

## **India's Foreign Policy Re-Orientation in Modi's Second Term and Future Prospects**

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**Abstract:** After his re-election as prime minister of India, Narendra Modi will likely continue his existing foreign policy, although it will likely assume some new characteristics in response to changes in India's domestic politics and the international strategic environment. On the whole, Modi will prioritize Neighborhood First policy, India's relationships with China and the US, as well as multilateral diplomacy to raise India's international status. While it pursues these policies, the second Modi administration will face the challenges of strengthening its capability, balancing its relations with China and with the US, and the rise of ideological conservatism. Forging a stable relationship with India by drawing on the advantages of the association and avoiding its disadvantages will help China better advance its major country strategy, promote its neighborhood diplomacy, and develop the Belt and Road Initiative.

**Keywords:** Modi administration, China-India relationship, the Belt and Road Initiative, India's diplomacy

Narendra Modi was sworn into the office of prime minister on May 30, 2019, initiating the second term of his administration. During this term, the Modi administration will face profound and complex changes, both at home and abroad. Domestically, Modi's Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has consolidated its dominance as the most powerful party in India's

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domestic politics, promoting the idea of Hindutva<sup>1</sup> as the defining ideology of India, which provides a stronger foundation for Modi administration to promote its diplomatic agenda. However, in terms of regional security, the Modi administration is also facing the risk of negative spillover effects from the intensification of religious conflict. Externally, the growth in importance of the Indo-Pacific region in recent years has elevated India's geostrategic value, offering it crucial opportunity to exit the so-called South Asia tub and enter the world stage. Nonetheless, the intensifying strategic competition between China and the US has restricted India's ability to create a strategic position for itself. These challenges at home and abroad will have major effects on Modi's diplomatic decisions during his second term.

### **Changes in Political Ecology and Strategic Environment**

The diplomatic policy of any country is developed in the interaction between its domestic politics and the external environment. India's domestic political ecology is relatively complex, meaning that inter-party relations, relations between the central and local governments, and ethnic relations all play a part in the formulation of its foreign policy. As a major country with a rising posture, an increasingly active and profound engagement with the external environment has enhanced India's prominence as a major regional power in the Indo-Pacific. India's diplomatic orientation is based on its reading of long-term trends. Among these, the existence of the Indo-Pacific strategy implemented by the US and China's Belt and Road Initiative has had a definite effect on India's diplomatic strategy.

I. India's political history has entered the BJP-dominant era, bearing the prominent imprint of strongman-style politics. During the national election of 2019, the BJP won 303 (out of 543 directly elected) seats in the Lok Sabha (House of the People, the lower house of parliament), 21 more

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<sup>1</sup> Hindutva is an expression of Hindu nationalism, first proposed by the Indian ideologist Savarkar in 1923, believing India is a political community composed of common geography, racial connection and shared culture, which combines Hindu, Hindi and Hindustan.

seats than in the 2014 election, instead of losing ground as had been generally predicted, enabling the ruling coalition to occupy a total of 353 seats in the Lok Sabha. The BJP's share of the vote grew from 31 percent in 2014 to 37.4 percent. This election marked the first time since India's independence that a non-Indian National Congress (INC) government has won re-election immediately after completing its first term, and it is the first time that a single party has claimed more than half the seats in Lok Sabha in two successive elections since 1984, indicating the disappearance of the political landscape that had begun with independence, where the INC dominated, and it also marked the beginning of the BJP era in India's politics. In the 2014 election, Modi's BJP won great success, winning 282 seats, becoming the first single party occupying over half of the seats in the Lok Sabha since 1984 and marking an end to the almost 30-year history of alliance politics in India. Thereafter, the BJP, capitalizing on the Modi Wind, won in many local elections and took charge of more states than any other political party in India, either heading a government or being part of a government coalition in 16 states,<sup>1</sup> although it was then defeated in five states at the end of 2018. Observing this, some Indian scholars assessed this development to indicate that India had entered "the moment of the second dominant party system."<sup>2</sup> The most recent election further boosted the ruling position of the BJP and consolidated Modi's image as a political strongman for India.

India's diplomatic agenda indicates Modi's ruling idea for India's foreign policy. The Indian strategist Raja Mohan has divided India's diplomatic history since independence into three phases. The first lasted from independence to the end of the Cold War, and here we find India persisting in non-alignment, retaining good relations with the Soviet Union and pursuing an Indian version of Monroeism with regard to its neighbors.

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<sup>1</sup> "After BJP's Defeat in 3 States, Only 51% Indians Now Live Under Its Rule," December 13, 2018, accessed April 23, 2019, [https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/after-bjp-s-defeat-in-3-states-only-51-indians-now-live-under-its-rule-18121300119\\_1.html](https://www.business-standard.com/article/current-affairs/after-bjp-s-defeat-in-3-states-only-51-indians-now-live-under-its-rule-18121300119_1.html).

<sup>2</sup> Suhas Palshkar, "India's Second Dominant Party System," *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 52, No. 11 (2017).

In the second phase, from the end of the Cold War until Modi's rise to power, India still kept to a non-alignment policy and greatly improved its relations with the West while adopting a more conciliatory stance toward its neighbors. The third phase began with Modi's rise to power, and shows an India that has replaced non-alignment with strategic autonomy, giving priority to its relations with neighboring countries and upgrading its east-oriented policy from Look East to Act East.<sup>1</sup> Relative to his predecessor Manmohan Singh, Modi, with his strong style and dominance in the ruling coalition, has more say and greater decision power for India's foreign policy, due to his broad political connections and great prestige, derived from the fact that he worked his way all the way up, ultimately succeeding in making the party elders stand aside or retire.<sup>2</sup> In his second term, Modi's ability to shape India's diplomatic agendas will be further consolidated because of the strong ruling position he has assumed and the experience he has obtained in diplomacy during his first term. He has given priority to national security as a policy pursuit and formed a powerful diplomatic and security team composed of trusted followers like BJP President and the Union Home Minister Amit Shah, National Security Adviser Ajit Doval, and Foreign Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar.

Efficient decision making may lead to the declining influence of local political forces on India's international diplomacy. Although the administration of diplomatic and military affairs does fall within the ambit of the central government, India's government was once subject to local political forces to a greater degree when it proposed and implemented foreign policy, particularly its policy toward its neighboring countries, beginning with India's entry into alliance politics in the 1980s. The

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<sup>1</sup> C. Raja Mohan, *Modi's World: Expanding India's Sphere of Influence* (Noida: Harper Collins Publishers India, June 2015).

