George Perkovich

# Is India a Major Power?

Kenneth Waltz provided a useful, colloquial definition of power as the "extent that [one] affects others more than they affect [oneself]." A state's power can thus be understood as a combination of its capacity to influence others to behave as it wants them to and, conversely, to resist the unwelcome influence of others.[1] India today lacks great power in that, for the most part, it cannot make other important states comply with Indian demands. Nor can India obtain all that it desires in the international arena. It cannot compel or persuade technology suppliers to ignore nonproliferation strictures and supply new power reactors to the country, nor can it alone win preferred trade terms in World Trade Organization (WTO) negotiations. India cannot persuade others to isolate Pakistan and probably cannot gain a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council in the foreseeable future. Yet, India does have the capacity to resist most if not all demands placed upon it by other states, including the recognized major powers.

Like any state, India's capacity to affect others and to resist undesired influence results from the country's various forms of hard and soft power. These forms of power include military strength, social cohesion and mobilization, economic resources, technological capacity, quality of governance, and diplomatic and intelligence acumen. A careful analysis of India in each of these realms confirms that the country has just enough power to resist the influence of others but must still make great strides before it can attain significant power over other states and thus in the international system at large. Yet, India is home to so many people that achieving socioeconomic development and internal peace through democratic means would be a great

George Perkovich is vice president for studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, in Washington, D.C., and author of *India's Nuclear Bomb*.


*The Washington Quarterly* • 27:1 pp. 129–144.

global triumph. India is more populous and diverse than the United States, Canada, Mexico, Central America, South America, France, Germany, and the United Kingdom combined. Getting India "right" would be a manifestation of great global power; failing to meet the aspirations of India's citizenry would consign India to the world's middle ranks.

## Socioeconomic Indicators

The material well-being and productivity of a society sets the conditions for its international power. A poor, conflicted society will lack global muscle or respect. A prospering one will command resources and authority to make others pay it heed.

A country's per capita gross domestic product (GDP) is a useful indicator of its socioeconomic health and prospects. A relatively low GDP for a country typically indicates that its citizens have many unfulfilled longings and aspirations for basic socioeconomic goods, which in turn establishes priorities and major challenges for its government. The governments of poor countries must scramble for resources to meet basic needs and stem social discontent that can threaten internal order. Such governments are pleaders for international assistance more than positive influencers of global affairs. Simply put, states with low per capita GDP struggle to translate their aggregate productivity into effective international power. Ranking near the bottom of per capita GDP comparisons of regional and global powers, India's estimated 2002 per capita GDP was $2,540, measured in purchasing power parity (PPP) (the value of goods and services that could be bought in the United States with the dollar equivalent of the Indian per capita GDP). In 2002, China's per capita GDP was $4,600, and Brazil's was $7,600. The Indian government, therefore, still faces the great challenge of mobilizing the Indian population to achieve significant domestic objectives. This is a precondition for wielding economic, political, or military power in shaping the direction of the international system.

> India cannot make other important states comply with Indian demands.

Other measures help evaluate states' socioeconomic health and prospects. The UN Human Development Index (HDI) provides an additional means for evaluating states' socioeconomic status by assessing how states meet their citizens' basic needs, which in turn affects current and potential economic productivity. The HDI is composed of four variables: life expectancy at birth, adult literacy rate, school enrollment, and GDP per capita

(PPP in U.S. dollars). India ranks 115 out of 162 countries for which data were available. In comparison, India's National Security Council Secretariat uses a variant of this index called the Population Index, which takes a country's population and multiplies it by its HDI coefficient, with the aim of adjusting the ranking of a state's population to take into account the development (including life expectancy, literacy, and education) of that population. By this index, India ranks second, behind China and two positions ahead of the United States. Despite its low per capita GDP, India has enjoyed a sound growth rate over the last decade, with an average 5.9 percent increase in annual GDP growth since 1992–1993. The rate of poverty alleviation, however, has been only a bit more than 1 percent per year.

