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Balancing Interests and Values: India's Struggle with Democracy Promotion

In 2005, early in his tenure as prime minister of India, Manmohan Singh underlined the importance of Indian democracy to the world:

> If there is an 'idea of India' by which India should be defined, it is the idea of an inclusive, open, multi-cultural, multi-ethnic, multi-lingual society. … [W]e have an obligation to history and mankind to show that pluralism works. … Liberal democracy is the natural order of political organization in today's world. All alternate systems, authoritarian and majoritarian in varying degrees, are an aberration.[1]

Coming from the leader of the world's largest democracy, Singh's remarks seem relatively unexceptional. Viewed in the context of the Indian foreign policy tradition, however, he was making a major departure in unabashedly praising liberal democracy and relating India's own democratic system to the current problems of the world.

As India celebrates the 60th anniversary of its independence, a paradox stands out. Much of the world sees a profound commitment to democracy amidst bewildering diversity as the defining feature of modern India. Yet, democracy as a political priority has largely been absent from India's foreign policy. New Delhi's conspicuous lack of emphasis on democracy in its engagement with the world is largely a consequence of the Cold War's impact on South Asia and India's nonaligned impulses in the early years of its independence. It attached more weight to solidarity with fellow developing countries and the defense of its own national security interests without a reference to ideology at the operational level.

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Since the end of the Cold War, however, supporting democracy abroad as an objective has begun to factor into India's policymaking. This priority has been triggered by intensive engagement with the United States since the early 1990s. In the final days of the Clinton administration and through subsequent terms of the Bush administration, Washington has emphasized the importance of India as the world's largest democracy, underlined the role of shared political values in transforming bilateral relations, and explored options for working with New Delhi on the promotion of democracy worldwide. India has in turn confronted new challenges, such as potential failed states in the region; managing consequences of internal conflicts within its smaller neighbors; and if possible, nudging these countries toward democratic evolution. As an emerging great power in its own right, India has also been increasingly called on to contribute to international peace and security, which in the contemporary world increasingly focuses on conflicts within states.

Among these external impulses, the question of India's political values and their role in the conduct of India's international relations are bound to figure more prominently in the future policy discourse in New Delhi. Yet, the question remains: Will democracy become a more important natural component of future Indian foreign policy as many in the West hope?

Cold War Priorities: Nonalignment over Democracy

During the Cold War, external and internal factors combined to prevent India from highlighting the relevance of its own democracy to the rest of the world. The impact of the Cold War on the subcontinent resulted, to put it simply, in the U.S. democracy aligning with military-ruled Pakistan and Communist-led People's Republic of China. India in turn found itself in the arms of the Soviet Union.

Once this regional balance of power system acquired a measure of rigidity, India and the United States could not build on their shared political values. Although the governments of the two nations often paid lip service to the notion of political pluralism, which was also at the center of the East-West ideological divide, there was no escaping the fact that India was not merely closer to the Soviet Union but also the only democracy that stood outside the system of U.S. alliances and in political opposition to the West on most international issues. Inevitably then, "estranged democracies" became the defining metaphor of Indian-U.S. relations.[2]

Liberal U.S. rhetoric on democracy often drew cynical jeers from the Indian intelligentsia, who pointed to the U.S. military alliance with military-ruled Pakistan. The U.S. policy of supporting military dictatorships and conservative religious forces within the developing world, as part of its effort to contain the

influence of communism, created deep anxieties within the Indian establishment. As it watched military coups undermine many nationalist regimes and nascent democracies in the newly decolonized states, India was anxious that its own democracy might be targeted by the West.

The internal anticolonial strain in the newly independent India morphed into sustained anti-imperialist posturing within the political discourse on world affairs. India's first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, certainly did not define nonalignment as a conscious anti-Western orientation. For him, India's nonalignment was a means to protect India's newly won freedom to conduct its own independent foreign policy and to maximize India's relative gains in the bipolar system. Nehru was never enthusiastic about creating a third bloc of nonaligned countries.

Democracy as a political priority has largely been absent from India's foreign policy.

The injection of anti-imperialism into nonalignment and the identification of the Soviet Union as a natural ally of the developing world came after Nehru. As India drifted toward economic populism and a leftist orientation at home starting in the late 1960s, India's foreign policy articulation increasingly acquired a strident anti-Western tone. As the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) became radicalized in the 1970s, the vision of a declining capitalist West and a rising socialist East gripped the imagination of Third World leaders. As the North-South ideological battles dominated the UN fora, India saw itself leading the charge in restructuring the global order against the West.

