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The Evolution of Indian Multilateralism: From High Ground to High Table

The path to international recognition and respect has not been an easy one for India. A lack of material resources and military capability prevented post-independence India from staking a credible claim to its place in the 'diplomatic sun'.[1] The Cold War offered shelter through alliances but threatened India's newfound independence, which it was unwilling to compromise, at least in principle. During those early years, India turned to multilateral forums as a way of magnifying its influence, *faute de mieux*.

From idealist moralizer to often-pragmatic dealmaker, India's transition within multilateral diplomacy mirrors its rise—second only to China—from the confines of severe poverty and underdevelopment. India's voice carries more weight today in multilateral forums largely due to its enhanced economic performance, political stability, and nuclear capability. Although many of its internal problems—including ethnic separatism, insurgency, poverty, inequality, minority rights, corruption, and poor governance—remain only partially addressed, on the international stage India now exerts real if still tentative geostrategic and economic influence. The assertion that 'the world concludes that India is a ''predictable player'' with enduring national interests'[2] may be premature, but major powers in the international system are eager today to engage with India.

As India's stature has grown, its stake in some forms of multilateralism has diminished. In several international forums, India increasingly engages with smaller groups of powerful nations to affect outcomes at the expense of the more broad-based universalist approach it traditionally espoused (or claimed to) in multilateral forums. India also today often prefers conducting business bilaterally with major actors such as the United States, China, the EU, Japan, and Russia. In organizations rooted in solidarity between members, such as the Non-Aligned Movement, and even in the Commonwealth (of which

Kamalesh Sharma, an Indian, became Secretary-General in 2009) India of late has seemed somewhat detached.

India's growing predilection for global governance by oligarchy—be it as part of the Five Interested Parties in the World Trade Organization (WTO), the BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India, China) group at the Copenhagen climate change negotiations of 2009, or the G-4 coalition of countries (Brazil, Germany, India, Japan) demanding permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC)—is striking as is its experimentation with a number of new groupings, often excluding the Western powers. Ironically, by eschewing genuine multilateralism in favour of power elites and strategic partnerships, India is buying into a strategy developed largely by the United States, Russia, China, and several West European powers to co-manage international economic and, to a lesser degree, security systems. However, India has not yet displayed that it is willing to assume much responsibility within these systems (as opposed to bilaterally with some states). Further, its shift to adopting the attitudes of a self-interested power focused overwhelmingly on economic prosperity for itself (however it seeks to dress up this position rhetorically) jars with its traditions. Public opinion in India may well be ready for this transition, but it is unclear whether much of India's establishment is.

The rest of this chapter first traces the evolution of India's approach to multilateralism over the last six decades, and then focuses on four substantive fields of foreign policy or forums of significance to India's multilateral stance during this period of global (and Indian) transition and flux: the UNSC; the WTO and its Doha Round negotiations culminating in 2008; international efforts to combat climate change, notably prior to and at the Copenhagen UN conference of late 2009; and some emerging international groupings of states in which India is playing an active role or seeking to.

From High Ground to High Table

Post-independence India immediately became an active participant in the multilateral system, at that time composed largely of the UN and its associated organizations. In spite of its status as a British colony, India had gained original membership of both the United Nations and its predecessor, the League of Nations. It also rapidly adhered to the many institutions associated with the UN, including the IMF and World Bank, and also some others such as the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT).

The philosophy embodied in the UN Charter resonated deeply with independent India. In September 1946, Nehru professed 'unreserved adherence, in both spirit and letter' to the UN Charter and committed to 'play that role in [UN] councils to which [India's] geographical position, population and

contribution towards peaceful progress entitle her'.[3] Parts of the Indian Constitution that laid out the principles of state policy with regard to international affairs reflected noticeably the principles of the UN Charter extolling the promotion of peace and security, international law, and settlement of international disputes through arbitration.[4]

Kashmir, 1947–8

However, Delhi experienced a major setback at the UN on the issue of Kashmir in the winter of 1947. Faced with the choice of unilaterally repelling the Pakistani attack and militarily consolidating India's hold on the erstwhile princely state, or referring the matter to the UN, Nehru chose the latter option. Much to his disappointment, the United States and Britain—both exercising considerable influence in the UNSC—failed to endorse India's claim to Kashmir, instead insisting on a plebiscite of the state's population. India realized belatedly that 'the Security Council was a strictly political body and that decisions were taken by its members on the basis of their perspective of their national interest and not on the merits of any particular case'.[5]

