

Indian Foreign and Security Policy: Beyond Nuclear Weapons

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IT TOOK INDIA AND THE United States more than three years to conclude a landmark civilian nuclear energy cooperation pact, and during this entire period, the Indian strategic and political elites were consumed by their obsession with the nuclear deal.¹ From the country's decision to initiate a nuclear program, to the relationship between its civilian and military aspects, to the decision on signing or rejecting the Nuclear Nonproliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), every aspect of the nuclear question has been debated threadbare.² The obsession continues even now with a vigorous debate about whether the nuclear deal forecloses India's future options vis-à-vis nuclear weapons testing. It is indeed a very significant agreement as it ends India's isolation from the global high-technology regime and integrates India into the global nuclear order. Without the ability to interact freely with all major powers economically and technologically, India will not be able to have a foreign policy that will make it an effective player in the emerging geopolitical environment. However, amid debates about the ramifications of the deal, discussions have tended to focus on the pact's pros and cons rather than a broader strategic agenda designed to reflect India's rising political capital.

Nuclear weapons do retain their relevance in international politics, but there is a clear realization that they are primarily political instruments and not weapons of war. India's nuclear doctrine of minimum credible deterrence—which involves a commitment to not striking first and developing second strike capabilities—serves its interests well in the near to medium term.³ Nonetheless, after having played its cards effectively by preserving its nuclear autonomy and gaining recognition as a *de facto*

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nuclear weapons state, the time has now come for India to move on and focus on the broader strategic realities confronting the nation at a time when it is advancing in the global interstate hierarchy.

ECONOMIC RISE

The biggest challenge for India remains that of continuing to achieve the rates of economic growth that it has enjoyed in recent years. Everything else is of secondary importance. China has been enjoying double digit growth rates for the last two decades while the Indian story is not even a decade old. India's real GDP has surged by an annual average of nearly 9 percent in the last five years, and it is on track to emerge as the fastest growing economy in the world in 2008-13, with an average annual expansion of 6.3 percent.⁴ Unless India can sustain this momentum, its larger foreign policy ambitions cannot be realized. India needs steady economic growth for the next decade or so with little disruption in regional and global peace, to be able to convert its global aspirations into reality.

The economic reforms process, however, has virtually come to a standstill over the last five years and this could have some serious long-term consequences. Opposition from the Communist Parties and leftist elements within the ruling Congress Party itself ensured that the government, though headed by Manmohan Singh, who crafted first generation of reforms in the early 1990s as a former finance minister, could not undertake any meaningful second generation reforms such as targeting of subsidies,

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making public expenditure efficient, instituting tax and legal reforms, and restructuring the rural sector. In fact, in the current climate of financial turmoil and the economic downturn around the world, it

would be difficult for any Indian government to pursue meaningful reform measures. Defying initial expectations that India could remain immune from the global economic slowdown, the Indian economy witnessed a fall in growth last year, with the Asian Development Bank warning that India's large fiscal imbalance poses daunting challenges of economic management for the nation in the coming years.⁵

Economic growth underpins India's ability to provide adequately for the nation's growing defence needs. India has emerged as one of the largest arms buyers in the global market in the last few years, and it is expected to make more than US \$435 billion of arms purchases from 2009 to 2013.⁶ India, the world's fourth-largest military power, has embarked on an ambitious plan to modernize its largely Soviet-era arms since the

late 1990s as it started asserting its political and military profile in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region. India's armed forces have become increasingly ambitious, talking of their own revolution in military affairs. In line with India's broadening strategic horizons, its military acquisitions are shifting from conventional land-based systems to means of power projection such as airborne refuelling systems and long-range missiles. India is setting up bases abroad, patrolling the Indian Ocean to counter piracy, protecting the crucial sea-lanes of communication, and demonstrating a military assertiveness hitherto unasserted. A continuation of this trend is premised on India's ability to sustain its present economic growth trajectory.

INSTITUTIONAL VOID

Resources alone are not enough. A sense of direction is needed which can only result if appropriate institutions are in place. In the realm of foreign and security policy, successive Indian governments have given short shrift to the building of institutional capacity. A big reason why a culture of long-term strategic thinking has failed to evolve in India is this lack of meaningful institutions that can effectively leverage the nation's resources in the service of clearly defined political goals. India's emergence as a major power is still a matter of potential. It is often assumed that India has the necessary institutional wherewithal to translate its growing economic and military capabilities into global influence even though the Indian state continues to suffer from weak administrative capacity in most areas of policymaking.