Equally consequential in undermining the liberalism of India was the extraordinary fascination with socialism among the founders of the Indian republic. Having grown up amidst the crises in Western capitalism in the 1920s and the impressive economic performance of the Soviet Union, many nationalists saw Indian socialism as the fastest means to transform the lives of their people. Although most of them were not willing to abandon freedom for the sake of socialism, they were indeed convinced that a third way, tilted toward state-led economic growth, existed between the models offered by Western capitalism and Eastern communism.

This article of faith for the political class was reflected in the decision by the Indira Gandhi government to convert India into a socialist republic in the late 1970s through a constitutional amendment. Although this was done during the brief emergency rule that suspended Indian democracy from 1975 to 1977, the political establishment did not even attempt to reverse it after that period.

India's collective faith in socialism crumbled only when its state-led economic model went bankrupt at the turn of the 1990s. It took Indian leaders 15 years of

cautious economic liberalization and globalization to discover the virtues of liberal orthodoxy. It was not entirely accidental that Singh, who launched India's economic reforms in 1991, was also the first Indian leader to begin to underline India's relevance as an "an open society and an open economy."[3]

Unlearning the Cold War Experience

The end of the Cold War made it possible for India and the United States to consider anew the prospect of building on their shared democratic values. Whereas the Western world celebrated the triumph of liberal democracy over authoritarian forms of governance at the turn of the 1990s, the world's largest democracy had very little reason to cheer the collapse of the Soviet Union. Having developed a huge stake in the strategic alliance with Moscow, New Delhi was in deep mourning. It was more concerned about the loss of a reliable strategic partner than the far-reaching systemic implications of the Soviet Union's collapse. New Delhi did not envision itself as a leading democracy in the world. As it coped with an uncertain world after 1991, India was more fearful of U.S. dominance in a unipolar world than enthusiastic for the triumph of democratic principles. Indian intelligentsia, although highly sensitive to any violation of democratic principles within the nation, seemed utterly insensitive to the international value of political pluralism.

In the United States, foreign policy efforts on deepening democracy throughout the 1990s focused sharply on eastern and central Europe, which saw many new democracies emerge in the wake of the collapse of the Warsaw Pact. In South Asia, however, the initial years of the Clinton administration saw U.S. energies devoted almost entirely to nuclear nonproliferation. In fact, the instincts of the Clinton administration at its beginning and more broadly of the liberal U.S. establishment to emphasize democracy as part of a neo-Wilsonian internationalism did not lead to U.S. recognition of the strategic value of Indian democracy. It ironically led to an emphasis on the shortcomings of the Indian democratic experiment. Single-issue groups in the United States focusing, for example, on human rights abuses or the practice of religious freedom or those seeking a linkage between trade and child labor tended to focus intensely on India's difficulties in these areas.

When issues relating to democracy did come up, they arose as U.S. criticism of India for the human rights situation in Kashmir, which New Delhi viewed as part of the traditional U.S. tilt toward Pakistan. Sikh Khalistani groups and the Kashmiri separatists backed by Pakistan also actively campaigned in the U.S. Congress to pass resolutions against the Indian state's human rights violations in the Punjab and Kashmir. (India did eventually beat back these efforts by its own intensive lobbying.) Washington's 1993 questioning of the legality

of the accession of the state of Jammu and Kashmir to India stoked all the visceral Indian suspicions of U.S. ulterior motives in the region. The enduring U.S. alliance with Pakistan and the U.S. tilt toward Islamabad in its dispute with New Delhi on Kashmir convinced many in India that Washington had little consideration for its unity and territorial integrity and was fundamentally opposed to the emergence of a powerful Indian state. The newly triumphal post–Cold War U.S. liberalism seemed to have no empathy for an India that was fighting its own demons. At the extreme, many U.S. internationalists were quite happy to berate Indian democracy as an "illiberal" one.

Two factors defined India's ambivalence toward Clinton's democracy promotion agenda.

At the global level, the Clinton administration's focus on assertive multilateralism and empowering the United Nations with the right to intervene in the internal affairs of developing nations raised alarm bells in India about potential U.S. plans to meddle in Kashmir. India subsequently opposed the new international interventionist agenda of President Bill Clinton and UN Secretary General Kofi Annan. At annual voting sessions of the UN Human Rights Commission in Geneva, India voted against or occasionally abstained on Western resolutions throughout the 1990s and beyond. In affirming its conventional nonaligned stand on human rights issues, India gained support from many Third World countries, including China and Iran, in beating back Pakistani resolutions on the political situation in Kashmir. Internationally, India saw defending the sovereignty of the Third World against the new interventionists as more important than defending the values of democracy.