<sup>2</sup> Rajesh Basrur, "Modi's Foreign Policy Fundamentals of Trajectory Unchanged," *International Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 1 (2017): 8. Of course, there are scholars believing that despite the rhetoric, Modi's diplomatic achievements in his first term of office has largely highlighted advances set in motion by his BJP predecessor Vajpayee. Ref. Abhijnan Rej and Rahul Sagar, "The BJP and Indian Grand Strategy," in *The BJP in Power: Indian Democracy and Religious Nationalism*, ed. Milan Vaishnav, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 73.



influence of local politics requires the central government to rely on its allied parties to keep the government running. This meant that political entities in West Bengal and Tamil Nadu had some say in the management of India's relations with Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Compared with the 2014 national election, the BJP not only continued to fill half of the Lok Sabha, but also enjoyed a greatly expanded political influence in West Bengal and the northeastern part of India, resulting in a compression of living space for local political parties. This means that the BJP is no longer in need of support from local political parties to maintain its administration of its policies, undermining the ability of the local political parties to bargain with the BJP over diplomatic affairs. In addition, although there has been some criticism of Modi's dominant position within the BJP, his overwhelming popularity, as shown in opinion polls, is of great importance to the party. Moreover, Modi has strengthened his control of the party through Party President Amit Shah, and some say that Modi's Prime Minister's Office (PMO) is the most powerful PMO in India's history.<sup>1</sup> In his second term, Modi's PMO is expected to be the central driving force, the beneficiary of an even more extreme concentration of power.<sup>2</sup> In the context of the increasingly complex situation at home and abroad, the increased authority of the central government in decision-making can help India rid itself of its domestic political restraints and pursue a more flexible foreign policy.

II. Hindutva is rapidly becoming the ruling ideology in India. During the struggle for national independence, two types of nationalism were present in India, secular and Hindu nationalism. The former upheld an ethnically and religiously pluralist India, where no group should be discriminated against, but the latter considered Hinduism to be the major source of national identity, asserting that disunity within Hinduism had

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<sup>1</sup> Sanjay Kumar and Pranav Gupta, "Why PM Modi Remains Critical to BJP's Fortunes," March 4, 2019, accessed May 30, 2019, <https://www.livemint.com/news/india/why-pm-modi-remains-critical-to-bjp-s-fortunes-1551718226157.html>; "The Most Powerful PMO in India's History," October 10, 2017, accessed May 30, 2019, <https://www.rediff.com/news/special/the-most-powerful-pmo-in-indias-history/20171010.htm>.

<sup>2</sup> Rakesh Mohan Chaturvedi, "PM Modi's Council of Ministers Mirrors Priorities, Rewards Performance," *Economic Times*, June 1, 2019.

enabled India's colonization by Western powers. For this reason, Hinduism's dominance should be strengthened.<sup>1</sup> Meanwhile, Hindu nationalism is manifested in many ways, with the moderates considering Hinduism to be the first religion among equals, and the extremists calling for an India as a state of Hindus. Hindutva is a representative version of Hindu nationalism, and it is the guiding ideology of the BJP and its parent organization, the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (RSS). In the early period after independence, secular nationalism, as exemplified by Nehru and his INC, dominated political ideology, and the RSS, the ideological fount of Hindu nationalist politics in the country, was banned because an RSS associate murdered Mahatma Gandhi in 1948. Sectarianism or Hindu communalism was considered to be the main internal enemy of governance of the country. This led secularism to become the prevailing ideology in India.<sup>2</sup> In the 1980s, Hindutva's star rose in India's political sky as political fragmentation grew, leaving an ideological vacuum that offered it the best opportunity to develop; the secularism's credibility was falling because the INC government was manipulating religious issues and upholding different policies with reference to different religions; the push to rebuild the Ram Temple heightened the religious zeal of the Hindu population, which increased popular support for the BJP. In the 1990s, BJP leader Atal Bihari Vajpayee was several times part of a coalition government. However, Vajpayee did not foreground the political agenda of Hindu nationalism. While he tended to the political appeals of other parties in the coalition, he aroused the resentment of the parent organization RSS, thus leading to an election defeat of the BJP in 2004. From 2004 to 2014, the INC was in control of government, and Hindu nationalism was contained, forcing the RSS and its affiliated groups to grow more closely together and provide ideological and popular support for Modi's 2014

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<sup>1</sup> Milan Vaishnav, "Religious Nationalism and India's Future," in *The BJP in Power: Indian Democracy and Religious Nationalism*, ed. Milan Vaishnav, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 7.

<sup>2</sup> Rukmani S., "The BJP's Electoral Arithmetic," in *The BJP in Power: Indian Democracy and Religious Nationalism*, ed. Milan Vaishnav, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 52.

victory in the national election. During his first term, Modi promoted Hindutva in India's political, economic, and cultural life by appointing Hindu nationalists to important government positions, revising textbooks in several states to mute or even conceal the role played by Islam in Indian history, renaming some cities and streets that had ties to Islamic culture, and issuing a national ban on cattle slaughtering.

After the 2019 national election, Hindutva became even more prominent in India's political ideology. First, in its election manifesto, the BJP reaffirmed the three major planks relating to Hindutva, namely, abrogating Article 370 of the Constitution to repeal the special status of India-controlled Kashmir, facilitating the expeditious construction of the Ram Temple in Ayodhya, and drafting a Uniform Civil Code.<sup>1</sup> The BJP's victory in the 2019 national election owes much to the support of the RSS and affiliated grassroots groups like the Sangh Parivar. Some local RSS members even bypassed the local BJP branches to play a leading role in the election, indicating the ascendant influence of the RSS over the BJP. The results of the election are likely to lead the BJP to breakthroughs in the three major platform planks mentioned above. Additionally, a number of politicians who firmly believe in Hindu nationalism have entered into the center of power. BJP President Amit Shah is a fanatical supporter of Hindutva, known to have called Muslim immigrants "termites" and to have said that "funding Islamic schools jeopardizes India's Hindus." After the election, he was appointed as Union home minister, making him the most powerful leader next to Modi.<sup>2</sup> Additionally, some BJP members of the Lok Sabha were suspected of being involved in anti-Muslim riots or of having called Mahatma Gandhi's assassin a "hero," all of which has concerned Indian Muslims that the rise of Hindu nationalism could be dangerous.<sup>3</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Bharatiya Janata Party, Sankalp Bharat, Sashakt Bharat, Sankalp Bharat Lok Sabha 2019, April 2019.

<sup>2</sup> "India Election Results 2019: Modi Claims Landslide Victory," *Guardian*, May 23, 2019; Karan Dhingra, "India's New Cabinet Is Old, Wealthy and Violent," June 3, 2019, accessed June 5, 2019, <https://thewire.in/politics/modi-cabinet-2019>.