While the present United Progressive Alliance (UPA) came to power in 2004 promising that it would make the National Security Council (NSC) a professional and effective institution unlike its conservative predecessor the National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government, the UPA also failed to make it work in an optimal manner, whereby the NSC anticipates national security threats, coordinates the management of national security, and engenders long-term planning by generating new and bold ideas. An effective institutional framework would not only identify the challenges, but it would also develop a coherent strategy to deal with them, organize and motivate the bureaucracy, and persuade and inform the public. The NSC, by itself, is not a panacea, particularly in light of the inability of the NSC in the United States to mediate successfully in the bureaucratic wars and effectively coordinate policy. But the lack of an effective NSC in India is reflective of India's ad hoc decision-making process in the realm of foreign policy, with the result that not once in its more than six-decade long history has India produced a national security strategy document.

In 1999, a serious crisis emerged between India and Pakistan when India discovered that Pakistani soldiers and militants had infiltrated into the Indian side of the

Line of Control (LoC) and taken control of important strategic positions. The Indian intelligence failure was grave, and it took Indian forces almost two months to reoccupy the territory under Pakistan's control, losing precious military and civilian lives in the process. This limited war under the nuclear umbrella threw up Indian shortcomings in intelligence, inter-services coordination, equipment for armed forces, and civil-military interface into sharp relief. The government appointed a committee to review this failure that made a number of recommendations on a range of issues, but the government did not follow through on most recommendations, and little was done to remedy the fundamental weaknesses in the nation's national security structure.

It was hardly any surprise, therefore, that after the terrorist attacks in Mumbai in November 2008—which involved equally grave intelligence failures as the Kargil fiasco—the Indian strategic elites returned to the same old debates about what kind of institutional reforms are needed to prevent such tragedies from recurring. And yet any consensus still eludes India, though as is the case after every crisis, the country's leadership has resorted to some tinkering with the existing institutions and laws. Moreover, the temptation after every crisis is to have new structures, if only to demonstrate that “action” is being taken, but the existing national security organisations remain underfunded and understaffed. It is not clear if the new ones will be any more effective in the absence of an overarching overhaul.

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On foreign policy and national security issues, state institutions often do not work because the governments of the day do not want them to work, so the onus falls on the bureaucracy which is not organized to think strategically. Moreover, it remains insular and not interested in making use of a wider knowledge base. Entrenched bureaucratic interests have prevented the much-needed overhauling of the national security decision-making apparatus and have scuppered even limited reforms, such as the provision of lateral entry into the foreign service to infuse it with fresh ideas. The foreign and security policy bureaucracy tends to view role of outsiders with suspicion and have opposed even a consultative relationship for fear of sharing influence and access to the political establishment. Given the rapidity with which the international environment has been evolving, Indian bureaucracy often finds itself out of tune with the changing realities in the realm of foreign policy and more often than not tends to perpetuate the status quo by focusing exclusively on responding to events when they occur as opposed to conceptualizing at a strategic level. Bureaucratic resistance was one of the main reasons why administrative reforms introduced by the present government at the beginning of its term were never taken to their logical conclusion. Declining professionalism, intellectual sloth, inability and unwillingness to acquire new knowledge, and a lack of dynamism have brought Indian bureaucracy to its ebb in the last few decades. Despite several committees recommending a variety of changes, bureaucratic inertia has pre-

vented any of the important recommendations from getting implemented.

It is equally the case that a wider culture of non-governmental academics and think tanks is largely absent. India's higher education system remains weak in producing the kind of output that would enhance India's ability to project itself and its values on the global stage more potently. The issue for India is: Can there be an institutionalized apparatus within a state if there is a lack of sophisticated academic and media discourse outside the state? Most Indian students today find engineering, medicine, or management the most lucrative options to study. Social sciences and humanities are being devalued today vis-à-vis science and technology, which is bound to result in some serious consequences as democracy requires a questioning citizenry brought up on a liberal education that gives its citizens the ability to interrogate and investigate the claims of authority. Indian universities of today have become intellectually dull places known more for political machinations than for generating new and interesting ideas. Years of low investment in higher education, along with a mistaken practice of providing uniform support to all universities irrespective of their quality, have led to a situation where few Indian academics and students have any incentive to undertake cutting-edge research. The result often tends to be a lot of noise in the media and think-tanks but a conspicuous absence of serious analysis and debate on public policy issues. The broader decimation of Indian academia has had immense consequences for what the state can do by way of institutionalization. And an absence of independent think tanks and policy institutes ensures that statist ideas, howsoever stale and unproductive, continue to dominate the intellectual landscape and that the government's exclusionary claim on policy-making remains unchallenged.