**India does have the capacity to resist demands placed upon it by other states.**

A 2002 study by World Bank economist Martin Ravallion explains that India's economic growth, which has largely been driven by services, has not significantly helped alleviate poverty because the bulk of India's poor live in rural villages that depend on agriculture, which lags behind the overall level of economic growth.[2] India's decade of improved economic growth has occurred chiefly in regions that are already better off, while the poorest parts of the country have experienced the least growth and development. Yet even within the rural sector, some regions utilize what little economic growth there is to lower poverty while others do not.

To achieve the level of economic development that can raise the quality of life of all Indians, especially the poor, the nation must average at least 7–8 percent annual growth during the next decade.[3] Attaining such desired levels of growth requires the Indian government, at the national and state levels, to provide the infrastructural, health, and educational resources necessary to improve the capacities of the 25 percent of Indians who remain impoverished. Indian states with programs that effectively promote literacy and health care, especially for women, reportedly experience higher rates of economic growth. States with higher-quality rural roads, irrigation, and other infrastructure also have higher rates of per capita GDP. Unfortunately, according to Ravallion, no state in India has developed good rural infrastructure and human resource programs.[4] Few challenges, therefore, are as important to India's power potential as rural development.

Education should also improve a society's prospects for increasing economic productivity. Here, India seems bifurcated. It possesses world-class scientific and technological education institutions but still has a vast undereducated population. The Indian Institutes of Technology graduate a

large number of engineers, programmers, and technicians who drive India's and, through emigration, the world's information technology sectors. The Indian Institute of Sciences and other higher education institutions have produced thousands of top-class scientists, earning India recognition as a world-class player in at least three vitally important sectors of the twenty-first-century global economy: information technology, biotechnology, and space. At the same time, however, India is miserably deficient at providing primary education to its large population. Much of India's workforce lacks the basic knowledge and skills required to be effective in a modern industrial and service economy.[5] With 60 percent of the population tied to agriculture, the lack of adequate rural schooling, especially for girls, imposes a major handicap on India's prospects.

India is thus caught in a vicious cycle. With the aggregate central and state government deficit running at a debilitating 10 percent of GDP since 1998, interest payments on this debt comprise the single-largest government expense. Fiscal debt servicing combines with defense spending and subsidies to total 60 percent of the budget. Insufficient funds remain for necessary investments in health, primary education, and infrastructure. Economists have identified several methods to reduce the fiscal deficit, but in a democracy, interest groups mobilize to block each of these pathways to fiscal solvency.[6] India's emergence as a major global power will depend significantly on whether state and society can simultaneously mobilize investment to improve the capacities of its poor and reduce the country's fiscal deficit.

## International Trade

Greater participation in international trade, particularly increased exporting, can boost national income significantly as well as enhance a state's power by making others depend on it, either as a buyer or provider of key desired goods and services. On the other hand, trading partners can subject an internationally engaged state to influences. Still, theory and history suggest that trade heightens efficiency and wealth production, suggesting a correlation between share of world trade and power potential. India's small share, accounting for less than 1 percent of world trade in goods and services, has not prevented recent healthy levels of economic growth, but it does impede India's acquisition of international power as a major importer and/or exporter.[7]

Nevertheless, certain Indian corporations, largely in the information and biotechnology sectors, have become global leaders. Outstandingly managed Indian information technology firms account for much of the growth in India's foreign trade; exports grew at an 11 percent annual average from

1993 through 2001.[8] These private firms, which arose without government control or subsidy, also can be a model for other Indian entrepreneurs and object lessons for politicians about the relative virtue of private over state-owned or -managed enterprise. As Yasheng Huang and Tarun Khanna recently concluded, the success of Indian companies may indicate that India's long-term economic prospects are greater than China's.[9] According to Huang and Khanna's analysis, China's receipt of large amounts of foreign direct investment reflects a relative absence of domestic entrepreneurship and therefore signifies weakness as well as strength. Unlike China, India has only recently encouraged nonresident nationals to invest in "the motherland." If investment in existing firms grows, India will benefit much more than if investment were directed, as in China, to manufacturing platforms of nonindigenous corporations.

> Failing to meet India's citizenry's aspirations would consign it to be a middle power.