The Turning Point: India and the Community of Democracies

It took the first U.S. presidential visit to India in 22 years, by Clinton in the spring of 2000, for Washington to recognize the importance of Indian democracy. Clinton's sensitivity to the extraordinary diversity of the country and his celebration of India's multicultural tradition put democracy back at the center of Indian-U.S. relations. Clinton's support of India in the 1999 Kargil war against Pakistan and his publicly expressed view that the United States has no interest in balkanizing India eased, if not erased, the traditional Indian perceptions about U.S. hostility.

Although Clinton brought new warmth to Indian-U.S. relations and successfully removed much of the poison that had accumulated during the Cold War, India's struggle to adapt to the changes in world order continued. In the

first-ever substantive and sustained political and security dialogue between Washington and New Delhi from 1998 to 2000, the Clinton administration sought Indian support for an initiative to promote democracy worldwide.[4] India was aware that being part of an international club built around the idea of political pluralism would help to differentiate it from two of its principal adversaries, China and Pakistan. Yet, the Indian establishment was skeptical whether the new connection with Washington on promoting democracy would in any way change the fundamentals of U.S. policy toward India. They wanted to see U.S. support in changing India's nuclear status, U.S. neutrality in the conflict with Pakistan over Jammu and Kashmir, and U.S. treatment as an equal to Beijing.

Bush took a simpler but strategic view on the importance of Indian democracy.

As the United States sought India's help on democracy promotion, New Delhi by sheer force of inertia tended to hold on to its traditional foreign policy position on nonintervention in the internal affairs of developing nations. During Clinton's visit to India, for example, the United States proposed setting up a Center for Asian Democracy, with natural overtones against China, and sounded out India on its willingness to vote against Beijing or at least abstain on China's human rights record at the UN Commission on Human Rights. India was in both cases unwilling to lend itself to a potential campaign against Beijing. Afraid of a U.S. intervention in Kashmir at one of the weaker moments of the Indian state, New Delhi still found it more convenient to align with China and the nonaligned bloc in defending the principle of nonintervention rather than with the West on human rights issues.

Yet, India would not reject out of hand the Clinton administration's proposal on working together on democracy promotion. At a minimum, decisionmakers in New Delhi were compelled to review for the first time what the nature of its internal politics meant for the rest of the world. Washington's idea was to form a small core group of democracies representing different regions that would meet regularly to address the challenges to the rule of law and democracy. In considering the implications of joining what clearly was an ideological project, India had to take into account the potential weakening of its established diplomatic equities in the UN and other multilateral forums as a leading NAM member.

The multilateralists in the Indian foreign policy establishment, reflecting an entrenched Third World perspective, were opposed to letting a new political fashion replace the familiar ways of doing business at the UN. Yet, the political leadership of the center-right Bharatiya Janata Party, which was trying to

reorient Indian foreign policy, chose to go along cautiously with Clinton's proposal. In 1999, India became one of the 10 founding members of the Community of Democracies initiative. The 10 countries, meeting at the ministerial level, issued a concept paper declaring that the first-ever platform of nations sharing the same political values "provide[s] an unprecedented opportunity for exchanging experiences, identifying best practices, and formulating an agenda for international cooperation in order to realize democracy's full potential."[5]

At the first meeting of the Community of Democracies in Warsaw in June 2000, in which foreign ministers and officials from 106 countries participated, India was given a prominent role as a founding member and was chosen to lead one of the ministerial panels. Despite real U.S. diplomatic enthusiasm for presenting India in a lead role in the new initiative, a tentative India was unwilling to step too far out. New Delhi had not yet resolved the fundamental tension in its own worldview between the notions of sovereignty and intervention. Its own national experience had tended to emphasize the argument that, to be successful, democracy must have a strong internal basis and cannot be enforced from abroad.