INTERNAL SECURITY

This lack of institutionalization and commensurate strategic orientation has also prevented India from tackling internal issues central to its foreign and security policy.

India is witnessing a gradual collapse in the authority of the state. From left-wing extremism to right-wing religious fundamentalism, the nation is facing multiple challenges that threaten to derail the story of a rising India. India remains, in the words of Fareed Zakaria, a strong society with a weak state, unable to harness its national power for national purpose.¹⁰

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India is becoming a vulnerable target for Islamist extremism with some estimates suggesting, rather astoundingly, that India is second only to Iraq in the number of lives

lost to terrorism over the last three years.¹¹ India had long prided itself on the fact that not one person in a country that has the second largest Muslim population in the world was linked to al-Qaeda or to any international terror plot. This pride got shattered in recent years, with India emerging as both a target and a recruitment base for organizations like al-Qaeda and with attacks being carried out by home-grown jihadist groups, trained and aided by organizations in neighboring Pakistan and Bangladesh. Much like al-Qaeda, the most prominent terrorist group in India today, the Indian Mujahideen, is a loose coalition of jihadists bound together by ideological affiliation and personal

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linkages with its leadership scattered across India.¹² Given India's proximity to Pakistan, the epicentre of global terrorism, it has emerged as an attractive target for Islamist extremist groups such as Lashkar-e-Taiba. As has been rightly sug-

gested, India has become the "sponge" absorbing "most of the blows unleashed by the terrorist groups that treat it as a common enemy along with Israel, the United States, and the West more generally."¹³ Indian security forces are now even fighting terrorists in the hearts of their major cities like New Delhi and Mumbai, and the last five years are being deemed as the worst in India's history of fighting terrorism.¹⁴

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India's Prime Minister has acknowledged that vast gaps exist in intelligence gathering on terrorist networks operating in India.¹⁵ This is a remarkable admission given that terrorism has been India's biggest vulnerability for decades now. Yet after a spate of recent attacks, institutional chaos was evident in the manner the government handled the situation, with the National Security Advisor criticizing the intelligence agencies and inadequate coordination between central and state intelligence agencies. The fact remains that India's highest decision-making body on national security, the Cabinet Committee on Security, does not even receive regular briefings from the Chairman of the Joint Intelligence Committee. There are no institutional mechanisms for intelligence assessment so that remedial actions can be taken in time. At a time when India needs effective institutional capacity to fight the ever-more sophisticated terror networks, Indian police and intelligence services are demoralized to an unprecedented extent due to the politicization of India's response to terrorism. The government pressurized the security agencies not to target the Muslims in their investigation of a number of terror attacks for fear of offending Muslim sensitivities, thereby equating counter-terror with Muslim alienation. Such blatant communalising of the process under which the security forces have been forced to call off searches and interrogations for fear of offending this or that community has led to a situation where the security services have become risk-averse.

The result is the failure of the Indian security establishment to solve a single major terrorism case in the last five years. Moreover, a dangerous perception is gaining ground among the minorities—the Christians and the Muslims—that the state is biased against them, and this will further hinder India's fight against terrorism.¹⁶ The Indian polity will find it difficult to mobilize the nation's collective will against the threat of terrorism if it fails in enlisting the support of all segments of the society.

Meanwhile, the Maoist insurgency has spread from the margins to the limelight, with the Prime Minister of India identifying the Naxalites as the “greatest internal security threat” facing the nation.¹⁷ The Maoists have taken the fight to the geographic heart of India, to the vast swath of territory comprising of impoverished villages in central India. Today, the Indian Home Ministry lists more than 150 districts as being “Naxalite-affected,” and the combined force of the Maoist insurgents has been estimated to be between 10,000 and 20,000 armed fighters and at least 50,000 active supporters.¹⁸ In a sign of how precarious the state of affairs is, the Indian security forces lost 38 lives in a Naxalite attack on police last year, the second largest loss of life in India's more than five decade-long battle with insurgencies. Yet, the Indian government ostensibly remains unable or unwilling to come up with credible policy response to this challenge. Unless the Indian state establishes control within its own territorial borders, its aspirations to play a larger role beyond its borders won't be taken seriously.

