing country" (Khilnani et al. 2012: 31). India's value system, its "exceptionalism" (Stuenkel 2012: 35) and stable democratic institutions amid poverty and inequality, forms policy makers' view of the globalised world. India's economic power will give it the prospect for better and mutually beneficial relations with its neighbours. However, liberalisation in India has

largely been understood as neo-liberal deregulation of the economy (Wankhede 2012: 41).

Not directly related to the liberalisation policy and the growth of the Indian economy, but at the height of the economic boom, there emerged chance emerged to improve relations with the United States, something which was important for India's foreign policy and its global aspirations. The 'nuclear deal' of 2005, as it came to be called, made between the USA and India ended a three-decade nuclear trade moratorium, giving India access to non-military nuclear technology and resulting in unprecedented progress of US-Indian foreign relations (Bajoria/Plan 2010). This Indo-US rapprochement was possible despite the continued push for advancing India's nuclear weapon program. The US government under President Bush (junior) viewed India as a rising power that could help, on the side of the US, to shape the balance of power in Asia. In the small strategic community in New Delhi this agreement and the autonomous developments in nuclear technology are seen as a stepping-stone for India's enhanced global role and a strong partnership with the United States, particularly regarding its security concerns in the region (Mohan 2012: 46; Purushothaman 2012 on present US-India defence relations).

Nuclear weapons policy is an issue which is largely uncontroversial in India but contested abroad. India's use of idealist and moralist arguments in foreign policy create a dilemma — if not hypocrisy. Various governments in India have emphasised the discriminatory nature of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and all Indian governments have refused to give in to pressure to join the treaty. The NPT is seen as 'nuclear apartheid' since it treats the nuclear 'haves' and 'have-nots' unequally. Since India has acquired the de facto status of a nuclear power, endorsed by the US-India nuclear deal, the government's attitude has somewhat changed. In the case of Iran, India has on several occasions made it clear that Iranian nuclear weapons are not desirable since it will further destabilise the unstable situation in the region (Khilnani et al. 2012: 24; Sagar 2009: 805-806). In such cases as Iran and North Korea the Indian government is now in the camp of governments that want to prevent the spread of nuclear weapons.

4. Soft Power: India's Foreign Policy Potential

India possesses considerable soft power. Soft power, according to Nye (2004: X) "is the ability to get what you want through attraction rather than coercion or payment." Soft power, although difficult to measure and underpin with solid statistical facts, is the ability of a government to co-opt other states without using hard power (such as for example military means or trade, which can be used as 'sticks' or 'carrots'). Hard power is familiar, whereas soft power is more difficult to define, and it is more difficult to calculate its outcome. Soft power is





the attraction to others and is based on three resources of a country (Nye 2004: 11): “its culture, [...] its political values, [...] and its foreign policies [...]”²²

It is not surprising that the potential of Indian soft power is now being discussed in India in parallel to economic liberalisation. Liberalism emphasises that state ideas and culture and the governance system, rather than power and capabilities, are determining factors for the role of states.

Indian culture, its functioning democracy and political pluralism, its free press, religious diversity, its values and cultural heritage make it an attractive partner. Even such diverse aspects as Gandhian non-violence and non-cooperation, India’s cuisine, its Bollywood films, music, literature and science, ayurveda and yoga are considered to contribute to India’s soft power (Blarel 2012, see also Suri 2011 on the activities of Indian diplomatic service to make use of India’s soft power). Political ideals, education and knowledge are part of this ensemble of soft power (Kumar/Kumar 2010: 45). It is the moral and ideological capital of the country. India’s policy makers have begun to emphasise the importance of its democratic process (Blarel 2012: 31); they underline that an open society can be a more attractive basis for a long-term partnership than an authoritarian regime that might get things done more quickly. But the positive image can be damaged by lax handling of the rule of law and the increase of nepotism, embezzlement and other corrupt practices (Pethe/Tandel/Gandhi 2012). The democracy in India has a high legitimacy, as surveys suggest, but this “contrasts sharply with the low capacity of the political system to deliver fundamental public goods like health, education and the rule of law” (Wagner 2010: 337).

However, foreign policy has always been and still remains the prerogative of the centre, or more precisely, the privilege of the executive. Parliament plays a marginal role in foreign affairs. The complex, continent-sized democracy is often self-absorbed with its internal politics and quarrels among the many political parties. Foreign affairs are rarely a factor in domestic politics (except for differences with China and Pakistan) and they hardly play a role in the electoral politics of India (Ghosh 1994: 816). In the 28 Indian federal states and the additional autonomous regions domestic, provincial and even local factors usually determine the outcome of elections. The “increasing democratization of foreign policy in the post-Cold War era” (Holsti 1995: 58), which Holsti describes as a general trend, has not taken place yet in India.