To be sure, India recognized the value of sharing experiences and best practices but was not willing to inject more into the notion of democracy promotion. More immediately, New Delhi was not convinced that Washington itself was ready to insulate democracy promotion from the larger dynamics of its foreign policy. The skepticism of the Indian conservatives was reflected in an assessment on the eve of the Warsaw conference:

> There is no harm in India participating in the forthcoming Warsaw conference on the Community of Democracies … [but] [o]ver-enthusiasm and wishful-thinking that India is now an equal partner of the US in a new jehad for democracy would be unwise. … We should avoid letting ourselves be used by Washington in this venture to advance its interests unless there is a genuine convergence of the interests of the [United States] and India.[6]

Thus, India went along with the United States on the Community of Democracy initiative, but it was not prepared to invest significant political or diplomatic energies into it. After the Warsaw conference, the United States sounded out India on leading the Caucus of the Community of Democracies at the UN, to coordinate the positions of caucus members on various issues. India, weighed down by its past association with the developing world's Group of 77 and NAM, large numbers of which are nondemocratic states, was reluctant to give up traditional ways of mobilizing support for Indian positions at the UN.

The Indian decision to turn down the U.S. request to lead the UN Democracy Caucus reportedly left Washington "puzzled." As journalist Malini Par-

thasarathy remarked, “On the one hand, India is seen as seeking international support for its initiatives against terrorism and has been canvassing vigorously its claims to a Security Council seat, but on the other hand it seems to have passed up an opportunity to take on a high-profile role in the context of the United Nations.”[7]

Two factors defined India’s ambivalence toward the Clinton administration’s agenda on democracy promotion. The first was the unsurprising lag between the prospect of India emerging as a great power and the evolution of New Delhi’s attitudes from that of a vulnerable Third World state to those of a nation capable of shaping the international system. India’s self-confidence as a rising force on the global stage has been building, with its May 1998 nuclear tests in defiance of the United States and the nonproliferation system as well as its subsequent capacity to withstand international sanctions, its success in creating a niche for itself in the information technology area, and above all an acceleration of its economic growth.

The democratic transition in Nepal is a favorable sign for U.S.-Indian democracy promotion.

The immediate post-1998 years were marked by an extraordinary diplomatic dynamism in New Delhi and a political leadership that was willing to break the inherited ideological mold. Multilateralism was not the highest priority for New Delhi at a moment when it was reconfiguring its relations with the great powers, reestablishing its relevance in a resurgent Asia, and reordering its ties with two of its most important neighbors, China and Pakistan. The new realists running India’s foreign policy had little reverence for the grandstanding in multilateral forums of the past.

Focused as they were on rebuilding India’s power, they had no time for fanciful multilateral projects, thus reducing India’s emphasis on NAM and activism in the UN, the sole exception being its campaign for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council. This lack of interest in the UN at the highest level meant, paradoxically, some autonomy for the multilateralists in the Indian system who were happy to plod along the beaten path.

The second and perhaps more consequential reason for India’s disinterest in a global campaign for democracy was the difficulty of engineering a new convergence of strategic interests with the United States. Despite Clinton’s eventual empathy toward India, his administration was rigid in its opposition to accommodating India on the nuclear question. After its nuclear tests, the new center-right government in India, which was so different from the left-liberal governments that had dominated India for decades, was pitching for a genuine strategic partnership with the United States. The new approach

was highlighted by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, who departed from the conventional wisdom in New Delhi in proclaiming India and the United States to be "natural allies."[8]

The Clinton administration, with its commitment to neo-Wilsonian internationalism, was polite in noting the new Indian enthusiasm but had no interest in building new alliances or pursuing geopolitical goals in Asia. Conventional U.S. liberal internationalism was not willing to look at India as a potential ally. President George W. Bush, however, who had a very different view of the world and of India, was ready to make amends.

Simplifying Democracy Promotion

Unlike Clinton and the liberal Democrats in the United States, Bush was prepared to take a simpler but strategic view on the importance of Indian democracy. Senior Bush aides have underlined his strong admiration for Indian democracy. As one adviser said, "When I asked … Bush in early 1999 about the reasons for his obvious and special interest in India, he immediately responded, 'a billion people in a functioning democracy. Isn't that something? Isn't that something?'"[9]

Bush's personal enthusiasm translated into policy initiatives toward India that departed from the traditional approach to the region. Unlike his predecessors, who saw India through the limiting prism of Pakistan and the subcontinent, Bush was prepared to rank New Delhi as a potential major power with global significance. This addressed India's long-standing complaints that Washington had little regard for New Delhi's global aspirations.

After the September 11 attacks, the war on terrorism produced greater empathy from the United States for India's concerns about terrorism emanating from Islamic militant groups based in Pakistan. Despite its renewed reliance on Pakistan in the war on terrorism, Washington was not prepared to sacrifice its incipient partnership with New Delhi. Determined not to let U.S. policy drift back to a zero-sum game between India and Pakistan as it was during the Cold War, Washington successfully expanded relations with both states. Unlike the Clinton administration, which was unwilling to hold Pakistan responsible for these attacks and underlined India's shortcomings in Kashmir, the Bush administration began to mount political pressure on Pakistan to stop cross-border terrorism after the September 11 attacks. Although Bush has not been able to make Pakistan completely stop such support, India saw the value of the positive change in Washington's approach.