KASHMIR UNSETTLED

Against the backdrop of a dramatic deterioration of India's internal security lies the changing dynamic in Kashmir, where much of the population is engaged in an emerging Gandhian non-violent struggle for an independent Islamic state, closely allied with Pakistan. Facing non-violent protesters in Kashmir and armed attacks by terrorists inside the country, the Indian government finds itself in unknown territory. To tackle this problem and focus on its global power aspirations, India may have to adopt policy that invites international approbation while unraveling the country's domestic balance.

Amid all the hype about India's rise and relative lull in Kashmir in recent years, an assumption grew that Pakistan and India were inching towards a tentative resolution on this conflict. The assumption was not idle. The governments of India and Pakistan were supposedly talking regularly, and former President Pervez Musharraf had publicly made a commitment to the international community that he would get rid of the jihadi elements in his military and intelligence services. In fact, India and Pakistan were close to achieving a historic breakthrough in the countries' decades-old conflict over Kashmir. The attempt ultimately failed because declining political fortunes left Pakistan's then-president, Pervez Musharraf, without the clout he needed to sell the agreement at

home. Meanwhile, the region of Jammu and Kashmir in India enjoyed two rounds of democratic elections deemed to be reasonably free and fair. Tourists were returning to the idyllic Kashmir valley, and the separatist elements found themselves isolated.

And then the spell broke over a minor land dispute and maneuvering by Indian politicians, especially the Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party, for tactical political gains against the ruling Congress. The Hindu nationalists whipped the Hindus of Kashmir into a frenzy, leaving the field wide open for the separatist rabble-rousers. The government responded predictably by saturating the streets with its military prowess, shaken as it was by the sudden emergence of the largest public pro-independence demonstrations since the Kashmiri uprising in 1989.

While the Hindu nationalists provoked the Hindus in Jammu, further widening the chasm between the religious communities in the region, and while Hindu-Muslim communal lines hardened in Kashmir, many members of the liberal intelligentsia in New Delhi have started wondering if the time has not come to give in to the demands of those who want nothing to do with India.¹⁹ A sense of fatigue over the issue of Kashmir has prompted suggestions that Kashmir should be allowed to secede. Some point out that the costs of holding on to Kashmir are far too great even as others suggest that India should not be a colonizer, ruling people against their will. In a characteristically provocative essay, celebrated author-turned-activist, Arundhati Roy went farthest, suggesting, "India needs freedom from Kashmir as much as Kashmir needs freedom from India."²⁰

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It is important to recognize that the Indian state, for all its many faults, is not the only guilty party in the Kashmir imbroglio. The saga of Kashmir is one of competing nationalisms and political philosophies.²¹ On one hand, the Indian government continues to champion Muslim-dominated Kashmir as a symbol of India's secular democratic ethos, while failing to acknowledge that a majority of Kashmiris have ceased to view themselves as Indians. On the other hand, the separatists who want the right of self-determination refuse to account for the aspirations of the Hindus and Ladakhis as if they are not a part of this dispute at all.

Both the conservatives and the liberals in India fail to grasp the complexities of Indian and Pakistani interests in Kashmir and refuse to reckon with the long-term consequences of their supposed "solutions." Clearly, no Indian government is in a position to allow Kashmir's secession from India for fear of triggering a new spate of separatist struggles in the multi-ethnic, multilingual nation. India's democracy and secularism would receive a body blow if India, with the world's second-largest Muslim population, accepted the idea that a Muslim majority in any state could secede.

In fact, if there has been any success in the India-Pakistan "peace process" in the last few years, it has been recognition on both sides that redrawing territorial borders is

strictly out of bounds. Moreover, broader geopolitical ramifications of an independent, landlocked Kashmir remain dependent on the kindness of its neighbours. India, Pakistan and even China would try to enhance their own strategic interests and compete for the loyalty of Kashmir. Finally, it is not readily evident that an independent Kashmir would reduce tensions between India and Pakistan. Islamist extremism would get a boost worldwide even as India, already under assault from rising Islamist fundamentalism, would find it difficult to manage growing tensions between Hindu extremists and Islamist radicals. It's no exaggeration to suggest that it would be the end of India as the world has come to know.