<sup>3</sup> Ajaz Ashraf, "Why Hindutva's Dark Fantasy About India's Muslims Could Become Real," June 2, 2019, accessed June 5, 2019, <https://thewire.in/rights/muslims-india-modi-victory-hindutva>.

Third, opposition parties have become involved, to different extents, in the rhetorical system shaped by the BJP. A scholar of India has noted that “this perhaps explains why there has been such little talk of secularism by political parties and politicians in the run-up to the 2019 elections. Fearful of being labeled minority appeasers and cognizant of the BJP’s pitch that it is the only party that represents the Hindu majority, leading secular parties like the Congress have instead pivoted to brandishing their own Hindu credentials to blunt the BJP’s appeal.... These critics worry that the traditionally secular party is essentially trying to beat the BJP at its own game, which will never work given the latter’s Hindu majoritarian bona fides.”<sup>1</sup> In sum, during Modi’s second term, secularism is likely to lose more influence in India’s political ideology, and the prominence of Hindutva indicates that India’s foreign policy will be more influenced by nationalism, and its Pakistan policy will likely be greatly influenced, which will affect its diplomatic relations throughout South Asia or even more broadly.

III. The international strategic environment is undergoing profound changes, with traditional geopolitical competition returning to the Indo-Pacific region, which has fundamentally influenced India’s external strategy. For a relatively long period of time after India’s independence, the global strategic scene was characterized by the Cold War between the US and the USSR and the rising national independence movements in the developing countries, resulting in India’s pursuit of a non-aligned foreign policy and its self-positioning bellwether of the non-aligned movement. After the end of the Cold War and disintegration of the Soviet Union, India was forced to implement an economic reform and turn to the Western developed countries for funding and technical support that it badly needed for its domestic development. Beginning with the international financial crisis of 2008, the international power reorientation between the rising East and the declining West has been accelerated, triggering a profound adjustment to the international order. As an emerging major country, India’s

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<sup>1</sup> Milan Vaishnav, “Religious Nationalism and India’s Future,” in *The BJP in Power: Indian Democracy and Religious Nationalism*, ed. Milan Vaishnav, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 16.

discourse power and visibility in international affairs have risen in recent years. As China steadily promotes the construction of the Belt and Road, and the US has proposed a strategy that seeks a free and open Indo-Pacific while placing China into the role of a strategic competitor, the political center of gravity worldwide is rapidly moving to the Indo-Pacific, as globalization faces the political shocks of trade protectionism and populism, and the absence or inefficiency of global governance becomes more severe, the world is undergoing profound changes unseen in a century.<sup>1</sup> As India's external environment becomes more complex, new opportunities and challenges are arising to India's foreign policy in Modi's second term.

On the one hand, the geostrategic importance of the Indo-Pacific is rising, and this has provided new geostrategic advantages to India's geographical location. This is not the first time that India took Indo-Pacific perspective, however. In 2004, India issued its first maritime strategy, the Indian Maritime Doctrine, which said "another post Cold War development has been the shift in global maritime focus from the Atlantic-Pacific combine to the Pacific-Indian Ocean region."<sup>2</sup> Because the US focus at that time was on the fight against terrorism, it paid limited attention to the geo-structural evolution taking place in the Indo-Pacific. Coupled with the fact that India had limited strength and traditional maritime security challenges were not pressing at that time, the importance of the Indo-Pacific as a geostrategic bloc failed to attract the attention of international strategic thinking, and the Indian government did not develop a systematic Indo-Pacific concept. During his first term, Modi began to conceive India's foreign strategy, adopting an Indo-Pacific perspective. At the end of 2017, the Trump administration proposed a strategy for a free and open Indo-Pacific and promoted Quadrilateral Indo-Pacific Consultation among the

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<sup>1</sup> "Xi Jinping: Nuli kaichuang zhongguo tese daguo waijiao xinjumian [Xi Jinping, strive to create a new landscape in major-country diplomacy with Chinese characteristics]," Xinhua News Agency, June 23, 2018, accessed May 29, 2019, [http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-06/23/c\\_1123025806](http://www.xinhuanet.com/politics/2018-06/23/c_1123025806).

<sup>2</sup> Government of India, *Indian Maritime Doctrine* (New Delhi: Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence 2004), 65-67.

US, Japan, India, and Australia, or the Quad, enabling India to become more deeply involved in the area. In June 2018, Modi, who was the first Indian prime minister to attend the Shangri-La Dialogue (SLD), said in his keynote speech “the destiny of the world will be deeply influenced by the course of developments in the Indo-Pacific region”; he added, “I am increasingly convinced with each passing day that the destinies of those of us who live in the region are linked.” In that speech, he also detailed India’s vision for the Indo-Pacific.<sup>1</sup> During his second term, India’s policy will concentrate more closely on the Indo-Pacific agenda, as the strategic forces of the US, China, and Japan have all stepped up their involvement in the Indo-Pacific. Multiple regional connectivity initiatives are in place, resulting in synergy, cooperation, collision, and competition, and India’s comprehensive national strength and sense of its own national interest have been expanding. More importantly for India, the concept of the Indo-Pacific includes not only India’s extended neighborhood, spanning Southeast Asia, South Asia, West Asia, and North Africa, but also its relationships with the major countries the US, China, and Japan, along with such important issues as maritime security and interconnectivity. This will result in a close focus on the Indo-Pacific in India’s external strategic deployment.

On the other hand, as strategic competition between China and the US intensifies, India has had to adjust its relations with both countries, in pursuit of a dynamic balance between them. Because China and the US are the two key countries present on India’s arrival on the world stage, in the wake of the Cold War, successive Indian governments have sought to maintain an overall stable relationship with both. Nonetheless, the two countries are now undergoing drastic changes in their “economic strength, strategic posture, strategic basis and strategic environment,” and the US has found that among “the few countries that could challenge it in science and technology, financially, and militarily, the three vital factors that

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<sup>1</sup> “PM Modi’s Keynote Address at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore,” June 1, 2018, accessed February 12, 2019, <https://www.narendramodi.in/pm-%20modi-%20to%20deliver%20keynote-%20address%20-at%20-shangri-la-%20dialogue-%20in%20-singapore-540324>.