The fact that India and China are neighbors, competitors, and global colossi makes comparisons inevitable. Yet, economic comparisons overlook the vital qualitative distinction of India's democracy. Although political evolution may (or may not) bring unforeseeable destabilizing changes to China, India's economic progress is likely to be more sustainable for having been democratically produced. Most importantly, though, the political freedom and justice available in India are profoundly valuable in their own right. The ultimate measure of a state and society is the quality of life enjoyed by its members, not calories consumed, television hours watched, or automobile rides enjoyed. Simply put, power is ultimately a means, not an end; improving the quality of life for India's citizens is the goal.

## State Capacity and Political Cohesion

A second category of state power, beyond economics, is governmental capacity and political cohesion. This category includes variables such as what one study called a state's "capacity to set goals," the "extent of elite cohesion," "relative power of social groups," the capacity of the state to collect higher levels of taxes from direct levies versus taxes on trade, and so on.[10] A state with a disgruntled or dissident citizenry will divert precious resources to impose order and will not be able to mobilize the full creativity and energy of its people. India's vibrant representative democracy allows its diverse citizenry to mobilize and pursue their interests through constitutionally regulated politics. At the same time, however, the incomprehensible caste,

economic, religious, ideological, and geographic tensions among this citizenry make it extremely difficult to mobilize the nation as a whole in a decisive direction. The recent rise of militant and intolerant majoritarian demands by Hindu chauvinists, which often seem directed at the country's 150 million Muslims, highlights the challenge.

As a functioning democratic political system, India has performed with mixed results. The polity's forward direction has been handicapped by communal violence, secessionism, corruption, and myriad conflicting interests. This record should not be underestimated, however, for no state in history has been as populous, diverse, stratified, poor, and at the same time democratic as India. The attempt to resolve all of India's internal conflicts through democratically representative government, almost by definition, leads to middling outcomes.[11] Specifically, India's representative institutions often preserve rough order by canceling out competing factional interests, resulting in lowest-common-denominator policies that deprive the nation of clear direction, as in economic reforms.

Few challenges are as important to India's power potential as rural development.

The particular conflicts India confronts today include the mobilization of historically disadvantaged groups within electoral politics; politically organized lower castes and *dalits* competing with each other and opposing upper castes; entrenched criminals in politics in several high-population states; fragmented national political parties; violence between Hindus and Muslims; and the emergence of Hindutva, or Hindu nationalism, as the most important ideological challenge to the secular constitutional vision of the liberal state.[12] Each of these phenomena involves competition to acquire the power and patronage of government offices. The practical aim is less to stimulate economic growth or pursue the common good than to acquire government jobs and to distribute state resources to allies.

Meanwhile, the imperatives of economic liberalization and globalization require diminishing the role of government in overall national activity, setting up a dilemma for New Delhi. On one hand, an active, representative democracy gives long-disadvantaged groups opportunities to mobilize and compete for control of government and, therefore, patronage. On the other hand, unregulated private markets do not provide such clear avenues for the disadvantaged to advance, potentially intensifying political conflict. Yet, it is private enterprises that offer the greatest potential to create jobs and growth and to meet the demands of global investors and liberalization, potentially improving the size of the overall economy along the way.

India's current central government reveals conflicting attempts to do both. While national economic reformers seek to increase the size of the overall economy, the Hindu chauvinist base of the ruling Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and other regional and caste-based parties emphasize issues related more to the allocation of resources among groups. In other words, powerful Hindu-nationalist groups such as the Rashtriya Swayamesevak Sangh (RSS) and the Vishwa Hindu Parishad (VHP) seek to overcome what they perceive as the self-denying effects of diversity by imposing a dominant character and direction in Indian politics. Others feel that the militant Hindu agenda will disadvantage them. Caste-based parties compete to protect and provide benefits to their members. The definition of a clear and widely accepted common good remains elusive.