Despite recent tensions, however, India was able to hold successful elections in the state of Jammu and Kashmir, which saw an unprecedented 60 percent of the local populace participating in the electoral process. This gave a boost to the sagging Indian morale as it demonstrated to the world Indian desire to acknowledge the aspirations of the Kashmiris within the constitutional bounds of the Republic. Yet, the issue of Kashmir remains on the South Asian strategic landscape with the new U.S. President Barack Obama suggesting that working with Pakistan and India to try to resolve their Kashmir conflict would be a critical task for his administration's efforts to try to counter growing instability in Afghanistan and Pakistan.²² The United States sees the lack of durable peace between India and Pakistan on Kashmir as a significant distraction from the war against al-Qaeda and the Taliban in Afghanistan. Such suggestions have caused consternation in the corridors of power in New Delhi, since India considers the Kashmir issue an internal matter and has long resisted any attempt by outside powers to intervene on the issue. Given that South Asia is going to be at the top of Obama's foreign policy agenda, India will inevitably be drawn into the broader regional dynamic, and the issue of Kashmir will continue to exercise its diplomatic energies.

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GOVERNANCE WOES

The turmoil in Kashmir brought to the forefront the fragile state of domestic affairs in India. The world media and India's elite talk about India's rise, often not realizing that the state—beset with rising Islamist extremism, a Maoist insurgency, and the growing and conflicting demands of myriad interest groups—is rapidly losing the ability to have its writ run over a large swath of its territory. The very idea of India is under siege with significant erosion in the legitimacy of the Indian state.²³ Though the Indian economy has continued to grow despite internal security challenges and foreign investors have not yet been discouraged by sporadic terrorist attacks, the Indian economy may soon

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face the consequences of the grim security situation if investors find the Indian state too weak to wield due authority within its borders.

Those who seek to challenge the authority of the Indian state feel emboldened to take advantage of the paralyzed decision-making in New Delhi. Maladministration, dithering, and incompetence are making India ungovernable with a growing loss of respect for all major state institutions. According to the latest Corruption Perception Index, India is becoming a more corrupt nation over the years, with the political establishment, police, and lower judiciary playing a large role in this decline.²⁴ And this corruption is having a corrosive impact on the social fabric of Indian society by undermining the trust of ordinary Indians in their nation's political system, political institutions, and leadership.

POWER BALANCE

Externally, the ambivalence that Indian elites display towards the notion of power has prevented India from exploiting the extant structure of the international system to its advantage. If the United States today wants to embrace India, it is not because it has suddenly realized its previous folly of ignoring India or discovered a new generosity towards India. It has to do with India's growing weight in the international system, and U.S. foreign policy is nothing if not adaptive to the changing geopolitical realities. It is today in the U.S. interest to have a stable bilateral relationship with the world's largest democracy and a growing economic power, and thus U.S. policymakers are ready to shed their Cold War baggage to carve out a new relationship with India. It is the Indian policymakers who still remain hesitant to take advantage of the structural realities that the international system seems to be offering them. They want to continue to cling to the outmoded concepts of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and Third World solidarity that might have had some utility when they were devised during the Cold War but are of little use in the changing strategic milieu.

India can keep propounding the desirability of a multipolar world order, but for all the talk of a "post-American" world order, U.S. primacy is not going anywhere in a hurry. It is important, therefore, for India to develop a partnership with the United States that can serve not only their mutual interests but also specific Indian interests. This is especially important because while the United States is unlikely to face a peer at the global level in the near-term, the emergence of China as major power in the Asia-Pacific is already changing the strategic reality in the region. Recognizing the shifting balance of power in Asia-Pacific produced by China's rise, the Bush Administration was prescient to embrace India as a counterweight. Some have even compared the signing of the nuclear energy cooperation pact between India and the United States to Nixon's

1972 visit to China as “an act of grand strategic importance.”²⁵ No country will be as significantly affected by China’s regional rise as India. India needs to focus on redressing the balance of power and develop leverage over China, and the most effective way of doing this is to learn from China to play the balance of power game. China has been rather successful in hemming India in the South Asian region by developing economic and military ties with most of India’s neighbors. Much to the dismay of Indian elites, India has yet to find a way to break out of the South Asian logjam, and a partnership with the United States allows it to accomplish exactly that. Yet India’s domestic politics, as well as its desire for “strategic autonomy,” make it highly unlikely that it will simply follow the U.S. lead on major global issues. If Americans are hoping to cultivate another Britain, or even another Australia, India, for sure, is not the right candidate to expend energies on.

