
The new Dynamics of Indian Foreign Policy and its Ambiguities*

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ABSTRACT

Thanks to the cumulative effects of high economic growth, steady integration with the international market economy, rapid strides in business processing, successful introduction of new technologies of communication and the induction of nuclear weapons and delivery capacity to national defence strategies, the international status of India has altered radically over the past decade. Increasingly, in the domestic political arena, India's leaders see their country as a global player, rather than as a low-income country with poor infrastructure and mass poverty. Suddenly, India is 'everywhere'; but what does it amount to in terms of foreign policy, particularly in terms of the contradictions that underpin it? This article examines the anomalies and missing elements of India's foreign policy, which sometimes create a sense of vagueness and incoherence about her intentions on, and likely reactions to, issues affecting her vital interests. The article illustrates this argument on the basis of an analysis of some core concerns of India's foreign policy, such as nuclearisation, Kashmir, terrorism and India's position in South Asia.

INTRODUCTION

The image of India in the Western world has altered radically over the past decade. Thanks to the cumulative effects of high economic growth, steady integration with the international market economy, rapid strides in business processing, successful introduction of new technologies of communication and the induction of nuclear weapons and delivery capacity to national defence strategies, the picture of India has changed from that of a backward country with mass poverty to one with global ambitions. Suddenly, India is 'everywhere'; but what does it amount to in terms of foreign policy? Closer inspection reveals that there have been deep contradictions and missing elements within her foreign policy, creating a sense of vagueness and

*This article is based on a paper originally presented at the twenty-eighth annual conference of the Committee for the Study of International Affairs, entitled 'The rise of Asia in international affairs', held at the Royal Irish Academy, Dublin, 24 November 2006. We are grateful to John Doyle for his comments.

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Irish Studies in International Affairs, Vol. 18 (2007), 19–34.

incoherence about India's intentions on, and likely reactions to, issues affecting her vital interests. Some degree of ambiguity and consequent uncertainty emerging out of internal dissent is not unusual for most large democracies. This comes across clearly if one analyses some of the core concerns of India's foreign policy, such as nuclearisation, Kashmir, terrorism and India's position in South Asia. India, it would seem, is a case apart, particularly in view of the uncertainty of India's foreign policy relative to its power.

Is Indian foreign policy caught in a time warp, functioning very much as under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, acting as a self-appointed keeper of international morality, and a Quixotic lone warrior, seeking to create a form of world politics without power, despite her recently acquired nuclear teeth? Or were the nuclear tests of 11 May and 13 May 1998, without an explicit desire to use nuclear weapons, merely a pragmatic gambit to put a foot in the door of the nuclear club (without quite appearing to want to do so)? In other words, was India 'playing poker', albeit in the name of morality and sweet reasonableness?¹

This article analyses the ambiguities of India's foreign policy with reference to India's military capacity, arms procurement and missile deployment, threat perceptions and the explicit and implicit ways in which India relates to South Asia and beyond. The analysis of these empirical problems prepares the ground for some larger issues. Does an Indian doctrine underpin India's military capacities? How does the absence of an explicit canon affect India's role in international politics? Even if there is no explicit dogma, can one be inferred from the country's recent pronouncements, policies and choices?

We argue that while India's vibrant political process effectively conveys the democratic 'noise' of India's domestic politics to the international arena—much like the domestic opposition in the US or the UK to the Iraq policy espoused by government in those countries—there has been, in contrast, no corresponding *deep stateness*, or *residual reserve of basic national consensus* about the core interests of the country. As such, while India joins large democracies like the US or the UK in terms of domestic dissent over national policy, unlike them, India's likely response to a crisis remains uncertain, whereas the American or British reaction in a similar situation is predictable to the outsider. The Gandhian legacy, nostalgia for the halcyon days of Nehru's *panchasheela* and, most of all, the political anchor of foreign policy in the larger project of nation-building, explain the ambiguities that characterise India's foreign policy.² This is clearly the case with India's official doctrine, even if it is not quite so in practice. However, closer inspection of ground reality reveals clear, effective and determined action that holds the potential to be woven into a coherent doctrine, on the lines of a 'third way' in international politics, as distinct from the American and European positions.³

¹See Bill Finan, 'Nuclear diplomacy up close: Strobe Talbott on the Clinton administration and India', *India Review* 4 (1) (2005), 84–97: 96, 'It would seem that for India, and Singh, it was poker all along, and that Singh bluffed the man who held the stronger hand'.

²*Panchasheela*, a term derived from Buddhist scriptures, encapsulated the 'five principles of peaceful coexistence' as enshrined in the 1954 agreement between India and China, which were supposed to frame Sino-Indian relations as well as India's foreign policy more generally. The five principles referred to (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 coexistence.

³See Subrata K. Mitra, 'The novelty of Europe as seen from the periphery: Indian perceptions of the "New Europe" in a multi-polar world', Heidelberg Papers in Comparative and South Asian Politics, 2005, available at <http://www.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/archiv/6387> (24 July 2007).