The carnage in Gujarat last year dramatizes the stakes at hand in the conflict over the identity of the Indian nation and state. Although exact details remain disputed, perhaps as many as 2,000 Muslims were killed in a pogrom following the burning of 58 Hindu campaigners on a train that stopped in the town of Godhra. The BJP-led state authorities in Gujarat failed to stop the violence for several days, a failure that many allege was purposeful. India's manifold diversity precludes easy conclusions about the likely outcome of the campaign for Hindu majoritarian direction of India's polity and the clashes this stimulates. The BJP aspires for sustained national leadership. This ambition requires it to temper its social agenda to attract diverse political partners into the coalition it needs to rule the central government. Among the BJP's 22 current coalition partners, many do not subscribe to Hindutva. Geographically, the Hindutva movement draws its strength primarily from northern Indian states and is anathema to many in the south, adding a geographic fault line to the communal one.

Achin Vanaik, an eminent social observer, has argued that a campaign for cultural nationalism of any kind contravenes the very essence of India's democratic nationalism, which seeks to "try and build a sense of Indianness which recognizes and respects the fact that there are different ways of being and feeling Indian, and that it is precisely these plural and diverse sources of a potential nationalism that constitute India's strength."[13] Thus, at the same time that India is generating the material economic and military resources to become a major global power, the Indian political system struggles to clarify the nation's essential identity. The very character and conduct of this struggle will profoundly affect India's cohesion and stability. India's stability and particularly the relations between the Hindu majority and enormous Muslim minority also will affect the way the rest of the world regards India. In a world looking for models of harmony between Muslims and non-Muslims and seeking secure, predictably governed markets for investment,

India's management of its internal tensions will affect its attractiveness to the international community.

Will India gain greater global respect as a decidedly Hindu nation in a twenty-first-century world defined in terms of civilizations?[14] Or, as the writer Raja Mohan has suggested, will India win global power and respect as a carrier of the Enlightenment project of scientific rationalism, individual liberty, and constitutional protection of rights into Asia? Either course is possible. Yet, if analysts of international power are correct, then the most empowering course will be the one that provides the greatest mass of the Indian populace with the education, infrastructure, and political-economic liberty and security necessary to lead productive lives. The most successful course will be the one that strengthens the cohesion and allegiance of the greatest number of India's diverse citizens and groups. In an inherently pluralistic society, pluralism, not cultural nationalism, offers the only viable model to release the creative energies of a vast population. The alternative is civil conflict and disorder that make other major powers chary of investing economic or political capital in ties with India. Moreover, as the international community struggles to redress the increasingly violent alienation of Muslims, an India that successfully integrates its enormous Muslim population will gain major soft power as an exemplar.

## Military-Security Indicators

Measuring military power is more complicated than it might seem. First, for the measurement to be meaningful, a requirement must exist against which to measure the state's military power. What are the threats the military is to deter or defeat? Second, measuring effectiveness itself is difficult. War provides a true empirical test, but states would like to know the effectiveness of their military before they enter war. Expenditures can be measured easily but do not necessarily indicate military effectiveness, and numbers of men under arms and numbers of tanks, aircraft, and ships do not necessarily connote fighting effectiveness. Although all states might naturally desire absolute security—confidence that no adversary or combination of adversaries could do one any harm—in the real world, states settle for relative security. In addition, the degree of security a state practically seeks depends largely on its basic capabilities at a given time. In other words, a state's security ambitions can grow as its power potential grows.

India's military security challenges begin at home, with internal security against insurgents and terrorists. The next and most dramatic ring of the threat circle encompasses Pakistan. India seeks to deter or defeat Pakistani support of subversion within India, including most prominently in the state

of Jammu and Kashmir. India also must deter or defeat Pakistani attempts to escalate the conflict between the two countries. India strives to retain a free hand to punish Pakistani violence by imposing greater losses on Pakistan than Pakistan imposes on India. This amounts to a battle for dominance of the potential escalatory process. India also requires the capacity to deter or physically deny China from coercively blackmailing India into an unacceptable resolution of their border dispute. Next, India seeks to protect its sea lines of communication to the east toward Indochina and to the west through the Arabian Sea and the Indian Ocean. Importantly, India's aims are not to acquire additional territory or, with the possible exception of Pakistan, to coerce others to meet Indian demands. Rather, India wishes to preserve India's autonomy and to receive the prestige and political influence that come with military capacity.