American supremacy depends on, is China.”<sup>1</sup> In its National Security Strategy and National Defense Strategy, the US has labeled China a “strategic competitor.” As a result of this, the US has placed pressure on China, beginning waging a trade war, challenging China’s high-tech development, restricting people-to-people exchanges, and interfering in the South China Sea disputes, etc. The US Department of Defense (DoD) issued a Indo-Pacific Strategy Report in June 2019, in which it designated China a “revisionist country” and accused it of seeking to reorder the region to its advantage, by leveraging military modernization, influence operations, and predatory economics to coerce other nations.<sup>2</sup> During Modi’s second term, so long as the US sees China as a strategic competitor and continues to put pressure of various sorts on China, the collision and contest between China and the US in politics, economy, security, diplomacy, science and technology, and even people-to-people exchanges will intensify, and this could seriously challenge India’s external environment. In Modi’s new cabinet, Jaishankar, originally a senior diplomat, not a politician, who was previously ambassador to both China and the US, was appointed as External Affairs Minister, indicating that the prioritization of India’s relations with China and the US will be the diplomatic focus of Modi’s second term.

### **Continuity and Change in India’s Foreign Policy**

Winning re-election has made it possible for the Modi administration to continue its foreign policy. However, whether the original foreign policy is continued and strengthened or adjusted or even re-oriented, the above-mentioned changes in India’s internal and external environment will certainly be reflected in its external strategy. On the whole, the second Modi administration will pursue a foreign policy that focuses on three

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<sup>1</sup> “Yuan Peng: liyi shendu kunbang shi zhongmei guanxi de yida chenggong jingyan [Yuan Peng, binding interests in a deep way is a major success story in the China-US relations],” *Paper*, December 26, 2018, accessed May 28, 2019, [https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail\\_forward\\_2670504](https://www.thepaper.cn/newsDetail_forward_2670504).

<sup>2</sup> Patrick Shanahan, “Message from the Secretary of Defense,” in the Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*, June 1, 2019.

aspects: prioritizing “Neighborhood First” policy but from an Indo-Pacific perspective rather than a South Asia perspective and continuing its efforts to isolate and pressure Pakistan; expending more efforts on balancing relations with major countries, particularly applying proper handling to relations with China and the US, mainly focusing on specific issues as a factor of pragmatism and dynamic balance; and, in addition to developing its own hard power, working to promote its international influence by showing soft power in multilateral regimes and supplying public goods to change India from a balancing power to a leading one.<sup>1</sup>

I. Advancing its Neighborhood-First Policy in the framework of the Indo-Pacific instead of South Asia. Modi proposed the Neighborhood-First policy during his first term, calling on countries in the region to develop “greater connectivity and integration, trade and investment, cultural and human ties, a common endeavor to combat poverty and a shared stake in development; and, underpinned by the responsibility of the largest and the most centrally located country, India, to lead the process.”<sup>2</sup> Examining the list of foreign leaders invited to his inauguration and the first foreign country he visited in his second term, it can be concluded that the Neighborhood-First policy will continue during Modi’s second term, but adjustment will be made in terms of geographical scale, areas of cooperation, and policy goals.

First, expanding the geographical scale of the Neighborhood-First policy currently centered on South Asia. During Modi’s first term, the Neighborhood-First policy was mainly directed at countries in South Asia, that is, the immediate neighborhood in the traditional sense of the term. During his second term, Modi will promote his Neighborhood-First policy in the context of the extended neighborhood, a region that spans Southeast Asia, Central Asia, critical island countries in the Indian Ocean, West Asia,

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<sup>1</sup> Dr. S. Jaishankar, “India, the United States and China,” IISS Fullerton Lecture in Singapore, July 20, 2015, accessed May 30, 2019, <https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/25493/iiss+fullerton+lecture+by+dr+s+jaishankar+foreign+secretary+in+singapore>.

<sup>2</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, *Prime Minister Narendra Modi Select Speeches on Foreign Policy 2014-2015*, Preface, 8, accessed June 5, 2019, [http://mea.gov.in/PM\\_SpeechBook\\_2014-25/?page=1](http://mea.gov.in/PM_SpeechBook_2014-25/?page=1).

and North Africa. On the one hand, the steady expansion of India's interests and power in these sub-regions, coupled with the improved interconnectivity there, calls for and makes it possible for India to take a holistic view in advancing its external strategy; on the other hand, India's self-positioning has gradually changed from an idea of itself as a South Asian country to an Indo-Pacific country, which must be supported by an expansion of the geographical scale of the prioritized neighborhood. In April 2019, the External Affairs Ministry of India set up a new Indo-Pacific wing, responsible for affairs relating to the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA), ASEAN, and the Quad, which may be taken as a type of groundwork for future relations.<sup>1</sup> In May 2019, Modi did not invite the leaders of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) to his inauguration, which he did in 2014, instead inviting leaders from the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) member states and Kyrgyzstan and Mauritius, indicating his intentions. Next, the Modi administration will take multiple steps to seek dominant influence over other South Asian countries (excluding Pakistan) and key island countries in the Indian Ocean like Mauritius and the Seychelles, while integrating sub-regional policies such as Act East, the SAGAR (Indian word for ocean and also an acronym for Security and Growth for All in the Region) and Link West through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the BIMSTEC, the India-ASEAN Forum, the IORA, and the Organization of Islamic Cooperation (OIC), among others, to promote India's diplomatic momentum in these sub-regions.<sup>2</sup>

Second, stepping up efforts to isolate and pressure Pakistan. After the

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<sup>1</sup> Indrani Bagchi, "In a Show of Intent, External Affairs Ministry Set Up Indo-Pacific Wing," *Times of India*, April 15, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Of late, India made a proposition through Bangladesh in the OIC of admitting non-Islamic countries to its meeting. In March of 2019, India's External Affairs Minister then Sushma Swaraj, at the invitation of the host UAE, attended the Foreign Ministers Council meeting of the OIC as a distinguished guest, which is deemed as a great diplomatic success for India, while the Pakistani foreign minister absented himself from the meeting as a protest. Jayesh Khatu, "India at the OIC: Has 'History' Been Made?," March 5, 2019, accessed May 22, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/03/india-at-the-oic-has-history-been-made/>.