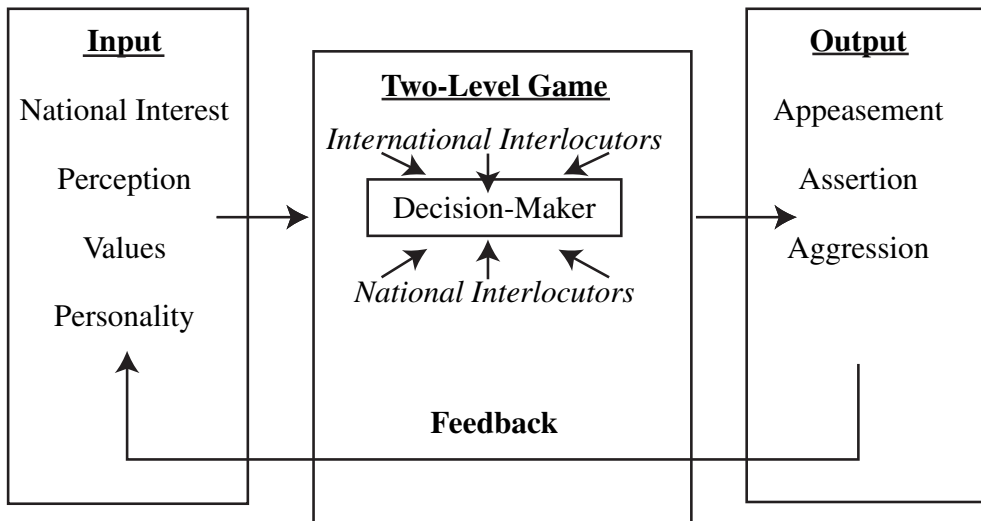
THEORY AND MODEL: INDIA'S STRATEGIC AMBIGUITY

Each of the mainstream theories in international relations has its pet concepts, for instance neo-realism is connected to ‘the security dilemma’;⁴ neo-constructivism is linked to ‘collective identity’;⁵ and, neo-liberalism is seen as being tied to the potential for ‘absolute gains’.⁶ Whilst such conceptual tools are valuable, they too often insist on stark distinctions being drawn between the domestic and international realms of analysis. As a result, foreign policy analysis falls between two stools—neither qualifying as international relations nor content to be categorised as public policy or domestic politics.

The question to begin with is whether India’s foreign policy is better explained by domestic variables than by international ones. Seen from a neo-realist, structural approach, India has failed to act in accordance with its emerging power and status. Furthermore, in the past India has either disastrously miscalculated (leading to the 1962 border conflict with China), or demonstrated a puzzling incapacity to exert its influence in the region. While this article does not address the peculiarities of a region where India is a natural hegemon and where external actors have a history of meddling in regional affairs,⁷ the contention that domestic factors have had a deeper role to play in forming the limits of Indian foreign policy is explored. We argue in this article that, acting under cross-pressure, India’s foreign policy appears to vacillate between appeasement and aggression, rather than converging onto the assertion of national self-interest. Of course, on specific issues the policy rhetoric follows the predilections and eccentricities of specific prime ministers, but in sum, the formal doctrine remains abstract, normative and ambiguous.

For our analysis, we make use of a tool box (see Fig. 1), derived from Robert Putnam’s ‘two-level game’, as a heuristic device to explain the linkage between

Fig. 1: Domestic and international constraints on foreign policy



⁴See Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of international politics* (New York, 1979).

⁵See Alexander Wendt, ‘Collective identity formation and the international state’, *American Political Science Review* 88 (2) (1994), 384–96.

⁶Robert O. Keohane, *After hegemony: cooperation and discord in the world political economy* (Princeton, 1984).

⁷For an analysis of this see Subrata K. Mitra, ‘The reluctant hegemon: India’s self-perception and the South Asian strategic environment’, *Contemporary South Asia* 12 (3) (2003), 399–418.

foreign policy options and the domestic constraints under which choices among policy options are to be made.

Within the framework of our 'tool box', the statesman or foreign policy decision-maker is regarded as having to manage two different levels simultaneously. At home, he must cater to the interests and demands on the domestic front; and **abroad**, he must deal with his international counter-parts across the negotiating table. The **'inputs' into foreign policy-making comprise 'national interest'**, or what goes under that rubric as perceived by key opinion-makers; values that dominate the foreign policy elites; and crucially, the personality of national decision-makers. Putnam describes two-level games as follows:

At the national level, domestic groups pursue their interests by pressuring the government to adopt favourable policies, and politicians seek power by constructing coalitions among these groups. At the international level, national governments seek to maximise their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments. Neither of the two games can be ignored by central decision makers.⁸

As a result, the state is no longer the unitary actor that neo-realists assume, and the formulation of what the 'national interest' **is becomes contingent** not only on international arrangements and the dynamics of power, but, critically, upon the bargaining processes and interest coalitions at home.

That this model is not as esoteric and distant from reality as one might think can be seen, for example, in a satirical cartoon that appeared in *India Today* on 2 October 2000, in which the cartoonist captures aptly the same idea with reference to the multiple cross-pressures on Prime Minister Vajpayee.⁹ On returning from a visit to the United States in September 2000 that was internationally reported as a confirmation of warming Indo-US relations, the reception that Vajpayee got at home was far from uniformly positive. The cartoon depicts the unruly alliance Vajpayee was leading at the time, which consisted of, among others, a hard line Hindu nationalist party, the Shiv Sena, and the powerful South Indian regional party, the Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam (DMK). **The result of trying to placate all of these diverse interests, all of which placed separate constraints on Indian diplomacy, was that a degree of fuzziness crept into the government's foreign policy doctrine, despite the relatively unambiguous nature of the manifesto of the Bharitya Janata Party, of which Vajpayee was the leader.**

To develop a testable hypothesis about two-level games, this article uses **rational choice theory**. The central contention, as mentioned above, is that a country needs a **residual reserve of basic national consensus** about its core interests to produce an **institutionalised foreign policy, with specified** goals and a choice of instruments at hand. Helen Milner in her 1997 book *Interests, institutions and information*, identifies these three elements as her core explanatory variables in the making of policy. As she frames it, in the domestic arena the game depends on 'the differences among the players' policy preferences, the distribution of information domestically, and the nature of domestic political institutions'.¹⁰ In this article, it is proposed that the legacy of the freedom struggle and Gandhi's strategy of non-violence, the long innings of Congress governments that sustained an aura around Nehruvian foreign

⁸Robert Putnam, 'Diplomacy and domestic politics: the logic of two-level games', *International Organisation* 42 (3) (1988), 427–60: 434

⁹See Ajit Ninan, 'Centrestage', *India Today*, 2 October 2000, available at <http://www.indiatodaygroup.com/itoday/20001002/cstage.html> (30 July 2007).