Above all, Bush managed to correct the perspective in New Delhi about a U.S. tilt toward Pakistan on Kashmir. By shedding the activist approach of Clinton in pushing India toward substantive negotiations on Kashmir with

Pakistan, resisting the temptation to mediate, and endorsing the internationally observed elections to the provincial assembly of Jammu and Kashmir as free and fair, Bush removed New Delhi's entrenched suspicions about U.S. intentions in Kashmir. Somewhat counterintuitively, Washington's reduced activity on Kashmir opened the space for India to initiate the first purposeful negotiation in decades on the long-standing conflict with Pakistan.

Despite progress on the joint democracy-promotion agenda, limits are evident.

Furthermore, the Bush administration's willingness in its first term to sidestep disputes with India on nonproliferation allowed New Delhi to warm up to Washington on a range of international political issues. India was eager to assist the United States in its war on terrorism after the September 11 attacks. Despite the U.S. decision to rely on Pakistan, India was fully aware of the big opportunity for transforming Indian-U.S. relations in the Bush years and seriously considered Bush's request to send a division of troops to Iraq in the summer of 2003. Although the Vajpayee government held back in the end for the fear of a domestic backlash, its readiness for a new framework of political cooperation with the United States was unmistakable.

Finally, Bush's controversial agreement with Singh in July 2005 to initiate civilian nuclear energy cooperation with India and modify the global nonproliferation regime instilled a new confidence in the prospects for a genuine partnership and generated a readiness to take political risks on aligning with U.S. policy on such ideological issues as promoting democracy. In the global nuclear order built around the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty of 1970 (NPT), India had had an anomalous standing. India was in possession of nuclear weapons but could not be accepted as a nuclear-weapon state under the NPT. Moreover, India would not give up its nuclear weapons and join the treaty as a non–nuclear-weapon state. For 35 years, finding a way to keep its nuclear weapons and to regain the benefits of international nuclear commerce have been among the highest national security objectives for New Delhi. This priority, however, ran headlong into the solid U.S. domestic consensus on ensuring strict adherence to the NPT. Bush was the first U.S. president since the mid-1960s to seek a new domestic consensus to let India have both nuclear weapons and access to the global nuclear energy market.

The July 2005 White House summit between Bush and Singh went beyond the nuclear question to announce a joint global democracy initiative. India and the United States declared that they "have an obligation to the global community to strengthen values, ideals, and practices of freedom, pluralism, and rule of law" and agreed to assist states seeking to become more open and

democratic.[10] Bush and Singh committed to support the new UN Democracy Fund, which had the relatively modest objective of funding projects for strengthening democratic institutions and promoting human rights around the world. Recognizing the special personal importance attached by Bush, Singh disregarded advice not to appear with Bush at its launch in the fall of 2005. Speaking at the occasion, Singh expanded on the virtues of Indian democracy and its universal relevance: "For us, the democratic ideal is a common heritage of mankind. Those fortunate to enjoy its fruits have a responsibility to share its benefits with others."[11]

Singh also dropped the traditional Indian defensiveness in the debate on democracy versus development.

> Poverty, illiteracy, or socio-economic backwardness do not hinder the exercise of democracy. Quite the contrary, our experience of more than 50 years of democratic rule demonstrates how democracy is a most powerful tool to successfully overcome the challenge of development. But most of all, democracy alone gives the assurance that the developmental aspirations of the poorest citizens of our society will be taken into consideration.[12]

Unlike in the Community of Democracies initiative, in which India chose to take the back seat, New Delhi was now more enthusiastic in the context of the big changes that Bush was prepared to take toward the transformation of bilateral relations. The Indian government's willingness to do this amidst the known visceral opposition from the Communist allies of the ruling coalition to any political cooperation with the United States, let alone on democracy promotion,[13] was a signal that the Indian establishment had acquired an unprecedented political comfort level with the United States. Yet, there was still considerable resistance within the Indian foreign policy establishment to supporting the UN Democracy Fund. The multilateralists in the foreign affairs office were particularly concerned that joining the United States on the democracy issue would cost India its traditional NAM allies at the UN.[14]