The Kashmir episode permanently coloured Indian thinking on the United Nations. Since then India has been loath to allow any form of multilateral intervention, not just in Kashmir but in the South Asian region, much of which it regards as its sphere of influence, more generally.[6] Pakistan's consistent efforts to internationalize the Kashmir issue at the UN (and elsewhere) doubtless contributed to India's growing preference for bilateralism over multilateralism.[7] And India's strong attachment to the primacy of state sovereignty in the conduct of its international relations owes much to this early trauma.

Non-alignment

In spite of the UN's position on Kashmir, India recognized two basic advantages offered by multilateralism in the age of superpower rivalry as the Cold War developed. The first is summed up by the proposition that 'the political game must be played in such a manner that India in spite of her political weakness could establish a politically strategic position'.[8] The second was protection of India's independence through the attainment of international influence. Dhiraj Chamling wrote: 'Tensely surrounded by a galaxy of big, industrially-developed powers to one of which interests she could easily fall a prey, the only possible defence for India perhaps was to get vigorously involved in the affairs of the UN.'[9]

Nehru's foreign policy of non-alignment relative to the two power blocs of the Cold War era was a rational response to India's circumstances and the

intense polarization of international relations as of the late 1940s. He described it as 'the natural consequence of an independent nation functioning according to its own rights'.[10] The policy was not simply one of neutrality, both Nehru and his foreign policy *eminence grise*, V. K. Krishna Menon, maintained, the latter remarking at the UN, 'there can no more be positive neutrality than there can be a vegetarian tiger'.[11] He asserted that India was not neutral between war and peace, between imperialism and freedom, or on questions of ethics.

For India, non-alignment was therefore a policy that stressed independence in international decision-making above all else. Strategically, non-alignment implied 'adjustment to both sides, all the time, obstinately defending and projecting genuine independence, the real power to choose and not be compelled to accept the policies of other states rooted in their national interests'.[12]

Non-alignment in principle rejected military alliances, especially those with the two superpower blocs, and emphasized friendly relations with all countries.[13] In the UN, this prompted India to push for as broad a membership base as possible (the growth coming from newly decolonized states) and to work to preclude either bloc from appropriating the organization's agenda and resources. This was why India at every opportunity advocated UN membership for the People's Republic of China despite Western reluctance to include a revolutionary communist country. It also explains India's early defence of the veto in the UNSC: 'India prefers an ineffective organization, representing all the major political elements in the international community, to an effective organization which may grow into an instrument of one power bloc.'[14] Thus, India opposed the 1950 Acheson Plan, also known as the 'Uniting for Peace' resolution, which empowered the UN General Assembly to act on security challenges at times when the UNSC was in deadlock.

When war broke out in Korea, India initially endorsed UN intervention but declined to label China an aggressor or support the crossing of UN troops into North Korea. (India committed not troops but a field ambulance unit to the UN effort.) Increasingly, during the 1950s, India was seen as an actively neutral power as between Moscow and Washington. This created new roles for it. At the end of the Korean war, Indian General K. S. Thimayya was Chairman of the UN's Neutral Nations Repatriation Commission that oversaw the repatriation of prisoners of war from both sides. India adopted an equidistant stance at the Geneva Indo-China conference of 1954, eventually serving with Poland and Canada (as the two aligned members) on the International Control Commission monitoring implementation of the undertakings agreed at Geneva.[15] India was a 'champion of pacific settlement of disputes' at the UN, contributing generously to peacekeeping missions in the Suez Canal and the Congo, fielding the highest number of troops in both cases.[16]

However, India was criticized in the West for applying double standards: 'On the one hand, the Government of India intensely desired to bring about a change in the political system of the world by supporting all kinds of anti-colonial and anti-imperialist movements, while on the other when faced with a real situation India supported the maintenance of status quo in the name of peace.'[17] For example, although India was a vociferous critic of Dutch rule in Indonesia, it was (at least overtly) less hostile to the French in Indo-China and the British in Malaysia. Indian decision-makers (essentially Nehru), not unreasonably, reserved to themselves the right to judge each case on its merits, and rhetorically drew a fine distinction between nationalist and communist movements to explain any perceived inconsistency in their positions. (Nehru was sensitive to China's support for communist movements in Indo-China and Malaysia.) Eventually, India's judgement did seem to falter: its failure to condemn the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956 (while decrying Western military involvement on the side of Israel in the Suez crisis of the same year) led to perceptions, which were to prove lasting, in the West of Indian duplicity.