¹⁰Helen V. Milner, *Interests, institutions and information* (Princeton, NJ, 1997), 14.

policy and the internal pressures of nation-building, held the *mélange* of interests, institutions and information in Indian domestic politics in an artificial equilibrium. With the emergence of the Bharitya Janata Party (BJP)—the main representation of the Hindu nationalist stream in Indian politics—as a national contender, and the tendency towards coalition politics, the nature of the domestic game has altered fundamentally, thereby enabling India to respond differently to new opportunities arising in the post-Cold War and post-11 September 2001 world.

However, as the following analysis will demonstrate, all three elements—interests, information and institutions¹¹—seem to be in a state of flux, thus delaying the emergence of a stable, ‘institutionalised’ foreign policy and creating the apparent and real ambiguity that seems to dog contemporary Indian foreign policy. To demonstrate this, the *structure of domestic preferences* in the four issue areas of nuclearisation, Kashmir, terrorism and India’s position in South Asia are briefly examined.¹²

CORNERSTONES OF INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY

The Indian Bomb: the nuclear quandry

The nuclear tests of 1998 put India technically in the league of atomic powers. But, India’s membership of the club of five—the USA, China, France, the UK and Russia—whose full nuclear status and access to fissile material are guaranteed by treaties and sanctions, still remains strongly contested. The signing of the ‘Henry Hyde United States–India Peaceful Atomic Energy Cooperation Act’, on 18 December 2006 permitted US civilian nuclear cooperation with India, and represents the culmination of a year and a half of work. Three major steps remain, however, before the deal can be implemented. India and the United States must negotiate a bilateral cooperation agreement requiring full approval by the US Congress. In addition, India and the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) must agree on a safeguards agreement, and the 45-nation Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), which regulates nuclear trade, needs to change its rules to permit its members to undertake civilian nuclear cooperation with India. What is holding up the process is the proposition that extending full nuclear status to India, a non-signatory to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty (NPT), will encourage others with similar ambitions, such as Iran, to possess nuclear weapons, and in consequence will endanger global security. The counter-argument by Shyam Saran, who was India’s foreign secretary in 1998, for inducting India into the nuclear club, proposes that the global non-proliferation regime will be more effective ‘with India inside the tent’. Why did India take the risk of facing international disapproval and sanctions by going overtly nuclear? Does India remain deliberately coy (unclear and imprecise) about the real intention behind going nuclear?

Following independence from British colonial rule in 1947, India attempted to follow an independent foreign policy based on non-alignment, disarmament and commitment to international organisations. However, the attempt to build a foreign policy on moral persuasiveness rather than on force did not prove sustainable or effective. The 1962 border conflict with China and the 1965 war with Pakistan drove home the need for military preparedness.

¹¹Defined according to Douglass North, *Institutions, institutional change and economic performance* (Cambridge, 1990), 3, as ‘the rules of the game in a society, or more formally, the humanly devised constraints that shape human interaction’.

¹²The concept of the ‘structure of domestic preferences’ is borrowed from Milner, *Interests*, 16.

India's atomic programme was started as early as 1948 by the renowned nuclear physicist, Homi J. Bhabha. In 1948 the Atomic Energy Commission (AEC) was established, and in 1956 and 1960 the first two civilian nuclear reactors were opened. Despite China's atom bomb test in 1964 and India's capacity to move to weaponisation, it was only in 1974 that nuclear weapons were tested. Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, riding high over the 1971 victory in the Indo-Pakistan War and over success in parliamentary and assembly elections, termed the 1974 test a 'peaceful nuclear explosion'. For the rest of the 1970s and through the 1980s India's nuclear state was one of 'recessed deterrence', which meant that deployable weapons could be produced at short notice, but the country's nuclear status fell short of full weaponisation.

The fact that India waited till 1998 to test the bomb can be attributed to two factors. In the first place, the relative advantages of a test were not clear. Once India came out openly with her nuclear capacity it was expected that Pakistan would follow suit, and a nuclear Pakistan, particularly with the assistance of China, would neutralise India's relative advantage in conventional weapons. The second factor was the pressure, from 1996 onwards, to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and to give up for ever the chance to test and to enter the nuclear club. The advocates of a nuclear India were aware of this danger and lobbied successfully with the National Democratic Alliance, a coalition of parties led by the Hindu-nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), to test.

While the push towards nuclearisation appears to have been authorised by Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi in the late 1980s, when his own de-nuclearisation initiative was cold-shouldered in the West, the decision to test in 1998, taken by the BJP, led to the spectre of a 'Hindu' bomb. However, this perception is contested by the fact that the left-centrist United Progressive Alliance (UPA) coalition led by the Congress party, which replaced the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance government in 2004, continues to defend nuclearisation as an integral part of India's economic, defence and foreign policy.

Despite the well-publicised opposition to recent India-US negotiations on civil nuclear cooperation,¹³ implementation of a deal on civil cooperation does not require a formal act of approval by India's parliament. The communist parties in alliance with the UPA have voiced vociferous objections to the deal and to closer Indo-US relations in general, but they have no desire to topple the government of which they are a part. The BJP, in opposition, has also drummed up criticism, but this is seen as political and not substantive, given that the first steps towards Indo-US civilian nuclear cooperation were launched under the BJP government in 2004. The most serious concerns have been raised by the scientific community, which disagrees with the need to write into US legislation India's voluntary decision to impose a moratorium on nuclear tests. Furthermore, the scientists question whether the US can be trusted as a dependable supplier of nuclear fuel and know-how. In the US, objections have included the fear of a regional conflict turning nuclear, or weapons of mass destruction finding their way into the hands of non-state actors. Previous congressional debates raised the issue of what guarantee there was that India would not unilaterally change the status of current civilian nuclear facilities into military ones, or add more and more military facilities, renege on the current moratorium on future tests or mask a more aggressive military use of nuclear power under her programme of research and development. Could India be trusted to protect the non-

¹³For further details on the proposed deal on nuclear civil cooperation, see, for example, BBC Online News, 'US and India seal nuclear accord', 2 March 2006, available at http://news.bbc.co.uk/2/hi/south_asia/4764826.stm (25 July 2007).

safeguarded facilities from terrorists?¹⁴ The IAEA safeguards for non-nuclear weapon states include all facilities where nuclear material is present, including research and development facilities. The debate was particularly sharp on the issue of which facilities would come under IAEA supervision.

Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice, appearing in front of key Senate and House committees during 2006, pressed the case for civil nuclear cooperation with India on three general points. First, the strategy of sanctioning India had not stopped India from nuclearisation but had served merely to isolate the country. She argued that the civilian energy initiative would, in addition to increasing business opportunities for America, 'advance international security'. The civilian nuclear agreement with India would be a 'strategic achievement' which is 'good for America, good for India and good for the international community'.¹⁵ The second argument related to the legal obligations arising out of the treaty obligations of the United States (like other signatories of the NPT). In this regard, Secretary of State Rice maintained that the nuclear deal with India would not lead to an arms race in South Asia. India had the support of Britain, France, Russia and the head of the IAEA and the bilateral agreement could be accommodated within the 1954 Atomic Energy Act through an amendment, without contravening the non-proliferation legislation in letter or spirit. Finally, she reiterated that India's non-proliferation record was impeccable and that it was 'simply not credible to compare India to North Korea or Iran'.

The initial reactions to the agreement were positive in American media. The *Washington Post* endorsed it as a deepening of the relationship with India, 'the world's most populous democracy, an emerging powerhouse in engineering and medicine, and a potential counterweight both to militant Islam and China'.¹⁶ The deal would 'boost global efforts to develop new sources of energy, particularly sources that won't increase the level of climate-warming gases'. India, which voluntarily respects the international rules of non-proliferation, 'would be formally committed to them' in future. However, the prospects for a rough ride ahead for both the US administration and India is quite likely because of a 'Catch 22' situation: Congress will not agree to the deal before India has implemented the separation of civil and nuclear facilities, a process that is likely to take place between 2006 and 2014; and India will not implement these costly and complicated steps if there is no guarantee that Congress will endorse the agreement. For the nuclear agreement to succeed, India and the Bush administration will urgently need to communicate the facts that underpin it to all potential stakeholders, and to link the nuclear non-proliferation regime with the removal of the discriminatory practices that currently lower its legitimacy in the eyes of non-nuclear states. While the 18 December 2006 signing of the Henry Hyde United States–India Peaceful Atomic Energy Cooperation Act represented a crucial step towards a final deal, as well as demonstrating US commitment to civil nuclear cooperation with India, implementation depends upon the finalisation of a peaceful nuclear cooperation agreement, approved by the NSG, in addition to New Delhi's own safeguards arrangement with the IAEA.

The controversy around the testing of an Indian nuclear bomb demonstrates how radically India and the world have changed over the past decade. Unlike in the past, the choices that India makes today have implications far beyond her frontiers. India

¹⁴See 'US nuclear cooperation with India: issues for Congress', Congressional Research Service Report, 26 November 2006, available at <http://www.fas.org/spp/crs/nuke/RL33016.pdf> (23 March 2007).

¹⁵Condoleezza Rice, 'Opening remarks before the Senate Foreign Relations Committee, Washington, DC, April 5 2006', available at <http://www.state.gov/secretary/rm/2006/64136.htm> (3 August 2007).

¹⁶'Nuclear India', *Washington Post*, editorial, 3 March 2006, available at <http://www.washingtonpost.com/wp-dyn/content/article/2006/03/02/AR2006030201682.html> (3 August 2007).

is a strategic partner of the United States and the European Union and has pronounced her aspirations to gain a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council. The decision to go to nuclear put India's emerging ambitions and capabilities in the spotlight, forcing her to explain her goals and strategic vision. The analysis undertaken here has sought to emphasise that rather than being a 'Hindu bomb', India's nuclear programme, based on calculated risks, is an integral part of her national project, crucial to her economy, security, environment and national identity. The tests of 1998 had the support of the Congress party, which was in opposition at the time. Since 2004 the Congress party has been the leading element of the ruling UPA-coalition, and it has continued the nuclear programme with great assiduity. The nuclear programme broadly enjoys wide popularity and bipartisan support in national politics. And yet, at the level of nuclear doctrine, the Indian argument as to why the country needs the bomb does not come across as clear or convincing, despite the formulation of a draft nuclear doctrine in 1999.

The discussions over finalising the US–India nuclear deal have highlighted the degree of division in the structure of domestic preferences. Key policy analysts like Bharat Karnad, regarded as a hawkish voice amongst India's security experts, have argued strongly against compromising India's ability to test nuclear weapons in the future. This is seen as a fundamental right of an aspiring great power and, in particular, as being necessary for a country that faces real threats from its neighbours. Karnad has pointed out that India's current deterrence is ineffective against China's vastly superior nuclear arsenal and that under the context of a nuclear deal with the US, India would be at a disadvantage even with Pakistan, which, unconstrained by any legal undertakings, would remain free to test, design new weapons and improve the effectiveness of existing ones. How Prime Minister Manmohan Singh ultimately closes and sells the deal at home, where distrust of US interests prevails, particularly among atomic scientists and the government's leftist allies, will be an important milestone in the country's national security debate.

The Kashmir conflict: India, hamstrung

Although the conflict is currently at a reduced scale compared to the recent past, India is still at war in Kashmir. It is a war of attrition, which India cannot manage to win and Pakistan cannot afford to lose. An all-party resolution of the Indian parliament, voted unanimously by the Lok Sabha in 1995, affirms Kashmir as an integral part of Indian territory and as India's internal problem. Any move away from that, which is liable to be perceived in India as 'giving in to the demand for plebiscite in Kashmir', can thus be blocked both by opportunist political parties or determined special interests. A 'land-for-peace deal' in Kashmir, under these circumstances, is difficult to conceptualise; nor is the Israeli experience in this regard particularly encouraging. Furthermore, India runs the risk of 'setting the wrong example' to other secessionist movements, particularly in the northeast of the country.¹⁷

The issue of Kashmir has long been a central concern to both Indian and Pakistani projects of nation- and state-building. For India, the state of Jammu and Kashmir, which is multi-religious but predominantly Muslim, is a crucial pillar of the secular Indian nation-state. Less readily admitted is the strategic significance of the region in terms of natural resources and national defence. To Pakistan, Kashmir ought to form part of the putative Muslim homeland of South Asia. As a result, the two countries have fought three wars (in 1947–48, 1965 and 1999) over the issue and

¹⁷For a critique of the Indian position opposing 'mediation' on Kashmir, see P.R. Chari. 'Advantages of third party mediation are cited', *India Abroad*, 30 July 1999.

related matters; and twice (in 1990 and 2001–2) have threatened to escalate the dispute into nuclear conflict.