Uri Military Base in the Indian-controlled Kashmir was attacked by terrorists in September of 2016, the Modi administration toughened its policy toward Pakistan, an act that was characterized as bringing anti-terror to the core of its Pakistan policy, in particular demanding that Pakistan “cease infiltrating Indian-controlled Kashmir”; adding more options to its Pakistan policy, including surgical strikes and air raids; and raising the status of the BIMSTEC while downplaying the SAARC, as well as contending with Pakistan for influence in Afghanistan. Although the possibility that the Modi administration will resume its dialog with Pakistan cannot be ruled out in Modi’s second term, the relationship is not likely to improve substantially, as India will likely seek to isolate Pakistan and promote change through pressure, while Modi holds high the banner of national security, attempting to place himself in the position of India’s Watchman (Chowkidar), strengthening the dominance of Hindutva in the Indian ideology and continuing a policy of coercion in Indian-controlled Kashmir (or possibly even abolishing the special constitutional status of the region). In addition to the confrontational Pakistan policy that was pursued in his first term, Modi will seek the international isolation of Pakistan, including not only replacing the SAARC with the BIMSTEC as a major platform for regional integration to extrude Pakistan from the regional integration process,<sup>1</sup> but also seeking to isolate Pakistan internationally in the name of countering terrorism. For instance, the BJP has stated that India “is committed to taking concrete steps on international forums against countries and organizations supporting terrorism, and taking all necessary measures to isolate such countries and organizations on the global stage. To ensure the same, we will work towards establishing a Comity of Nations against International Terrorism as a voluntary multi-lateral forum based on the principles of the draft Comprehensive

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<sup>1</sup> Shubhajit Roy, “Why Modi Swearing - In Invite to BIMSTEC Leaders Sends Important Signals to India’s Neighbours,” *Indian Express*, June 4, 2019. Given the facts that BIMSTEC includes five South Asian countries of India, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, and that India has strengthened connectivity with Maldives and Afghanistan through the SAGAR Doctrine and the first India-Central Asia foreign ministers meeting (with Afghanistan admitted), India’s neglect of the SAARC is actually intended at isolating Pakistan.

Convention on International Terrorism.”<sup>1</sup>

Third, increasing India's attractiveness to its neighbors and its cohesion with them by promoting interconnectivity. Other major countries have proposed initiatives for regional interconnectivity, and Modi has also participated in and proposed regional interconnectivity initiatives during his first term, such as the BBIN sub-regional cooperation initiative involving Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, and Nepal; the SAGAR Doctrine, targeting the island countries in the Indian Ocean; and the International North-South Transportation Corridor, involving the Central Asian countries. In June of 2018, Modi attended the SLD and delivered a keynote speech that elaborated on India's vision for the Indo-Pacific, recognizing the key role that is played by connectivity; he stated that “these (connectivity) initiatives must be based on respect for sovereignty and territorial integrity, consultation, good governance, transparency, viability and sustainability. They must empower nations, not place them under impossible debt burden. They must promote trade, not strategic competition.”<sup>2</sup> In his second term, Modi is likely to allow freer play to interconnectivity in promoting his Indo-Pacific vision and strategy toward the neighboring countries, adopting it as a major tactic for increasing the dependency of the neighboring countries on India and hedging against the connectivity endeavors of other countries in the neighborhood. In advancing this process, the Modi administration will prioritize the coordination of its domestic infrastructure development plans with its regional connectivity initiatives and coordinating those initiatives with relevant proposals by the US, Japan, and Australia, involving both land connectivity and maritime connectivity. For example, Modi made his first state visit after his re-election to the Maldives and Sri Lanka to “demonstrate the priority India attaches to its ‘Neighborhood-First Policy’

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<sup>1</sup> Bharatiya Janata Party, Sankalp Bharat, Sashakt Bharat, Sankalp Bharat Lok Sabha 2019, April 2019.

<sup>2</sup> “PM Modi's Keynote Address at the Shangri-La Dialogue in Singapore,” June 1, 2018, accessed February 12, 2019, <https://www.narendramodi.in/pm-%20modi-%20to%20deliver%20keynote-%20address%20-at%20-shangri-la-%20dialogue-%20in%20-singapore-540324>.

and the SAGAR Doctrine.”<sup>1</sup>

II. Promoting major country diplomacy and seeking a dynamic balance with China and the US, based on national interest and specific issues. India is not only democratic and a large developing country, but it is also a dominant country in the South Asian subcontinent, which renders it great advantages in the international arena and makes it a prospective object for such major forces as China, the US, Russia, Europe, and Japan in their pursuit of cooperation. During his first term, Modi abandoned the non-alignment policy pursued by the INC government and greatly deepened strategic synergy as well as defense and security cooperation with the US and the Indo-Pacific alliance, which exemplifies the great flexibility and pragmatism of Modi’s foreign policy.<sup>2</sup> Meanwhile, the Sino-Indian relationship bottomed out after the Donglang standoff and remained stable after the Wuhan summit between Modi and President Xi Jinping. During Modi’s second term, the intensifying strategic competition between China and the US will affect the game among major countries as well as the situation in the Indo-Pacific, which is the primary issue that the Modi administration must deal with in advancing its external strategy. The Modi administration wants to reap the benefit of their competition, perhaps in the form of support from the US in defense equipment and high-tech products, but at the same time, Modi will attempt to avoid taking side between them, as is exemplified by his appointment of Jaishankar, who is rich in diplomatic experience and personal connections in both China and the US, as his minister for external affairs.

With regard to the US, India will treat the US as the priority of priorities in its diplomacy, continuing to capitalize on the US need for strategic cooperation with India, and attaching particular importance to bilateral defense and security cooperation. Although India and the US have

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<sup>1</sup> “Visit of Prime Minister to Maldives and Sri Lanka (June 08-09, 2019),” June 3, 2019, accessed June 5, 2019, <https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/31408/Visit+of+Prime+Minister+to+Maldives+and+Sri+Lanka+June+0809+2019>.

<sup>2</sup> Anhijnan Rej and Rahul Sagar, “The BJP and Indian Grand Strategy,” in *The BJP in Power: Indian Democracy and Religious Nationalism*, ed. Milan Vaishnav, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 80.



different views of the geographical extent of the Indo-Pacific, the priority areas within it, and China's role within it, the Indo-Pacific concept nevertheless indeed provides a geo-strategic framework for India and the US to engage in strategic cooperation, with anxiety about China remaining the major factor driving their defense and security cooperation. "The US strategic deployment in the Indo-Pacific is chiefly intended to forge and strengthen the maritime security alliance and partnership network it dominates, and maintain its leadership in the region.... While India's geographical location, its comprehensive national strength and its democracy have made it a major partner of the US to advance its Indo-Pacific strategy."<sup>1</sup> In June 2019, the US DoD issued its Indo-Pacific Strategy Report, which put India at the top of the list of partners that the US sought in the Indian Ocean region, reiterating that "the United States continues to pursue a range of initiatives with India to enable cooperation, strengthen our interoperability, and establish a strong foundation for defense trade, technology sharing, industrial collaboration, and broader cooperation on defense innovation."<sup>2</sup> Therefore, during his second term, Modi will continue to seek cooperation with the US in defense and security, particularly maritime security, and support from it in defense equipment and technology, while strengthening consultation with it and its alliance system about the Indo-Pacific order and promoting regional connectivity and joint maritime military exercises through arrangements such as the Quad and US-Japan-India trilateral format, to tie down the expanding strategic influence of China in South Asia and the Indian Ocean. Admittedly, as the Trump administration insists on "America First" and "Equal Reciprocity," which objectively contradicts the slogan "Nation First" that Modi's administration puts forward, disparities between India and the US over issues relating to Iran, Afghanistan, and trade will grow, adding to the uncertainties in the relationship. If disparities between the

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<sup>1</sup> Lou Chunhao, "Zhanlue renzhi zhuanbian yu modi zhengfu de haiyang anquan zhanlue [The change of strategic cognition and the maritime security strategy of the Modi administration]," *Waijiao pinglun* [Foreign Affairs Review], No. 5 (2018): 104.