The criticism was not merely from the Indian side. The skepticism was considerable within the United States, increasingly polarized in the Bush years, over India's decision to warm up to Bush and his ideological agenda. The growing sense that the Bush intervention in Iraq had failed generated a new skepticism among both liberals and conservatives about the prospects for democracy promotion around the world. Furthermore, there is no shortage of U.S. critics who question India's credentials as a democracy.[15]

The waxing and waning of support for democracy promotion in the United States, however, is part of a familiar and unending cycle in which the pendulum swings from an emphasis on realism, caution, and the primacy of self-interest to a vigorous focus on spreading U.S. values abroad. In any case, Clinton

placed the question of supporting democracy abroad on the Indian-U.S. agenda, and Bush has enthusiastically built on it. Pragmatists in Washington and New Delhi are aware that initiatives such as the Community of Democracies and the UN Democracy Fund are unlikely to set the world on fire. These kind of multilateral forums become routinized over time and lose policy relevance sooner than later. The real question that underlines the political engagement between India and the United States on democracy promotion is whether they can cooperate in specific circumstances to achieve political outcomes in favor of freedom around the world.

Indian-U.S. Convergences and Divergences

Evidence from the ground offers some interesting insights into the potential as well as the limits of future Indian-U.S. political cooperation on democracy promotion. The democratic transition in Nepal, which saw a peaceful movement forcing an ambitious monarch to surrender his absolute powers and accept far-reaching constitutional changes, is a favorable sign. Throughout the crisis, which began with a spectacular regicide in the summer of 2001 and ended five years later when popular protests forced King Gyanendra to cede power to the people, New Delhi and Washington engaged in unprecedented diplomatic coordination. By cooperating with each other and with other major powers such as the European Union in coercing the Nepalese and by cautioning China not to break the arms embargo imposed by the Western powers and India, New Delhi and Washington successfully prevented the monarchy from dividing the great powers to its advantage.

To be sure, there were many tactical differences between India and the United States in managing this transition, especially in the final stages. Whereas India was prepared to countenance a political role for the Maoists, the United States was more apprehensive of being taken in by the promises of the rebels, who were branded as terrorists by Washington and New Delhi. The U.S. view of treating Maoists purely from the perspective of terrorism was indeed a view that was shared strongly by sections of the Indian establishment. New Delhi was torn between those who sought to deal with the Maoists simply as terrorists and others who sought to put the question in the larger context of the struggle for democratic and social change in Nepal. As the crisis unfolded rapidly in the spring of 2006, the latter won the day. The assessment that Maoists in Nepal were not different from the many insurgent groups in India that were ultimately brought into the mainstream through political accommodation has been borne out, at least for the moment.

The Nepal experience could be seen as heralding a new phase of substantive political cooperation between India and the United States in supporting

the region's positive evolution. For decades, India was deeply suspicious of the U.S. role in its neighborhood, insisting that other great powers keep out of its backyard on principle.[16] In turn, the United States had offered a sympathetic ear to smaller South Asian nations' complaints of Indian hegemony. This began to change with the decision of the Bush administration to establish a regional security dialogue with India in 2002.

The new framework allowed the two wary governments to begin to understand each other's concerns and explore the prospects for diplomatic and political cooperation. The dialogue has certainly been productive, with greater recognition of shared interests in the region, including ending the Sri Lankan civil war on the principles of federalism and protecting minority rights as well as encouraging political responsibility amidst the anarchy in Bangladesh. The convergence of Indian and U.S. interests was also strong in promoting the reconstruction of Afghanistan after the ouster of the Taliban. India has emerged as one of the top donors to Afghanistan, and the United States has warmly welcomed the substantive Indian contribution. The frequent interaction between the two foreign policy establishments also helped to remove historically accumulated mutual distrust.

The U.S. is unwilling to discuss democracy in Pakistan in its dialogue with India.

Despite the positive evolution of Indian-U.S. cooperation on promoting democracy, the limits are evident. The Bush administration, which has endorsed India's high-profile economic diplomacy in Afghanistan, has been hesitant to seek New Delhi's participation in bolstering the military capabilities of the Karzai government. Dependent as Washington is on the Pakistani army's pivotal role in stabilizing its lawless border with Afghanistan, it is especially sensitive to Islamabad's concerns about New Delhi gaining a strong political position in Kabul. The Bush administration also feels that Afghanistan must be insulated from a potentially harmful Indian-Pakistani rivalry.