Faced with a mostly indigenous, ethno-religious insurgency in the late 1980s that was later transformed into a proxy war financed through Pakistani aid, the Indian state found itself locked into a bloody war of attrition. With the conflict having engaged Indian security forces in heavy-handed counter-insurgency operations, the elections of 1996 and 2002 were hailed as a turning point in the government's strategy. The elections provided an opportunity for political competition and the venting of local needs and demands. The People's Democratic Party (PDP) performed well—ousting the National Conference (NC), which had been backed by the centre—and entered into government in alliance with the Congress party. Confronted by the PDP's demand that the separatist Hurriyat group¹⁸ be included in the dialogue about Kashmir, the central government has had to consider additional players, like the Hurriyat, in the framing of its Kashmir policy, or in negotiations with Pakistan.

Despite improvements on the ground, the Kashmir issue continues to hamstring Indian foreign policy. Internationally, India gets hauled up for human-rights abuses in Jammu and Kashmir. The international media continue to refer to the region as either Indian-administered Kashmir or Indian-occupied Kashmir, implying a lack of stability and durability. At home, special provisions recognising the unique status of Kashmir under Article 370 of the Constitution add to the ambiguous position of the state within the Indian Republic. Despite the growing number of terrorist attacks launched outside the Kashmir area but linked to foreign-funded, Kashmiri-related *mujahideen*, the Indian government sticks to its position of Kashmir being an internal problem requiring an internal solution. In 1999 Prime Minister Vajpayee gambled considerable political capital in travelling to Pakistan—crossing the border by bus—to initiate the Lahore Declaration. The declaration, which at the time was considered a landmark in India–Pakistan relations, was signed by Vajpayee and Pakistan's Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif on 21 February 1999. It emphasised the need for a peaceful and bilateral resolution of all problems related to Kashmir.

Any sense of optimism following the signing of the declaration was, however, soon lost, as tensions increased over the infiltration of Pakistani soldiers and militants across the border into Kashmir; and between May and July 1999 the two nuclear-armed neighbours were engaged in an armed conflict in the Kargil district of Kashmir. Following so closely in the wake of the Lahore Declaration, the Kargil War was seen by India as cynical duplicity on Pakistan's part. After Kargil, the more dovish elements in the Indian government have become wary of pursuing discussions with Pakistan, and the focus has turned to co-opting Kashmiri moderates and marginalising the extremists. Continuing 'composite talks' with Pakistan remain important, however, given the need to create a positive atmosphere of improved 'people-to-people contact', cross-cultural exchange, trade and commerce, so that the Pakistani leadership can build the public support that will be needed for concessions that Islamabad will eventually have to make in relation to Kashmir.

Kargil demonstrated India's military vulnerability along the porous Line of Control (LoC), which is the cease-fire line that emerged following the 1971 India–Pakistan War that ended with the creation of Bangladesh. In late May 1999 India launched Operation Vijay, in which air strikes were used to flush out infiltrators in the border region. Although it was hailed at the time as hugely successful, the poor

¹⁸The Hurriyat, which was founded in 1992 and factionalised into the All India Hurriyat Conference in the late 1990s, demands a referendum in which Kashmiris would be given the opportunity to vote for independence.

showing of some of its aircraft during the operation highlighted the need for the Indian air force's training in more advanced electronic warfare, early warning equipment, modern ammunitions and joint institutions for planning, coordination and operations. The 'Kargil review committee report', tabled in parliament in February 2000, highlighted the key technological and structural improvements necessary for the Indian intelligence community to consider.¹⁹ The operational impact of the Kargil War has thus been a renewed Indian commitment to maintaining a robust forward defence. In addition, India will have to modernise its physical infrastructure in Kashmir.

Furthermore, the strategic community's debate is beginning to turn to the need to increase Pakistan's costs of running an insurgency across the border. Presently, Pakistan's military perceives its conflict strategy to be of low cost, in part because it has transferred a substantial portion of these costs to the civilian population that participates in the 'jihad'. If the Pakistani military's support for the insurgency were to intensify, this would increase the incentives for India to contemplate strategies that increase the costs borne by the Pakistani army directly. Nevertheless, the Kargil review committee report recommended constraint and restraint on India's part, together with a more vigilant reconnaissance and surveillance presence along the LoC, while plugging holes along the boundary. India's completion in 2004 of a fenced border in Kashmir has helped, judging from improved security in the region since, bringing in its wake benefits to the local economy. However, given that the border remains undemarcated, the fencing was denounced by Pakistan as illegal, thereby adding to the uncertainty and ambiguity that marks India's Kashmir policy.

Using survey data from 1996 and 2004, it is interesting to note a dramatic increase in responses favouring negotiation over suppression on the issue of Kashmir (see Table 1 below). Across religious groups, and regardless of education levels, an overwhelming majority advocates negotiation; in other words, a solution that involves talking to all parties concerned, including Pakistan, and not treating Kashmir simply as a matter of India's internal security. The increase in support for negotiation from 33.5% in 1996 to 59.2% in 2004 is quite remarkable. It is even more so when one looks at the detailed breakdown across social groups, with support for negotiation on Kashmir reaching as high as almost 80% among the most educated. However, at 12%, support for suppression of the insurgency by force is also higher than average among this group. On the whole, support for negotiation is just below the national average among Hindus as compared to people belonging to other religions. Thus, although the country as a whole is much more aware of the Kashmir conflict now than before (the option 'not heard of Kashmir' has come down from 21.6% to 9.3% in the span of eight years), and is more ready for negotiation than before, there are still strong constituencies favouring suppression as well. The consequent 'trickling up' of the democratic process thus lends a degree of fuzziness to the policy and postures of the government of India on the issue of Kashmir.