<sup>2</sup> The Department of Defense, *Indo-Pacific Strategy Report: Preparedness, Partnerships, and Promoting a Networked Region*, June 1, 2019, 34.

two countries over specific issue expand, the Modi administration is likely to keep a deliberate distance from the US to safeguard its national interest and maintain its policy independence, avoiding dependence and entanglement.<sup>1</sup>

India will continue to promote its relations with China through competition and cooperation. The Sino-India relationship went through a series of ups and downs during Modi's first term, and the crisis of Donglang standoff sent their relations to the lowest state. Meanwhile, the third-party factors of the US and Pakistan are becoming increasingly serious.<sup>2</sup> During Modi's second term, India's competition with and vigilance against China in the security domain will not fundamentally change. As Hindu nationalism continues to rise, India's national security team is dominated by hawks.<sup>3</sup> While the progress of China's Belt and Road Initiative in South Asia has intensified India's anxiety, China also differs with India on issues of India's focal concern, such as the permanent membership of the UN Security Council and the membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group, as well as issues relating to Pakistan. Nevertheless, the positive development of the bilateral relations cannot be ignored. For instance, India's attitude toward the Second Belt and Road Forum of International Cooperation turned positive<sup>4</sup>, and it expressed earnest expectation regarding the second informal summit between China

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<sup>1</sup> Rajesh Basrur, "Modi's Foreign Policy Fundamentals: A Trajectory Unchanged," *International Affairs*, Vol. 93, No. 1 (2017):15.

<sup>2</sup> Lou Chunhao, "Managing the 'Third Party Factors' in China-India Relations," *China-India Brief*, No. 136 (2019), accessed June 5, 2019, <https://lkyspp.nus.edu.sg/research/publications/details/china-india-brief-136>.

<sup>3</sup> India's decision-making system on national security is composed of the Cabinet Committee on Security and the National Security Council, with the former being the highest decision-making body made up of the Prime Minister, the Minister of Internal Affairs, the Minister of External Affairs, the Minister of Defense, and the Minister of Finance, while the latter being a decision-making advisory body. National Security Advisor is responsible for running the daily work. In Modi's second term of office, National Security Advisor Doval has remained, who is rather a hardliner on China and likely to rely on retired officers from the military intelligence as he did during Modi's first term of office.

<sup>4</sup> P. S. Raghavan, "An Image Makeover of the Belt and Road Initiative," *Hindu*, May 4, 2019.

and India, which was planned for the second half of 2019.<sup>1</sup> At a time when Trump is continuing his unilateral pursuit of his America First policy, India is abstaining from entangling itself in the US' China strategy. In addition, although Modi won re-election on a platform highlighting national security, the achievement of socio-economic development is his first priority. Cooperation between China and India on the economy and trade has great potential, and the bilateral trade volume this year is expected to exceed US\$100 billion. Furthermore, the 100-day agenda of the second Modi administration involves infrastructure, agriculture, investment, and the digital economy, in all of which India is calling for cooperation with China.<sup>2</sup> Thus, China and India are exhibiting strong momentum toward a consolidating development partnership.

III. Actively participating in multilateral affairs in the international arena and striving to become a "leading power". India has long held a serious ambition to become a great power. In his first term, Modi "sought to restore India's civilizational glory and rightfully secure the country a more prominent place in the international system."<sup>3</sup> This is closely related to religious thinking in the country, as its unique caste system gave birth to the particular world outlook of the country, featuring Brahman supremacy. As a result, India believes itself to be in the upper class of the world, which "not only is the starting point of India to look at the world, but also deeply influences the security and diplomatic thinking of successive leaders of India since independence."<sup>4</sup> In 2019, the BJP election manifesto proposed that "while pursuing our national developmental and security interests, the

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<sup>1</sup> Ministry of External Affairs, "Official Spokesperson's Response to News Reports Appearing in a Section of the Media on the Next Informal Summit between India and China," May 29, 2019.

<sup>2</sup> Joe C Mathew, "Modi Government's 100-day Agenda to Be Packed with Policy and Administrative Measures," *Business Today*, May 27, 2019; G Seetharaman, "Has Modi Been Able to Deliver on His Flagship Schemes?," *Economic Times*, June 2, 2019.

<sup>3</sup> Anhijnan Rej and Rahul Sagar, "The BJP and Indian Grand Strategy," in *The BJP in Power: Indian Democracy and Religious Nationalism*, ed. Milan Vaishnav, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 73.

<sup>4</sup> Hu Shisheng, "Donglang duizhi wei ji yu zhongyin guanxi de weilai [The crisis of Donglang standoff and the future of the China-India relations]," *Xiandai guoji guanxi* [Contemporary International Relations], No. 11 (2017): 18.

ancient Indian vision of ‘Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam’ (the world is one family) will form the basis in our global co-operation for progress, prosperity, peace and security, especially with friendly countries and neighbours.”<sup>1</sup> Therefore, secured in his firm political position and buoyed by rising nationalism at home, Modi is likely to make it a priority to seek leading-power status for India in his second term.

First, joining in important international organizations and seeking discourse power there. A global power should have a suitable label, such as membership in elite clubs, positions of leadership in international organizations, and frequent interactions with other high-status states.<sup>2</sup> In its second term, the Modi administration will seek to raise India’s position in the UN and other major international organizations, such as seeking permanent membership on the UN Security Council and membership of the Nuclear Suppliers’ Group, as well as acquiring greater sway for its role in multilateral platforms like G20, BRICS, the British Commonwealth, SCO, ASEAN, and even the Arctic Council. India is also likely to attempt to elevate the status of the regional organizations it dominates, such as the IORA and the BIMSTEC, making them into powerful regional cooperation platforms that it dominates or where it has decisive discourse power, to say the least.

Second, expanding its national influence through the provision of public goods. The Modi administration attached great importance to public goods in place of the use of coercive means as a way of raising its national influence. In *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy*, published by India in October of 2015, the Indian Navy is seen to have steadily stepped up its operations in India’s areas of interest in the Indian Ocean, with an increasing cooperation framework to make “contributions as a ‘net security provider’ in the maritime neighborhood, including deployments for anti-piracy, maritime security, NEO and HADR

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<sup>1</sup> Bharatiya Janata Party, Sankalp Bharat, Sashakt Bharat, Sankalp Parta Lok Sabha 2019, April 2019, 38.