**India's long-term economic prospects may be greater than China's.**

India recently has increased significantly its expenditure on and accumulation of military instruments. Its budget for fiscal year 2003–2004 raises defense spending by 17 percent, the fourth consecutive year of annual defense budget increases greater than 12 percent. In the last three years, India has signed at least $4 billion worth of contracts with Russia to purchase advanced military equipment. These purchases reflect India's accretion of foreign reserves, its government's desire to manifest muscle, and the legacy of the 1999 Kargil war with Pakistan and subsequent war scares following terrorist attacks on India.

When Indian leaders tested nuclear weapons in May 1998, many Indians felt that their country finally had entered the ranks of the major powers. Indian scientists and engineers have continued to increase the state's stockpile of nuclear materials and weapons, and the country is currently estimated to possess 40 or more nuclear weapons. The technical composition of India's nuclear arsenal remains publicly unclear, including how many, if any, of these weapons are thermonuclear, boosted-fission, or fission. India's capacity to deliver nuclear weapons also continues to expand; fighter-bomber aircraft remain the principal means of delivery. India is also developing and deploying at least three models of mobile ballistic missiles, the short-range Prithvi and the Agni I and Agni II, with longer-range Agni IIIs and IVs on the drawing board.

Yet, nuclear weapons are not sufficient to make a major power. Otherwise, Pakistan too would qualify as a major power, as would Israel and perhaps North Korea. In today's world, nuclear weapons are illegitimate, and thus ineffective, tools for coercing non–nuclear-weapon states. Nuclear

weapons could not help France achieve its aims in Algeria, nor the United States in Korea or Vietnam, nor the Soviet Union in Afghanistan, nor China vis-à-vis Taiwan. The sole effective use of nuclear weapons is to deter other states from using nuclear weapons, but this deterrent, although important, does not alone make a great power. Nuclear weapons cannot grow an economy, gain international market share, or win political support for a nation's demands to shape the political-economic order. Israel, India, Pakistan, and North Korea may possess nuclear weapons, but their political-economic problems and inability to transcend local conflicts and become net producers of international security prevent them from being major powers.

**Nuclear weapons are not sufficient to make a major power.**

Neither nuclear weapons nor a recent dramatic increase in conventional military procurement, largely from Russia, has freed India from Pakistani security threats. India's growing military and economic strength heightens the nation's frustrated desire to "teach Pakistan a lesson once and for all," but Indian statesmen also recognize that Pakistan's nuclear weapons make decisive military intervention to punish Pakistan enormously risky. Consequently, India must accept relatively manageable insecurity regarding Pakistan.

India passionately seeks to decouple, or de-hyphenate, Pakistan from India. The world's usual treatment of the two states as twins diminishes India. Indians (and many others) believe that India is superior to Pakistan in every category except one: nuclear weapons. Unfortunately for India and the world, however, nuclear weapons are great deterrent equalizers. The world fears the humanitarian horror that nuclear weapons could unleash in South Asia as well as the potential disorder it could bring to the international system. Thus, when Pakistan, or terrorist groups affiliated with it, instigate a crisis in Kashmir and India responds by threatening military retaliation, the world worries that the escalatory process could result in nuclear war. This fearful reaction might very well play into Pakistan's interest. Pakistan traditionally has wanted the United States to fear the potential for nuclear war over Kashmir so that Washington would intervene to compel India to offer better terms for an Indo-Pakistani settlement than Pakistan could obtain by itself through diplomacy with India. India recognizes this and refuses to play into the Pakistani strategy, insisting instead that India can and will retaliate heavily against any Pakistani aggression. The problem is that Pakistan's refusal to be deterred makes it difficult for the United States and others to discount the likelihood of nuclear warfare resulting from a military crisis. Nuclear weapons thus give Pakistan the capacity to stay in the game, to

continue to pop up and grab India by the *dhoti*. Neither the United States nor India has the power to compel Pakistan to do otherwise. Nor can the United States or India take over Pakistan, and neither would benefit from economically strangulating Pakistan. Thus, neither country can escape from the reality that it has to deal with Pakistan.