India's ambivalent politics of anti-terrorism

While terrorists have grown ever bolder in their choice of targets, India's response has remained notably restrained. In 1993 the Mumbai Stock Exchange was bombed; in 2001 the parliament of India was attacked; Bangalore's Indian Institute of Science was targeted in 2005; Mumbai's commuter trains in 2006; and most recently there

¹⁹The 'Executive summary' of this report is available at <http://rajyasabha.nic.in/general/25indi1.htm> (19 March 2007).

Table 1. Indian opinion on Kashmir policy: 1996 compared to 2004

Question: People's opinions are divided on the issue of the Kashmir problem—some people say that the government should suppress the agitation by any means, while others say that this problem should be resolved by negotiation. What would you say—should the agitation be suppressed or resolved by negotiation?

Opinion	1996	2004
Negotiation	33.5	59.2
Suppression	11.1	8.8
Cannot say	33.8	22.6
Not heard of Kashmir	21.6	9.3
Total	100	99.9

Source: National Election Study (NES) 1996, 2004. Conducted by the Center for the Study of Developing Societies, New Delhi.

were blasts on the cross-border Friendship Express running between New Delhi and Lahore. Following the 11 September 2001 attacks and the United States' declaration of a war on terrorism, India offered to open its military bases, airfields and intelligence to American forces in their campaign. This was an unprecedented offer, and it marked a dramatic shift in New Delhi's strategic posture. As one of the world's major victims of terrorism, India, it seemed, had found itself a critical position in an international coalition, this time among the 'have' and not the 'have-not' countries, as had been the case with its membership of the non-aligned movement.

This international dimension and awareness of the threat of terrorism is new for India, which has long dealt with terrorism at home. Broadly speaking, terrorism has been treated as a 'law and order' problem rather than as a threat to national security with concrete international links. As a result, India's counter-terrorism responses have lacked the coherent attention and wider resources of a national, centrally directed campaign and, due to its ambivalent policy, India's neighbours have been dismissive of India's terrorism concerns; and neither has the international community taken them seriously. India has failed to project a convincing or coherent case in relation to its approach to terrorism and, furthermore, has come to be seen as a 'soft state', incapable of protecting its sovereignty and integrity. The ambiguity and fuzziness that surround India's approach to terrorism are best seen in the political vocabulary. The government and the media alike refer to terrorists as militants—a category so broad that it pulls together all forms of assertive political behaviour.

The passing of the Prevention Of Terrorism Act (POTA) met with considerable protests and criticism, was seen as being draconian and anti-Muslim and ultimately had to be repealed in 2004. But in a country where the number of terrorism victims is amongst the highest in the world, it is surprising that no strong action has been taken till recently. Terrorists captured by the police seek refuge in India's legal system, dragging their cases out endlessly. For example, it was only in December 2006 that the trials for the 1993 Mumbai bomb blasts case were finally concluded. Keeping terrorists in prison is often an additional problem, in that it encourages hijackings and kidnappings to secure hostage swaps. Despite Indian governments being long accustomed to terrorism—in Jammu and Kashmir, the northeast or the 'Naxalite belt' and, previously in Punjab—the policy has remained ambivalent, partly because neither security nor terrorism has been a major electoral issue, as

caste and communalism have. This is perhaps changing in some ways. K.P.S. Gill, one-time security advisor to the government, famed for his success in rooting out militancy in Punjab, has pointed out that the old approach to terrorism entailed explaining away terrorist attacks in terms of 'root causes' and the neglect of people's demands that had to be addressed, both in the case of left-wing and ethno-religious extremism. Noting perhaps a change of tack, Gill quotes Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at the 15 April 2005 chief minister's conference, where he stated,

There can be no political compromise with terror. No inch conceded. No compassion shown....There are no good terrorists and bad terrorists. There is no root cause, root or branch, that can ever justify the killing of innocent people. No democratic Government can tolerate the use of violence against innocent people and against the functionaries of a duly established democratic Government.²⁰

Recognising that 'the challenge of internal security is our biggest national security challenge today', Singh called for urgent police reforms, efficient policing, special attention to intelligence gathering and the modernisation of intelligence services and security forces. However, no concrete action has followed this strong rhetoric. Current Indian policy on terrorism is not backed up by a clear definition of who is a terrorist and, what the state can legitimately do to him. In Kashmir, a political dialogue with terrorists might be in the offing.

Following the July 2006 bombings of Mumbai's commuter trains, the debate on India's counter-terrorism measures regained focus. Some journalists depicted the attacks as a failure of the country's intelligence community, others have argued that the old institutions simply cannot cope with the new pressures of globalised terrorism. While calls to restore the POTA or similar legislation have gained ground, sceptics draw attention to the fact that when it was in effect it did not prevent terrorist attacks either, and it was misused by politicians and the police. Furthermore, it is pointed out that provisions under the POTA have been retained by amending other laws. Nevertheless, it is apparent that the weakest link in India's counter-terrorism capability is in the legal mechanisms available to deal with terrorism. Investigative and prosecution agencies have to combat terrorism with legislation that was enacted long before terrorism emerged as a major threat to national security. It is argued that intelligence-gathering must be improved to pre-empt violence at the planning stage. On their part, intelligence and police officials complain of political interference, that the definition of a terrorist seems to change according to different governments in power and that intelligence is not acted upon by politicians driven by concerns about different blocs of voters.

India in the South Asian Context: Pax Indica?