Government policies at home and abroad have an influence on the soft power of a country. India’s foreign policy has varied in its values, its substance and its implementation. Thus, foreign policy has not always been a source of soft power but has at times been threatening to neighbours—at least in their perception.

²² Nye (2004: 31) differentiates between military (coercion, threats), economic (inducement) and soft power (attraction). His table of types of power is more differentiated than summarised here.



The cultural and political aspects of soft power are often positively perceived outside India and contribute to the image of India as an open society. This positive notion also dates back to some of the founders of India and its artists and authors like Tagore, Ravi Shankar, Gandhi and Nehru who wanted India to be “a site for an alternative universality” (Khilnani et al. 2012: 69). Values and norms matter in global governance; it is not only the economic or military power. Even the militarily and economic most powerful nations need to consider international norms as well as public opinion about their foreign policy behaviour. “Narrow values and parochial cultures are less likely to produce soft power” (Nye 2004: 11).

For many countries, the status of India seems to be an attractive example if not a model. And style in foreign policy can be as important as substance. It seems that India's soft power is increasingly felt globally, possibly through and beyond India's large diasporas in many parts of the world. The image of a bureaucratic, poor and underdeveloped nation still remains, as does the trend to modernisation, but the soft power aspects are increasingly seen together with the modernisation and economic growth of India. But this image of a developing country plagued by poverty, inequality, illiteracy and high levels of violence is only one part of the Indian society. At the same time there are modern sectors (particularly in the urban centres) that present the image of a dynamic society and economy.

For a long time, Western observers were sceptical about India's efforts to create a nation state and establish democracy. The country's sheer size, diversity and heterogeneity as well as the separation of Pakistan confronted the founders of India with enormous problems after the colonial masters had left. Their vision was to create a just society, relieving it from such structural obstacles as castes, communalism, religiously motivated strives, feudalism and capitalist exploitation. The democratic, plural, federal and republican constitution of independent India, largely based on the British Government of India Act of 1935, today still highly treasured by the people, emphasises values such as freedom and liberty, social justice and equality. These are modern universal norms. And: The pluralistic society did not break apart; the Indian Union remained a ‘unit in diversity’ (Wagner 2010).

The founder generation of independent India wanted the country's foreign policy to be based on moral principles. Peace and complete nuclear disarmament, the dissolution of military blocs, solidarity among developing countries and good neighbourly relations with other nations were key features of their foreign policy ambition. Many of the attractive goals for domestic social and economic development as well as foreign affairs have been disappointed and Indian governments experienced the slide down from the moral high ground to communal unrest, wars with neighbouring countries, worsening of governance and disappointments about the failure to play the desired role in global politics. There were periods when Indian policies were out of touch with the demands of the time and the interest of the people. These times seem to have gone and, on the basis of two decades of economic growth, India's self-assertion seems to have returned.

The root causes for the newly discovered self-esteem and confidence of the Indian elite lie deeper than high economic growth rates. To understand what



the basis of India's explicitly globally oriented new foreign policy is, to appreciate its diplomatic efforts towards transcultural cooperation and its external engagements after decades of insular views, it is necessary to grasp the political, social, cultural and economic background and the history of the society.

Certain facets of Indian society have contributed to and influenced the newly found buoyancy in foreign policy.

First, there is the capacity of the Indian society to integrate tradition and modernity and forming resilient institutions. Indian politics comes across to the unfamiliar observer as strange, peculiar, and sometimes archaic, yet familiar with its democratic processes and institutions. This is the result of the capability of the Indian society to integrate foreign influence into existing structures over centuries – to form a hybrid society. Politics in India follows rules and regulations that combine modern and traditional strands of this complex society. The political elite, mainly political parties but also art and business, has blended well-established traditions of society with modern political institutions (of the Westminster-type) inherited by the British (Mitra 2012). They formed a political system that is characterised, to the surprise of many Western observers, by extraordinarily resilient political institutions (Guha 2012: 6). India's institutions have proved to be robust, although they have increasingly come under pressure by personal greed, bribery, nepotism and corruption on a large scale.²³ Clientelism, patrimonial networks and voting manipulation are an expression of the deeply ingrained pattern of group privileges in Indian society. Despite this endemic negative behaviour of politicians and the civil services, democracy is alive and popular; the majority of citizens take part in democratic elections and the image of a multi-cultural and secular society is upheld and celebrated in India (Banerjee 2012: 45).