There are also tensions between India’s purported role on the world stage and demands of the challenges it faces in its own neighborhood. South Asia is a difficult neighborhood, and India’s strategic periphery continues to witness continuous turmoil and uncertainty. The instability in Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar is a major limiting factor of India realizing its dream of becoming a major global player. India is surrounded by several weak states that view New Delhi’s hegemonic status in the region with suspicion. The conundrum India faces is that while it is seen as unresponsive to the concerns of its neighbors, any diplomatic aggressiveness on its part is also viewed with suspicion and often resentment. The structural position of India in the region makes it highly likely that Indian predominance will continue to be resented by its smaller neighbors. However, a policy of “splendid isolation” is not an option, and India’s desire to emerge as a major global player will remain just a desire unless it engages with its immediate neighborhood more meaningfully and emerges as a net provider of regional peace and stability. In this context, India’s proactive role in Afghanistan is garnering a lot of global attention as it tries to shed its inward-looking strategic insularity to carve out a larger regional role for itself. Its success, or lack thereof, is likely to have serious consequences for India’s stature in the region and the international system at large.

IDEAS MATTER

Along with navigating the complexities of its internal and external pressures, India does not yet have the capacity to project what it stands for. Global reassessment of India is primarily predicated on its recent economic rise, but India’s rise will remain incomplete in the absence of a credible vision with a larger purpose. India not only appears to be devoid of big ideas backed by assertive political conviction, but it also continues to

lack the intellectual infrastructure essential to debate and achieve clarity on what being a great power means for India. India has always been a nation of great ambition, but today more than ever it needs to answer the question: What is the purpose behind its ambition? India wants to rise, but what for? It is not clear if the Indian elites understand the implications of their nation's rise. They seem more interested in pursuing a sectarian agenda than in providing effective leadership that this moment in India's history

The Indian elites do have a growing sense of their country as an emerging power, as an important player on the global stage. Yet, the Indian state seems unable to leverage the opportunities presented by India's economic rise to their full potential.

demands. As Ramachandra Guha, India's pre-eminent historian, suggests, today "the government of India is run by men and women of limited intelligence and dubious integrity, who know little about and care less for the ideas on which the Republic was founded."²⁶ The Indian elites do have a growing sense of their country as an emerging

power, as an important player on the global stage. Yet, the Indian state seems unable to leverage the opportunities presented by India's economic rise to their full potential. Tensions are inherent between the requirements of a great power foreign policy and the complications of a democratic multinational state, as was evidenced by the negotiations over U.S.–India nuclear deal. Policy-making in democracies is often a messy process full of complexities, but there is a "near paralytic fragmentation of authority" in the Indian polity to the point where on a whole range of crucial issues a sense of drift prevails.²⁷ Policy initiatives continue to be framed in a political environment that is highly fragmented and unstable.

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Kishore Mahbubani, in his book *The New Asian Hemisphere*, makes a strong case for India's global leadership, asserting that India's "credentials as the world's largest democracy; its open, tolerant and inclusive culture; its unique geopolitical and cultural position as a bridge between east and west gives it a unique opportunity to provide the leadership for forging new forms of global governance that spaceship Earth desperately needs as it sails into the future."²⁸ Certainly, India's rise to global prominence may not be very problematic for the world as its democratic political system will go a long way in allaying the apprehensions of the established powers. The real challenge for India lies in the domestic sphere, where the Indian state will have to succeed in overcoming the constraints that continue to inhibit India's potential.

Abid Hussein, India's former ambassador to the United States, provides an apt assessment of the dilemmas of taking on global leadership: "If you want to drive on the highway, you have to get up to 100 km per hour."²⁹ India might succeed in getting up to the highway cruising speed, but the transition is not going to be an easy one. India

would also do well to remember: “Be careful what you wish for, it may come true.” It has always wanted to be taken seriously. And now, when that wish is gradually getting fulfilled, it also means that everyone will be watching when India says something (or cannot figure out what to say), and they will care about what India decides to do. That is life in the fast lane. Therefore, it is not surprising that many think that India is better off not being a permanent member of the UN Security Council. If India does become a member, it would have to take positions on various critical issues, and given the fragility of Indian domestic politics, India might find this harder to accomplish than many anticipate.

The rise of India might be an idea whose time has come, but the challenges confronting Indian foreign and security policy today are varied and not amenable to easy solutions. The dithering in New Delhi over the U.S.–India nuclear deal made it clear that the Indian polity stands divided on fundamental foreign policy choices facing the nation. Left in the fray are serious doubts emerging about the nation’s ability to use the present economic and strategic opportunities to its advantage. It is up to India now to allay these concerns and take its rightful place in the comity of nations. 

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29. Thanks to Ambassador Teresita Schaffer for sharing this with me.

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