The United States is also unwilling to discuss democracy in Pakistan in its dialogue on shared political values with India. Indian-U.S. cooperation is arguably essential to engineer a significant political evolution in Pakistan toward modernization and democratization. Yet, the immediate U.S. stakes in Pakistan are so high that it cannot afford to antagonize Islamabad by being seen as engaging India on internal Pakistani matters. Although the United States has been willing to defer to India's leadership in dealing with the internal crises in the smaller neighbors of the subcontinent, Washington finds it necessary to deal with Pakistan in an entirely different manner.

India also finds it difficult to agree with the U.S. approach to promoting democracy in Burma by isolating it and tightening the sanctions against the

military regime. India's own policy toward Burma, with which it shares a long land border and the expansive Bay of Bengal, has evolved over a period of time. In the wake of the 1988 coup by the Burmese army, India was a strong and perhaps the only supporter of the democracy movement. Aung San Suu Kyi, the interned leader of the movement for restoration of democracy, had studied in New Delhi and had a huge number of admirers in India, often at the very highest levels of government.

Yet, as New Delhi saw Beijing rapidly expand its political and strategic influence in the 1990s, India reversed its policy of hostility to the Burmese government and began what it called a policy of constructive engagement. Although there were other factors, such as the security of India's restive northeastern provinces, that impelled India to renew engagement with Burma, the competitive dynamic with China has steadily deepened India's relations with Burma to include even defense cooperation.

Former Bush administration officials who see the shared commitment to spreading democracy as one of the "pillars of the United States' transformed strategic relationship with India" are dismayed by the "hard-edged realist mentality" that India has demonstrated in its approach to the democracy question in Burma.[17] Just as the United States finds it impossible to elevate the objective of democracy promotion above all other interests all the time, India's own calculus on the balance between spreading democracy and defending its other interests are naturally not always consistent, varying from situation to situation. Although an Indian-U.S. dialogue on the first principles of democracy promotion has value, political cooperation on a case-by-case basis could ultimately lend substance to the agreed agenda of promoting democracy around the world in a more practical manner.

Resolving India's Dilemmas

The divergence between India and the United States on Burma is perhaps emblematic of a potentially larger divide between India and the West on the questions of sovereignty and nonintervention. As India, a rising power, begins to define its own interests in more expansive terms and seeks to protect its regional primacy from Chinese encroachment, its impulse to compete with Beijing is only bound to intensify in the coming years. Whether it is in the search for equity oil, securing raw materials, or developing international political influence, India is already locked into competition, if not rivalry, with China. This will inevitably often compel India to ignore the internal orientation of the regimes it is engaging in many parts of the developing world, putting it at odds with the West, just as China finds itself regarding Sudan.

Although India's stand on the situations in Sudan and Burma might mirror that of China, an important distinction must be made between the approaches of New Delhi and Beijing. Despite sounding the same when opposing intervention in internal affairs and defending the notion of absolute sovereignty, India's diplomatic practice tells a very different story from that of China. Within the subcontinent and its environs, India's presumed sphere of influence, New Delhi has not hesitated either to support democratic movements or occasionally use military force beyond its borders to defend what it considers to be universal values. Long before humanitarian intervention became the international fashion, India chose to intervene in East Pakistan in 1971 to end genocide committed there by the Pakistani army. India's successful creation of Bangladesh occurred in the face of UN and U.S. opposition. India also used force, although unsuccessfully, in Sri Lanka in the late 1980s to defend the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka and to protect the rights of the Tamil minority there.

India also finds it difficult to agree with the U.S. approach to promoting democracy in Burma.

India's traditional attitude toward nonintervention had two distinctive elements. At the global level, it sought to oppose interventions by the great powers that could set the precedent for potential interventions against itself. Within its own neighborhood, however, India's policy mirrored those of great powers choosing to intervene when its interests or principles demanded so. These attitudes of a weak nation fearful of other powers undermining its territorial integrity have given way to a more open consideration of the responsibilities that come with being a great power. As India faces up to the threats arising from potential failed states in its region and must find ways to generate positive internal change within those societies, it is coming to terms with the many accompanying conceptual and policy dilemmas.