<sup>2</sup> Rajesh Basrur, “Modi’s Foreign Policy Fundamentals of Trajectory Unchanged,” 21.

operations.”<sup>1</sup> Likewise, the BJP's 2019 election manifesto asserts, “we will strengthen our role as ‘first-responder’ for disaster relief and humanitarian assistance and develop partnerships for disaster resilient infrastructure.”<sup>2</sup> As South Asia is a region beset with frequent natural disasters like earthquake and tsunami, it will be the chief region for the Modi administration to play the role as a “net security provider.”

Third, actively participating in global governance. At the current moment, global governance is seriously lacking or dislocated. The US is willfully withdrawing itself from important international treaties and organizations, undermining the existing international governance architecture. Meanwhile, the new governance issues of climate change, cyberspace, blue seas, and outer space have become more prominent, with the international multilateral trade regime suffering from the erosion wrought by trade hegemonism and the international system undergoing a transition, where the old order is crumbling and the new one is yet to be established. Faced with this scenario, the Modi administration will actively participate in global governance agendas to safeguard its own interests and the interests of other developing countries and to shape its image as the bellwether of the developing countries while also attempting to secure itself a position in the future global governance landscape as a shaper or even leader of global governance (at least on some issues). The major measures of the second Modi administration will include promoting reform in the World Trade Organization (WTO) and hosting the 2022 G20 summit.

## **Challenges**

As India's comprehensive national strength rises, its decision-making mechanisms in foreign policy being optimized, and its geographical advantages becoming more prominent, the resolution and capability of the Modi administration for promoting its diplomatic agenda should not be underestimated. However, Modi's foreign policy approach is faced with

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<sup>1</sup> Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defense (Navy), *Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy, 2015*, 8.

<sup>2</sup> Bharatiya Janata Party, Sankalp Bharat, Sashakt Bharat, Sankalp Bharat Lok Sabha 2019, April 2019, 38.

multiple challenges, both internally and externally.

I. The capacity to promote a diplomatic agenda must be improved. Whether it is pursuing the Neighborhood-First policy or working to obtain leading power status for itself, India must have a reliable basis for support; otherwise, its policy objective will remain a rhetorical expression or an expectation. In its neighborhood diplomacy, India is unable to keep the influence of such outside powers as China and the US from growing in South Asia, nor can it stop small countries in the region from developing cooperative relations with those or other outside powers. Taking that into account, the success of the Neighborhood-First policy depends on its attractiveness to its neighbors and the influence it may have at critical times. India's relations with the countries of South Asia, except Pakistan, all moved forward during Modi's first term, and one important reason for that was that improved interconnectivity increased India's economic attractiveness to its neighbors, and friendly governments appeared in Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. However, the American strategist Ashley Tellis noted that "India has not underwritten the regional assimilation that might have bound its neighbors' material progress and their political choices to its own success and political preferences as China's outward integration has comparably succeeded in East and Southeast Asia."<sup>1</sup>

In his second term, Modi will promote the Neighborhood-First policy within the Indo-Pacific framework, and this move may encounter the risk of dispersing its strategic focus and overdrawing its policy resources, as one scholar has suggested: "in the short term, India's engagement with the Indo-Pacific framework will remain largely diplomatic, economic and rhetorical. India's core strategic focus lies west of the Strait of Malacca."<sup>2</sup> Therefore, it is a priority for the second Modi administration to develop capacity corresponding to its foreign policy as a major power, including continuing to advance the modernization of its

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<sup>1</sup> Ashley J. Tellis, "Troubles Aplenty: Foreign Policy Challenges for the Next Indian Government," May 20, 2019, accessed May 22, 2019, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/05/20/troubles-aplenty-foreign-policy-challenges-for-next-indian-government-pub-79161>.

<sup>2</sup> Rahul Roy-Chaudhury and Kate Sullivan de Estrada, "India, the Indo-Pacific and the Quad," *Survival*, Vol. 60, No. 3 (2018): 181.



military, improving the indigenization of the national defense industry, and concentrating on economic development. However, these endeavors are faced with great challenges. For instance, although India's military expenditures have grown steadily in recent years, much of the increase has gone to the benefits (income expenditures) for service men and women instead to purchasing advanced arms (capital expenditures), which has seriously hampered the modernization of India's military. In the national defense budget for FY2018-2019, the income expenditures totaled 2.04436 trillion rupees, a 34.4 percent increase over FY2015-2016, while the growth in capital expenditures was only 9.3 percent.<sup>1</sup> In the first quarter of 2019, India's GDP grew 5.8 percent, the lowest in five years, while the growth in FY2018-2019 also slumped a five-year low of 6.8 percent,<sup>2</sup> indicating that Modi's second term faces an arduous task of economic development.

II. Managing the ideological dominance of Hindutva is challenging. For the Modi administration, Hindutva is a double-edged sword. On the one hand, it has provided the Modi administration with strong ideological and organizational support from the Sangh Parivar, centering on the RSS, which provided re-election; on the other hand, the Sangh Parivar's growing influence over government policy could have negative effects on domestic ethnic relations, India's economic opening-up, and India-Pakistan relations.

In domestic ethnic relations, the relationship between Hindu and Muslim believers is likely to worsen. As the Gujarat Chief Minister, Modi was accused of inaction during the religious riots that took place there in 2002. In 2014, when Modi was first elected as the prime minister, there were only 22 Muslim members of the Lok Sabha, the lowest in history, and the BJP was the first ruling party since India's independence that did not have one Muslim member. During his first term, Modi pursued social and

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<sup>1</sup> "Budget Dashes Hopes of Modernisation, Says Army Vice-chief," *Times of India*, March 14, 2018, accessed May 15, 2019, <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/mps-panel-slams-govt-for-starving-armed-forces-of-funds/articleshow/63288851.cms>.

<sup>2</sup> "FY2019 Growth Slumps to Five-Year Low of 6.8%," *Economic Times*, June 1, 2019.

educational policies that included banning cattle slaughtering and revising school books to hide or diminish the role played by Islam in India's history, as well as employing coercive tactics in Indian-controlled Kashmir, all of which have intensified the insecurity of domestic Muslims. In the national election of 2019, the number of Muslim members of the Lok Sabha did increase to 27, and the BJP gained one Muslim member. However, throughout the entire evolution of India's domestic politics, beginning with independence, Muslims have always been a politically vulnerable group.<sup>1</sup> The election manifesto of the BJP and the appointments of personnel in the Modi government indicate that the second Modi administration is likely to vigorously implement Hindu nationalist policies, which is likely to provoke religious riots and religious extremism. This will inevitably affect India's international image, India-Pakistan relations, and the state of anti-terror activity in South Asia.