Finally, the prominence and power of the Pakistani army, intelligence services, and jihadists arguably will not diminish as long as the prominence and power of Hindu militants continues to rise in India. Fundamentally opposed, the internal dynamics of Islamic extremism and Hindu chauvinism feed on each other. Pakistanis cite the menacing rhetoric and occasional violence of the RSS and VHP as proof that Hindus are out to destroy Muslims and, of course, Pakistan. The RSS and VHP, in turn, use the prominence of Islamist parties and terrorist organizations in Pakistan as proof that Muslims are evil. Pursuit of the Hindutva agenda only tightens the handcuffs, or the infamous hyphen, connecting Pakistan and India. Thus, pluralist liberalism, not cultural nationalism, provides the path toward growing India's power, not only by improving India's internal stability and cohesion but also by negating the Pakistani argument that Hindu-majority India is inveterately hostile to Muslims. This is necessary, but not sufficient, to liberate India from Pakistan.

Regarding China, India finds itself on a more positive trajectory. India's growing economic, military, and diplomatic strength, combined with China's desire to concentrate on internal political-economic development, induces Beijing to improve relations with New Delhi. India's rather astute cultivation of better ties with the United States and China has encouraged Beijing to seek better relations with India so that India should not align closely with the United States against China. New Delhi and Beijing thus augment their national military capabilities while simultaneously engaging in mutual diplomatic reassurance.

The June 2003 visit of Indian prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee to China highlighted the positive profile of Sino-Indian relations. Only the fourth-ever Indian prime minister to visit China and the first since Narasimha Rao in 1993, Vajpayee and the Chinese leaders he met evinced increased will to negotiate a resolution of the Sino-Indian border dispute and heralded the growing priority of economics in the bilateral relationship. They pledged to double bilateral trade within two years and to act in concert in WTO negotiations. The two states may be in a process of recognizing that their real priorities are internal development, influencing neighbors other than each other, and managing hegemonic U.S. power. Both would gain time, calm, and resources to attend to these priorities if they received assurances that their bilateral relationship was stable. Hence, India and China are steadily building each other's confidence. Both countries' international power will

increase to the extent that they divert fewer resources and less political energy to standing up to each other and concentrate more on growing their economies, reforming their troubled states, and helping to meet global challenges such as AIDS, terrorism, and climate change.

## Strategic Diplomacy

Statecraft can increase or decrease a country's influence relative to its material capabilities. The combination of leadership, strategic vision and tactics, moral example and suasion, and diplomatic acumen can earn a state great international influence. So, too, a state's power grows to the extent that it has authority in international institutions that set rules for state behavior—military, economic, political—and shape international responses to threats to peace and security. The UN Security Council is the most obvious such institution, along with the WTO and the international financial institutions.

The potency of India's statecraft has ebbed and flowed in decades-long tides. The currently rising tide follows decades of trough after the years of Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru. The overt demonstration of India's nuclear-weapon capabilities seems to have heightened Indian leaders' confidence in developing and prosecuting an international diplomatic strategy. Since 1998, under the leadership of Vajpayee and Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh, India has displayed new vigor and imagination in its interactions with the United States, China, Pakistan, Russia, the European Union, and other counterparts.[15]

In early 2003, Indian leaders showed how far their strategic and diplomatic acumen has evolved since the days of knee-jerk moralistic denunciations of U.S. power. India did not support the decision of President George W. Bush to intervene militarily in Iraq. Indians have felt to a large extent that the United States displays disingenuousness or even hypocrisy in waging war against Saddam Hussein as a terrorist while supporting Pakistani president Gen. Pervez Musharraf. In Indian eyes, Pakistan is a greater source of terrorism than Iraq. Whereas Indian leaders in decades past would have blasted the United States in morally laden denunciations, New Delhi in 2003 displayed diplomatic savoir faire by keeping a low profile on the issue. "India has not been happy with the United States because of its inability to pressure Pakistan on cross-border terrorism and lifting of sanctions," an Indian official declared, "but the government did not go beyond saying that it was 'disappointed' over the move. The government was not going by the sentiment; national interest weighed supreme in the minds of decisionmakers."[16] Vajpayee summed up the new statesmanship tellingly: "We have to take the totality of the situation into consideration and craft an approach which is

consistent with both our principles and our long-term national interest. Our words, actions, and diplomatic efforts should be aimed at trying to achieve pragmatic goals, rather than creating rhetorical effect. Quiet diplomacy is far more effective than public posturing."[17] This insight, if applied regularly, could greatly increase India's influence in the halls of global power.