The perception of India's power remains deeply ambiguous within the immediate neighbourhood. India's so-called 'small' neighbours—namely Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka—are comparable in terms of population to larger European states. The epithet 'small' is indicative of an approach that is part of India's problem in the region. In addition, there are historic and demographic reasons that contribute to the complexity of the problem. Soft borders, illegal immigration, terrorism, smuggling, drugs, water resources and the treatment of minorities are among the factors that create pressures on India to intervene in what these countries perceive strictly as their

²⁰See K.P.S. Gill, 'A prime minister speaks: finally, a clear voice on terror', *South Asia Intelligence Review* 3 (40) (18 April 2005), available at http://www.satp.org/satporgtp/sair/Archives/3_40.htm#assessment1 (19 March 2007).

domestic affairs. Two positive developments, however, have been noted by analysts and commentators in recent times. First of all, the revolution in economic policy that has swept over India makes it a far more attractive country for all its neighbours and the more developed states of Southeast Asia. Indian management expertise, technology and organisational skills are now widely exported to the rest of Asia, giving substance to the Indian claim that it is a major power. Secondly, India's democracy is having a great impact on many of its Asian neighbours. For the smaller states of the region, India is today something of a model of how to peacefully manage a multi-ethnic, multi-religious state. Nevertheless, instability in all of India's neighbours continues to represent a challenge to Indian diplomacy. Stability in India's immediate vicinity is in India's interests and ought to be the test of an aspiring emerging power and international player. However, the lack of regional trade, the traditional 'ganging-up' of the smaller countries against the perceived bully, India, and the involvement of 'external actors' such as China and the United States have long been obstacles to Indian hegemony, real or perceived. In consequence, the brand recognition of Indian foreign policy oscillates between that of a regional bully and a regional push-over.

Recent developments in Nepal and Sri Lanka demonstrate the pressures and constraints on India's regional strategy. Since the debacle of India's involvement in Sri Lanka's ethnic conflict in the late-1980s, India has been wary of playing an active role in mediating conflict in the near neighbourhood. In the case of Nepal, India has long tried to influence political events through tight controls over the Nepalese economy. This was complicated by the Maoist insurgency in Nepal and the ensuing political impasse. In addition, when India ceased arms supplies following the February 2005 decision by the Nepalese monarchy to dismiss all political parties, China stepped in, creating a competition for influence between the two aspiring powers. While current moves to restore popular rule in Nepal are welcomed by the Indian government, an eventual downfall of the monarchy is likely to be interpreted as a victory for the Maoist rebels, rather than as an achievement of the pro-democratic forces. India, which has been in contact with both parties, was reluctant to be seen as overtly supporting the Maoists who, over the years, had forged links with similar left-wing extremist and insurgency groups in India.

In the case of Sri Lanka, the link between domestic politics and foreign policy is most manifest. As ethnic violence spirals, two sets of pressure groups are pressing for New Delhi to take a more active role. In the Indian state of Tamil Nadu, where a large number of Tamils sympathise with the Tamil struggle for autonomy in Sri Lanka, Chief Minister M. Karunanidhi is pressing India's ruling coalition, of which his Dravida Munnetra Kazhagam party is a key partner, to take a pro-Tamil stand. At the same time there are growing calls for action from Sri Lanka's Tamil community.

CONCLUSION: *PANCHASHEELA REDUX*: FROM AMBIGUITY TO AMBIGUITY?

Ambiguities emerging from the issues analysed here find resonance in the repeated references to non-alignment in the foreign policy pronouncements of India's leaders. Seen out of context, these statements might come across as so much new wine in an old bottle. At its height, those critical of Nehru's *panchasheela* saw it as a convenient tool to play off the 'rest' against the West. Having borrowed the term from Buddhism and used it to symbolise India's vision of 'peaceful coexistence', Nehru had even staked the country's national security upon the high principles of the Panchasheela Agreement signed between India and the People's Republic of China in 1954 (see

note 2 above). However, Nehru, always selectively critical, repudiated the Anglo-French invasion of Egypt on the issue of the Suez Canal but refrained from censuring the Soviet invasion of Hungary. India, her commitment to high principles notwithstanding, is thus seen as a nation that is ambiguous and moralistic while all the same promoting low self-interest (as in Kashmir). Has nuclear-powered India, still self-consciously non-aligned, maintained the old tradition of keeping everyone guessing about her *real* intentions?

Analysed critically, the statement by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at the 2005 Asian–African Conference²¹—evocative of the heady days of the Bandung spirit not seen since the 1950s euphoria of *panchasheela* and Afro–Asian solidarity—reveals an important, new and potentially enduring step in the evolution of an Indian foreign policy doctrine.²² Once one gets past the familiar litany of internationalism in Singh’s speech, one finds a fine balance of national self-interest and idealism. The idea of Afro-Asian solidarity, as reformulated by Prime Minister Singh, is pragmatically adapted to the interests of India. The commitment to justice and solidarity is tempered with the imperative of change. Singh, the pragmatic economist that he is, argued in favour of globalisation and international competition. This marks a deep contrast with Jawharlal Nehru’s method of modernisation and progress, which sought to keep the country self-sufficient and independent through economic planning.

The difference in tone and content of the ‘new’ *panchasheela* from the old is remarkable. Whereas its invocation during the earlier phases started, continued and ended with idealistic evocations of Afro-Asian solidarity and abstract goals of peace, an instrumental approach to abstract goals triumphs in the current form. Recognising the need for change, Singh emphasised the new challenges and opportunities of the day, calling for a ‘new Asian African Strategic Partnership [that] outlines guiding principles for joint action to achieve our goals in a changed global environment’. With his insuperable command over the technical aspects of the international political economy and the newly acquired aura of confident actor in international politics, the prime minister outlined a series of specific measures as priorities on the international agenda. These measures included demands to phase out trade-distorting agricultural subsidies in developed countries; the removal of barriers to ‘our’ agricultural exports; lowering tariff barriers of ‘our’ other exports; balancing protection of the environment with the development aspirations of developing nations; and urgent measures to generate additional financial resources for development, especially for the least-developed countries and the highly indebted poor countries.