Third World leadership

Near-universal decolonization was in many ways the perfect foil for India's international ambitions. As more Asian and African countries gained independence, India, which had blazed a spectacular trail in seeing off Western colonizers, began to assume a leadership role among former colonies and spent considerable diplomatic resources cultivating their support. For example, in 1954, India pressed successfully for special provisions in the GATT for developing countries looking to protect their nascent economies from international competition.[18] Many of these countries found non-alignment to be a useful organizing principle for foreign policy, if not in guaranteeing freedom from foreign influence, at least in leveraging superpower competition for greater economic aid from both blocs.

The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) emerged out of initial consultations between the leaders of Egypt, India, and Yugoslavia at Brioni, Yugoslavia, in 1956. The first summit of twenty-five non-aligned nations was held in Belgrade in September 1961. However, Nehru himself was never entirely in favour of forming a global movement (or third bloc) based on non-alignment (which to him was primarily India's national policy toward the world).[19] C. Raja Mohan notes: 'The NAM often complemented India's pursuit of its international objectives but never fully supplanted non-alignment', which was India's foreign policy.[20]

By the early 1960s, India began to realize that, through strength in numbers, former colonies of the Third World could exercise considerable sway within international institutions. As a result, it lobbied for the expansion of the

UNSC, and was influential in the creation of the G-77 group of developing countries that remains active to this day on economic and social issues within the UN system alongside the group of NAM countries that address political questions.[21]

India's relationship with the NAM suffered a setback in 1962, with the Sino-Indian War. When China invaded, ostensibly to overturn India's border claims originating from the colonial era, there was little overt support for India from the Third World. Only forty countries responded positively to Nehru's international appeal for China to be declared an aggressor in November 1962, of which only three were from the group of twenty-five non-aligned countries at the time (Ethiopia, Cyprus, and Sri Lanka).[22] Even more disorienting for India's foreign policy inclinations was the immediate support from countries of the Western bloc during this episode. The USA dispatched a fleet to the Bay of Bengal—only to recall it upon China's unexpected withdrawal following a month's fighting. Nevertheless, some observers ironically recalled Nehru's own original thought that the non-aligned should be non-aligned not just with the power blocs, but also with each other.[23] This exasperated Nehru and commentators in India.

Nevertheless, India continued to play an active role in the UN and the NAM. Delhi during the 1960s contributed significantly to the establishment of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) and the United Nations Industrial Development Organization (UNIDO).[24] In 1963, pressure by India and others yielded institutional changes that expanded the UNSC and the Economic and Social Council to give African and Asian countries more representation.[25]

A global and Indian hiatus

The year 1964 was a significant one for India. In October, China conducted its first nuclear test at Lop Nor, prompting India to advocate through the NAM summit in Cairo the inclusion of non-proliferation on the UN's agenda for the first time. But dwarfing all other developments that year for India was the passing of Jawaharlal Nehru, who had scripted and overseen the implementation of the bulk of India's policies toward the world since independence. Following his death, India remained only as engaged in the UN and NAM as to allow it to frustrate Pakistan's attempts to isolate it multilaterally over their bilateral disputes. Commenting on the Nehruvian era, Siddharth Varadarajan recalls that Nehru was not driven by 'abstract principles' alone, but rather was engaged in a quest for 'strategic space' for which he was dealt a very weak hand in 1947.[26] Srinath Raghavan's important recent work on Nehru's strategic thought and foreign policy also severely qualifies a view of Nehru as primarily an idealist.[27]