Yet, democracy makes such dispassionate diplomacy difficult. As the United States encountered unexpected difficulties securing Iraq, Washington quietly beseeched India to supply an army division to work with U.S. forces in the country. The Indian army has proved adept at such missions, and the Vajpayee government, recognizing the goodwill such a contribution would earn in Washington, indicated its desire to supply the force Washington sought. Nevertheless, Indian politics ultimately prevented the government from joining with the Bush administration. The Indian public and especially many political parties resented the rhetoric and intentions of a Bush administration that was widely perceived as arrogant, unilateral, and militaristic. Worse, Indians felt that the administration was hypocritically self-centered to India's disadvantage: if the United States was leading a war against terrorism, why did it coddle Pakistan—a great source of terror not only against India but also against the United States? Faced with a looming year of elections, the Indian government did not want to join with such an unpopular U.S. leadership and cause.

**Pluralist liberalism, not cultural nationalism, provides the path toward growing India's power.**

India's complicated interests and attitudes also limit the government's effectiveness in international institutions and regimes. India has displayed an ambivalent attitude toward negotiations to liberalize global trade, a position that reflects diverse economic interests. The Indian service sector would benefit from freer global markets for its exports. Indian agriculture, in which 60 percent of the population toils, mainly on small plots, and with almost no safety nets to protect displaced farmers, could be harmed by surges of subsidized imports. As agriculture and old-styled manufacturing industries express their interests through the political process, Indian trade diplomats must tread cautiously. In the November 2001 WTO negotiations at Doha, India appeared the primary impediment to a stronger international consensus favoring liberalization. Fairly or not, the richer countries, particularly the United States, felt that the chief Indian negotiator, Murasoli Maran, typified an old, unwelcome, and counterproductive Indian style of moralism and doggedness. In contrast, in the September 2003 WTO negotiations in

Cancun, India worked closely with China and Brazil to lead a 21-country bloc to press the United States, the EU, and Japan to accommodate developing country interests more fully in the supposed Development Round of trade talks. If India can help maintain cohesion and constructive direction in this bloc, its international power will grow as the richest states in the system will have to be more forthcoming in dealing with this new bloc that represents half the world's population.

The international nonproliferation regime represents another arena for Indian diplomacy. Here, India has conflicting interests. It opposes the further spread of nuclear weapons and other weapons of mass destruction. It also wants to be recognized as a nuclear-weapon state and to be freed of export denials and other limitations related to India's nonmembership in the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). Indian leaders exhort the United States and others to remove bars to nuclear and other technology transfers to India. The United States, Japan, and others resist, arguing that removing limitations on India would reward proliferation and undermine the interests of the 180-plus states that have forsworn nuclear weapons through adherence to the NPT. Current evidence does not allow a sound prediction of how India and the world will fare on this matter.

Finally, India, similar to other states, regards a permanent seat on the UN Security Council as a measure of major power. Yet, India would be unlikely to win a vote to award it such a seat, either from the current Security Council members or the General Assembly. The greatest realpolitik problem is that China, if forced to choose, would likely vote against an Indian bid in the interest of maintaining its own advantage and blocking a gain by its greatest long-term rival for power status in Asia. Beijing also likely would be sympathetic to Pakistan's pleas to prevent India from being elevated. Pakistan might also be able to rally other Muslim majority states to block India in the General Assembly. More broadly, India's long position as a moralistic, contrarian loner in the international community has not excited others about the prospect of working with India at the apex of the UN system. Furthermore, the Security Council is the ultimate enforcer of the NPT; India's nonmembership in this treaty puts it in an awkward position, say, to vote on sanctions or use of force against actors newly seeking to acquire nuclear weapons. One measure of Indian diplomacy in the future will be how it either lowers the value of a seat on the Security Council or alternatively how it attains a seat.