Our analysis has important implications for the doctrine and conduct of India’s foreign policy. A coherent Indian security doctrine will need to achieve nothing less than two paradigm-shifts simultaneously. The first, as argued above, will be to eschew the verbiage and institutional relics of the Cold War, such as the ‘non-aligned movement’ and ‘Afro-Asian solidarity’, as goals by themselves. And the second, to take stock of the burdens of globalisation that entail both the vision and will-power to accept a necessary shrinking of sovereignty, and the political will to engage with situations that do not have any apparent links to national interest. In addition, India will need to provide for the imponderables of national, regional and international politics, such as another violent inter-community conflict as in Gujarat in 2002; a revival of Pakistan–Bangladesh–Saudi Arabia ties on an anti-India Islamic front, the

²¹The conference took place in April 2005, in Jakarta, Indonesia.

²²Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, ‘Statement by Prime Minister Dr Manmohan Singh at Asian–African Conference’, Press release, 23 April 2005, available at <http://meaindia.nic.in/speech/2005/04/23ss01.htm> (5 February 2006).

need for measured diplomacy towards the Shia-dominated states of Iran and Iraq and ties with Afghanistan, newly a member of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and, not least, the growing Chinese engagement in India's near neighbourhood.

The time for this double shift is ripe. When compared to the final years of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), India under the UPA government now exudes policy stability with regard to the international political economy, as well as a new confidence with regard its international diplomacy. Not hobbled by the taint of communal violence—such as the anti-Sikh riots that occurred under Rajiv Gandhi,²³ or the violence at Ayodhya²⁴ under Narasimha Rao and at Godhra²⁵ under Vajpayee—Manmohan Singh's regime has boldly charted a new course, and has found in the global campaign against terrorism a useful political base. Addressing the United Nations General Assembly in 2004, Manmohan Singh peppered his speech with references to globalisation and interdependence, once again reflecting the new reality that India seems to have to come to terms with despite the decades of socialist command and control economic policy.²⁶ The second pillar of Singh's projected world view in his UN speech was the global scourge of terrorism and the challenge of forging a global response and consensus. Emphasising India's readiness to participate in the 're-structuring of a just and dynamic world order', Singh did not shy away from expressly stating that the expansion of the Security Council to include India as a permanent member was a concrete step that needed to be taken. This directness is a new feature of Indian diplomacy: whilst Singh's speech was full of references to collective efforts and global coalitions that needed to be formed, the articulation of India's interests was clear. Seen in the context of its second coming, Panchasheela holds the potential to draw together the competing strands of India's doctrinal thinking and to produce an internally consistent and effective basis upon which to engage with the world.

In the final analysis, all democracies possess ambiguities in their politics, but India remains a special case of a country whose foreign policy strongly reflects the inner contradictions of national politics. This is partly the result of the nation-building process, which differed from Europe's experience of the nation appearing, historically, before the state. In the case of India, the superstructure of a state was handed over in 1947 and the governing elite was given the responsibility of consolidating a nation to fill the mould. As a result, foreign policy became a medium for nation-building and identity-construction. Furthermore, the independence struggle cast its legacy in terms of Gandhi's doctrine of non-violence and Nehru's ideals of peaceful coexistence, to the point that current Prime Minister Manmohan Singh still refers to them, using these concepts as a justification for India's domestic and foreign policies. On nuclearisation and the nature of US–Indian relations, the discourse has long been clouded by ideological rhetoric. With regard to Kashmir,

²³These followed the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi's mother, Indira Gandhi, in 1984 by two of her Sikh bodyguards.

²⁴This refers to the controversy over the Babri Masjid in Ayodhya in the state of Uttar Pradesh. The Babri Masjid is a mosque constructed in the sixteenth century; it is said to stand on the site of a Hindu temple marking the birthplace of the God Ram. In December 1992 the mosque was destroyed by Hindu activists who aimed to rebuild the temple. The mosque's destruction set off communal riots across the country.

²⁵Godhra, in the state of Gujarat, was the location where a train carrying Hindu activists returning from Babri Masjid was set alight, killing Hindu passengers and again sparking extensive communal violence.

²⁶Ministry of External Affairs, New Delhi, 'Prime Minister's address at the 59th session of United Nations General Assembly, New York', Press release, 23 September 2004, available at <http://meaindia.nic.in/speech/2004/09/23ss01.htm> (23 March 2007).

India's policy towards its border with Pakistan is skewed by the internal politics of maintaining Kashmir's special status yet projecting it as a crucial pillar of the Indian Republic. On terrorism, the terms of debate suggest the enduring legacy of a post-colonial government, uneasy with the explicit use of state power. Similarly, India's awkward policy towards its neighbours reflects an extra sensibility to allegations of hegemonic intentions and the potential for spill-over effects into Indian domestic politics. Nevertheless, there is enough evidence that the will and capacity for a shift in style and doctrine are present in the actual conduct of foreign policy, and that the previous oscillation between aggression and appeasement will give way to a more confident and consistent assertiveness.

On a more positive note, it can be argued that Indian foreign policy is less ambiguous in deed than it is in terms of doctrine. The 1998 nuclear tests that brought India opprobrium from all possible quarters was deftly handled in its conceptualisation, implementation and subsequent damage-limiting diplomacy and produced an environment conducive to a new sense of realism in Indo-US strategic relations. In turn, this has become a leading element in similar arrangements with the EU, Russia, China and Pakistan. For this change to happen, a favourable international environment was certainly necessary but not sufficient, since it was ultimately up to Indian policy-makers to both create and seize the opportunity. To appreciate the degree of change as well as the enduring inconsistencies of a country's foreign policy, the preferences of key actors at home, the country's political institutions and the distribution of information need to be taken into account. The disarray of India's foreign policy is *both* apparent and real. The sooner India and her friends (for India has no 'enemies' as Indian diplomats, acting in the non-alignment mode, remind the world incessantly) understand this, the better it would be for all concerned.