Second, there is the competition and cooperation between political actors at the national and federal level that has led to the establishing of a functioning federalism with checks and balances. From the days before its independence India has been faced with threats of separatism and the breakup of the subcontinent into different states. Aspirations for cultural and linguistic homogeneity and for economic autonomy have led to the breakup of old and the creation of new federal states within the Indian Union. But the establishment of new states and the partition of old ones have not led to the 'balkanisation' of India. The democratic institutions have contributed to make the largest democracy of the world a functional and vibrant democracy, despite some serious flaws.

²³ Examples on corruption in The Economist 2012: Power Shifts, The Economist, 29.09.2012. www.economist.com/node/21563423/ (27.03.2013). Indian newspapers are full of reports on corrupt politicians or bureaucrats; see for example the reports on the scandal called "Coalgate" (Vaishnav 2012). Transparency International lists India to be 95th highest in the world of 182. <http://cpi.transparency.org/cpi2011/results/> (27.03.2013).



Third, there exists an amorphous tenet in the society that has many forms and orientations but a distinctive aptitude for vagueness and improvisation to make things work. India is not only a polymorphous and diverse society (Heinemann-Grüder 2011). The way the country is run and the way things function is often nebulous, unstructured, and amorphous. Indians themselves have often mentioned how good they are in planning but criticised the poor implementation of plans and projects. Improvisation to make things work is more advanced, almost to perfection, than effective implementation; muddling through to solve problems is a preferred conceptual approach. Nevertheless, Indian institutions do work, somehow.

5. Conclusion

No doubt, India's star is rising and its influence in global affairs increasing. Its political elite is more outspoken in claiming to take over what it considers its rightful place in the world and, considering global challenges, from promoting peace to managing the financial crisis to tackling climate change, India's cooperation is more and more required. The government is keen to engage more actively in global affairs; it is interested in changing norms. These desires are, however, not orientated towards fundamental changes or to abolishing existing norms on a large scale or, instead, establishing new regimes. Indian official foreign policy continues to engage strongly in multilateral diplomacy, but not without emphasising its own position and occasionally discontent (for example at the World Trade Organization negotiations, or the refusal to join the International Criminal Court or the Ottawa Convention on the ban on landmines). The government's ambition is to secure India a larger share in global decision-making within the existing Westphalian format with the nation state in the centre and to establishing its own preferred interpretation of the global rules.

Intensified international Indian engagement will probably have effects on its policies. There is, for example, a debate on the government's position on the 'responsibility to protect' (R2P), which would require "a more nuanced understanding of a whole range of concepts and principles that have guided our foreign policy: the principle of state sovereignty [...]" (Khilnani et al. 2012: 9). The Indian government is cautious on so-called 'humanitarian interventions' and warns that human rights values and other universal norms should not provide a fig-leaf for pushing great power interests. While the Indian foreign policy needs to "probably review its stance in the light of current challenges internationally", it faces "its own internal disorders" (Bajpai 2012: 54; Bhojwani 2012).

India's capacities to engage in global governance and rule-making are lagging behind its ambition. The administration might be big and over-staffed



but the Indian diplomatic service is small.²⁴ There are probably too many paper-pushers in government service but too few experts to cope with international tasks. Reforming of old and creation of new institutions is required.

On the basis of its economic growth India could develop into a society with decreasing income gaps and less poverty, it could enhance the capabilities of its citizens and, on the basis of healthy democratic traditions and freedom of the press, it could be an attractive alternative to other economic powerhouses, particularly China. Asia could become the showcase for a competition of two alternative economic and political models. A prosperous India could be more attractive than China.

Whether the country is a superpower in the making or an emerging power is a question of definition and a matter of subjective judgment. India is a multi-faceted society with numerous contradictory trends and developments. There can be no doubt, however, that the country is likely to continue to play an increased global role and that intensified Indian global initiatives are widely appreciated. Economic growth has been extraordinary; investments into the armed forces are staggering. In spite of these trends, India is far away from being a global military actor with serious power projections. Its ambitions rest much more on economic, political and cultural factors.

²⁴ According to the Annual Report of the Ministry of External Affairs the cadre strength at the headquarters and the mission abroad during 2011-12 amounted to 3530, including junior administrative staff and posts budgeted by the Department of Commerce (Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs India 2012: 203). The Economist (2012: No frills, The Economist, 29.09.2012 <http://www.economist.com/node/21563415>) compares the size of the diplomatic services of several countries: India's diplomats are about one fifths of China's, 1341000 population per diplomat, where as this figure is 321000 in the case of China or 12000 in the case of Germany.



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