## Is India a Major Power?

From the standpoint of the United States, India has neither the interest nor the power to contest Washington across the board. Nor does India have the

interest or power to augment U.S. interests in many areas. Yet, India is too big and too important in the overall global community to measure in terms of its alignment with any particular U.S. interest at any given time. It matters to the entire world whether India is at war or peace with its neighbors, is producing increasing prosperity or poverty for its citizens, stemming or incubating the spread of infectious diseases, or mimicking or leapfrogging climate-warming technologies. Democratically managing a society as big, populous, diverse, and culturally dynamic as India is a world historical challenge. If India can democratically lift all of its citizens to a decent quality of life without trampling on basic liberties and harming its neighbors, the Indian people will have accomplished perhaps the greatest success in human history.

India will struggle to do this largely on its own, disabused of notions that the United States or others might help without asking anything in return. This capacity to do things on one's own is autonomy, a form of power that India has achieved to its great credit. To go further and make others do what one wants them to do through payment, coercion, or persuasion is a more demanding measure of power. Iraq raises questions whether even the United States has this power. India, to be great, has more urgent things to do.

## Notes

1. Kenneth Waltz, *Theory of International Politics* (Reading, Penn.: Addison-Wesley, 1979), pp. 191–192.
2. Martin Ravallion, presentation to the Brookings Institution-Carnegie Endowment for International Peace conference "Making Globalization Work," December 2, 2002, pp. 7–8 (transcript of panel 1) (hereinafter Ravallion presentation). See Martin Ravallion and Gaurav Datt, "Why Has Economic Growth Been More Pro-Poor in Some States of India than Others?" *Journal of Development Economics* 68 (2002): 381–400, http://poverty.worldbank.org/files/13995_JDE2002.pdf (accessed October 28, 2003).
3. Sanjaya Baru, "The Strategic Consequences of India's Economic Performance," in *India's National Security Annual Review 2002*, ed. Satish Kumar (New Delhi: India Research Press, 2003), p. 177.
4. Ravallion presentation.
5. Pradeep Agarwal et al., *Policy Regimes and Industrial Competitiveness: A Comparative Study of East Asia and India* (Houndmills, UK: Macmillan, 2000), p. 272.
6. Leading debt-reduction options are to reduce the size of government by cutting payrolls and privatizing state enterprises or, alternatively, increase the productivity of government workers and enterprises; attract foreign investment, particularly in infrastructure; or increase tax collections, not necessarily tax rates.
7. Baru, "Strategic Consequences of India's Economic Performance," p. 191.
8. T. N. Srinivasan and Suresh D. Tendulkar, *Reintegrating India with the World Economy* (Washington, D.C.: Institute for International Economics, 2003), p. 28.

9. Yasheng Huang and Tarun Khanna, "Can India Overtake China?" *Foreign Policy* (July–August 2003): 74–81.
10. Ashley J. Tellis et al., *Measuring National Power in the Postindustrial Age* (RAND, 2000), pp. 22–27.
11. B. R. Nayar and T. V. Paul, *India in the World Order: Searching for Major-Power Status* (New York: Cambridge University Press, 2003), p. 60; Francine Frankel, "Contextual Democracy: Intersections of Society, Culture and Politics in India," in *Transforming India*, eds. Francine Frankel et al. (New Delhi: Oxford University Press, 2000), p. 20.
12. Frankel, "Contextual Democracy," p. 5.
13. Achin Vanaik, "Interface between Democracy, Diversity and Stability," in *Democracy, Diversity, Stability*, eds. D. D. Khanna, L. L. Mehrotra, and Gert W. Kueck (New Delhi: MacMillan India Ltd., 1998), p. 301.
14. Using Samuel Huntington's controversial categories, the world can be seen as divided along the following civilizational lines: Western, Latin American, African, Islamic, Sinic, Hindu, Orthodox, Buddhist, and Japanese. Samuel Huntington, *The Clash of Civilizations and the Remaking of World Order* (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1996).
15. For a more thorough discussion of these developments, see George Perkovich, *India's Nuclear Bomb: The Impact on Global Proliferation* (Berkeley, Calif.: University of California Press, 2001), pp. 495–501 (paperback ed.).
16. Sanjay Singh, "Thin Red Line: New Delhi's Balancing Act," *Pioneer*, March 23, 2003.
17. Ibid.