The foreign economic policy of the Modi administration entailed the promotion of reform through opening-up and a growth-through-reform policy, while accommodating conservatives who oppose reform. The Sangh Parivar has always taken a conservative line toward opening-up, as seen in the criticisms of the Vajpayee government as anti-people, anti-worker, anti-national when it opened industries like insurance and media to foreign investment.<sup>2</sup> Although the attitude of the RSS toward opening-up to foreign investment tends to be pragmatic, affiliated groups like the Swadeshi Jagran Manch, the Bharatiya Mazdoor Sangh, and the Bharat Krishak Samaj have expressed reservations on the policy of opening-up to foreign investment that has been pursued by the Modi administration, objecting outright to foreign investment and emphasizing that laborers' rights and interests should be protected. Therefore, the degree of government intervention in economic activity, especially the role of foreign

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<sup>1</sup> "Muslim Representation Increases to 27 from Its Lowest Margin in Previous Lok Sabha," May 26, 2019, accessed June 6, 2019, <https://www.indiatoday.in/elections/lok-sabha-2019/story/muslim-representation-27-lowest-margin-17th-lok-sabha-1534804-2019-05-26>.

<sup>2</sup> "Swadeshi Gives Way to the Reforms Juggernaut," May 27, 2001, accessed June 6, 2019, <https://www.thehindu.com/2001/05/27/stories/05271344.htm>.

investment, has emerged as a major fault line within the Sangh Parivar and between the BJP and other members of the Sangh.<sup>1</sup> As a result, even if the second Modi administration continues to promote opening-up to the outside world, it must be prudent and ensure the rights and interests of the laborers, small and medium-sized enterprises, and peddlers. Otherwise, the BJP's base will be undermined. The Modi government's economic policy would affect India-US economic and trade relations (including tariffs and e-commerce), and India-China development cooperation, as well as whether India will reach the economic strength corresponding to its foreign policy.

III. Maintaining a good balance in relations with the US and China. Early in his first term, Modi actively synergized India's strategy with the US' and worked to enhance India-US bilateral defense and security cooperation, while remaining on guard against China and working against its rise. However, this policy changed somewhat late in his first term, and he began to seek to bet on both sides between China and the US: catering to the Indo-Pacific strategy proposed by the US while stressing differences from the US in its cognition of the Indo-Pacific and pressuring China on the border, Pakistan, terrorism, and the Belt and Road, while stabilizing India—China relations through the Wuhan summit. This tactic of bidding on two sides, or dynamic balance, may enable India to obtain benefit from both sides, but it may also trap the country into annoying both.

During Modi's second term, as the Trump administration follows its America First policy, disparities between India and the US over the reform of the multilateral trade regime, regional issues relating to Iran and Afghanistan, and bilateral issues concerning tariffs and visas are becoming more visible, leading to a state of "hot politics and cold economy" in their relationship and rising anxiety in India over the uncertainties of US policies. Meanwhile, the standoff at Donglang between China and India has, to a large extent, restrained the hawks in the Indian government from pursuing further provocations against China, leading to greater prudence on issues regarding China's core interest and major concerns, while the

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<sup>1</sup> Gautam Mehta, "Hindu Nationalism and the BJP's Economic Record," in *The BJP in Power: Indian Democracy and Religious Nationalism*, ed. Milan Vaishnav, Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 63.

leaders of China and India maintain open communication on issues of a holistic, long-term, and strategic nature, which has guided the development of their bilateral relationship in a positive direction. Therefore, the maturing China-India relationship is not easily to de-rail. As the strategic competition intensifies between China and the US, the disparities between India and the US increase, and the collision of interests between China and India in South Asia grows, it will become more difficult for India to maneuver between China and the US to seek balance. As the American strategist Ashley Tellis stated, “India will have to cope with two different problems where the great powers are concerned: strategic threats posed by Beijing, which only promise to grow in intensity for a long time to come, and geopolitical fickleness on the part of the United States, which will repeatedly call into question New Delhi’s gamble to rely on Washington for help with balancing China.”<sup>1</sup> The former Indian security advisor Shivshankar Menon also wrote, “while maintaining strategic autonomy, India needs to work out new frameworks for its relationships with China and the United States.”<sup>2</sup>

### **Additional Comments**

India is an important strategic force in the Indo-Pacific. As its national strength and decision-making efficiency in foreign policy have risen, its geopolitical advantages have become more significant, and the trend of its foreign policy is exerting an increasing impact in regional and even global states of affairs, which China should observe on three levels: the major country relationship, neighborhood diplomacy, and construction of the Belt and Road.

In the major country relationship, although India, wishing to restrain China’s growing influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean with the help of the US, is an important pivot for US strategic deployment in the

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<sup>1</sup> Ashley J. Tellis, “Troubles Aplenty: Foreign Policy Challenges for the Next Indian Government,” May 20, 2019, accessed May 22, 2019, <https://carnegieendowment.org/2019/05/20/troubles-aplenty-foreign-policy-challenges-for-next-indian-government-pub-79161>.

<sup>2</sup> Shivshankar Menon, “A Secure India, in India 2024: Policy Priorities for the New Government,” Brookings India, May 2019.

Indian Ocean, it is the least-committed member of the Quad, and it is unlikely to give up its strategic autonomy in its cooperation with the group, restricting participation to tactical questions. Therefore, India is where China may achieve a breakthrough. In neighborhood diplomacy, India's Neighborhood-First policy, in an Indo-Pacific perspective, includes Central Asia, South Asia, and Southeast Asia, which are all also within China's neighborhood. Hence, China and India may meet in competition for their separate interests (particularly in South Asia). However, this will likewise provide room for cooperation in promoting regional connectivity and building a stable neighborhood. With regard to the Belt and Road Initiative, South Asia constitutes its sea-land conjunction, but India appears uninterested in joining in due to its concerns on the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor and that China will pursue the pearl chain strategy by forging ahead on the Maritime Silk Road for the 21st Century. Nevertheless, a shared interest does exist between China and India in promoting infrastructure development and practical maritime cooperation.

In sum, India's foreign policy re-orientation during Modi's second term is both an opportunity and challenge for China. China must maintain strategic composure, managing and controlling the major strategic difference between the two countries in accordance with the changes in India's domestic politics and its policy; upholding openness, inclusiveness, and reciprocity; and forging a closer development partnership with India, to turn India into a positive factor for China to carry out practical cooperation in line with its major country diplomacy, neighborhood diplomacy, and the Belt and Road Initiative.

*(edited by Li Xin)*