In an important speech in February 2005, Indian foreign secretary Shyam Saran laid out some broad markers on New Delhi's attitude toward democracy in the region and hinted at the inherent sets of tensions between encouraging democratic change and exporting it; between national proximate and long-term interests; and between rival conceptions of order and justice. On the first set of issues, Saran argued that, "[a]s a flourishing democracy, India would certainly welcome more democracy in our neighborhood, but that too is something that we may encourage and promote; it is not something that we can impose upon others." Saran also warned against the temptations of seeking short-term advantage in the neighborhood by supporting nondemocratic forces: "We believe that democracy would provide a more enduring

and broad-based foundation for an edifice of peace and cooperation in our subcontinent. … [W]hile expediency may yield short-term advantage, it also leads to a harmful corrosion of our core values of respect for pluralism and human rights." Although he recognized the importance of a democratic foundation in relations with neighbors, Saran also emphasized that India cannot afford to suspend engagement with undemocratic regimes, saying that although "democracy remains India's abiding conviction, the importance of our neighborhood requires that we remain engaged with whichever government is exercising authority in any country." To resolve the tension between the necessity of engaging regimes and seeking to change their orientation, Saran focused on the need to engage civil societies: "We will promote people-to-people interaction and build upon the obvious cultural affinities that bind our peoples together. We need to go beyond governments and engage the peoples of South Asia to create a compact of peace and harmony throughout our region."[18]

The bad news from Saran, from the perspective of democracy promotion, was that India was not going to elevate the spread of freedom as an overriding national objective. India will take a long time to resolve the fundamental dilemmas of when and where to intervene in defense of higher universal values. Even the world's most powerful nation ever, the United States, has found it difficult to answer these questions. As the United States recoils from the failed intervention in Iraq, democracy promotion could well become a less salient objective in its deepening relationship with India. The good news is that India, which will soon have the capacity to influence regions other than its own, has begun to wrestle with these questions. It is equally welcome that New Delhi is shedding some of its past burdens of Third World ideology; is prepared to often, if not always, cooperate with other democratic powers to promote freedom; and is coming to terms with the complex relationship between democratic values and the use of diplomacy as well as force to promote them beyond its borders.

Notes

1. "PM's Speech at India Today Conclave," New Delhi, February 25, 2005, http://www.pmindia.nic.in/speech/content.asp?id=78 (speech by Manmohan Singh).
2. Dennis Kux, *India and the United States: Estranged Democracies, 1941–1991* (Washington, D.C.: National Defense University Press, 1992).
3. "PM's Speech at India Today Conclave"; "PM's Address at 'The Economist' Round Table on India," New Delhi, March 13, 2007, http://www.pmindia.nic.in/speech/content.asp?id=510 (speech by Manmohan Singh).
4. See Strobe Talbott, *Engaging India: Diplomacy, Democracy and the Bomb* (Washington, D.C.: Brookings Institution Press, 2004).

5. U.S. Department of State, "Toward a Community of Democracies" (paper, February 7, 2000), http://www.state.gov/www/global/human_rights/democracy/000207_democracies.html.
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9. Robert D. Blackwill, "A New Deal for New Delhi," *Wall Street Journal*, March 21, 2005, http://bcsia.ksg.harvard.edu/publication.cfm?program=CORE&ctype=article&item_id=1169.
10. U.S. Department of State, "U.S. India Global Democracy Initiative," July 18, 2005, http://www.state.gov/p/sca/rls/fs/2005/49722.htm.
11. "PM's Remarks at the Launching of UN Democracy Fund," New York, September 14, 2005, http://www.pmindia.nic.in/speech/content.asp?id=193 (speech by Manmohan Singh).
12. Ibid.
13. See Prakash Karat, "Community of Democracies: India Joins American Ideological Enterprise," *Marxist* 16, no. 1 (January–March 2000), http://www.cpim.org/marxist/200001_marxist_us_india.htm; Kuldip Nayar, "Democracy Talk," *Indian Express*, July 19, 2005, http://www.indianexpress.com/res/web/pIe/columnists/full_column.php?content_id=74667.
14. C. Raja Mohan, "PM Steps Out of Third World Shadow," *Indian Express*, September 15, 2005, http://www.indianexpress.com/res/web/pIe/archive_full_story.php?content_id=78166.
15. Barbara Crosette, "Think Again: India," *Foreign Policy*, January 2007, http://www.foreignpolicy.com/story/cms.php?story_id=3693.
16. See Devin Hagerty, "India's Regional Security Doctrine," *Asian Survey* 31, no. 4 (April 1991): 351–363.
17. Michael J. Green, "The Strategic Implications of the Burma Problem," testimony before the U.S. Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Subcommittee on Asia Pacific Affairs, March 29, 2006, http://www.senate.gov/~foreign/testimony/2006/GreenTestimony060329.pdf.
18. Shyam Saran, "India and Its Neighbours" (speech, New Delhi, February 14, 2005), http://www.mea.gov.in.