Nehru's successors, especially his daughter, Indira Gandhi, after 1966, articulated prominent, sometimes forceful, strains of *realpolitik* in their domestic and international dealings. India and Pakistan went to war in 1965, evoking a mixed response from the non-aligned countries, with more of them supporting Pakistan than India in part because of religious affinity. India was once again disappointed (but this time not surprised) by the lack of a response from the non-aligned nations. By 1969 an Indian minister was heard to declare, 'We have no friends, by sermonizing to everybody on what to do or not to do we have alienated all. All the nonaligned countries are afraid to stand up and be counted.'[28] India's profile in international organizations sharply declined in the 1960s.[29]

The relative eclipse of multilateralism in Delhi's worldview and strategies conformed to a broader pattern. Overall, the multilateral system took a back seat for over two decades after the Cold War intensified in the 1960s. Largely sidelined on security issues and in important international crises, the UN turned its attention to socio-economic, environmental, technological, and cultural issues.[30] In the NAM, India's engagement became 'general, rhetorical, and distant'.[31] But India, a champion of technical cooperation for development, contributed the largest number of technical experts under UN auspices of any member state between 1951 and 1967.[32]

Strategic departures

The nadir of India's engagement with the United Nations and some other multilateral groupings came in 1971. As the USA undertook a rapprochement with China, with Pakistan acting as facilitator, India intervened in East Pakistan on humanitarian and strategic grounds, against the atrocities committed by the Pakistani army on their Bengali compatriots. The resulting war brought about the independence of East Pakistan as Bangladesh. India was roundly criticized in the UN and the NAM for intervening in what was legally a matter within the domestic jurisdiction of Pakistan. Despite the millions of Bengali refugees that had crossed the border into India during the conflict, Delhi found itself almost entirely isolated in the international community. With hindsight, India's stance in 1971, while a self-serving one insofar as it allowed the breakup of its enduring antagonist Pakistan, should have evoked more sympathy within the NAM and among Western powers, given the extreme circumstances occasioned by Pakistan's violent repression of the East Bengali provinces ordered by its military leader, Yahya Khan. But in an age unfamiliar with and unsympathetic towards humanitarian intervention, India's actions were seen primarily as aimed at dismembering a member state of the UN. India escaped official censure by the UN solely because of the Soviet veto in the UNSC, further to the Treaty of Friendship signed by Delhi and Moscow earlier

in 1971. And because of this treaty India, having aligned itself on the USSR, could expect little support from NAM.[33] For the first time, India had eschewed 'diplomacy by conference' and opted for unilateral military action.

Delhi went on, in 1974, to conduct its first nuclear test, disregarding the non-proliferation regime that India itself had championed just a decade earlier. In defending its action, the Indian government described the test as a peaceful nuclear explosion, and argued it was not in violation of the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), which it had never signed on the grounds that it was unfairly biased toward the established nuclear powers. However, former foreign secretary J. N. Dixit acknowledges that the test was at least in part intended to provide the scientific basis for a future nuclear weapons programme.[34] And the established nuclear powers were entirely unconvinced by India's rationale. This test prompted the establishment by a number of states with nuclear capacities of the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), intending to control export of nuclear materials and technologies to states posing a risk to the Nuclear Non-Proliferation regime. The launch of this group and its subsequent ascendency alongside the International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) consigned India to a type of diplomatic *purdah* in the field of arms control and disarmament that was to dog its diplomacy and international image until its successful negotiations with the USA on nuclear cooperation, culminating in 2008. It then also convinced the NSG to approve (unanimously, as required within this forum) a new approach to safeguards on nuclear transfers to India.[35] Nuclear parity with China had been India's unspoken objective in the lead-up to the 1974 test, but, whatever the aim, the international community was wholly unsympathetic at the time.

During the 1980s, the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan, Vietnam's invasion of Cambodia, and the Iran–Iraq war all created divisions in the UN as well as within the NAM. India, which was noticeably ambivalent on Moscow's move into Afghanistan (opposed on substance, but mindful of its alliance with the USSR), grew further estranged from the NAM. In 1987, India intervened in another NAM country's internal affairs by air-dropping food into Tamil areas of Sri Lanka, under domestic political pressure in the Indian state of Tamil Nadu to aid the population there, caught in a rise between the LTTE and Colombo.

By the end of the decade, Cold War tensions eased and rapprochement between the United States and the Soviet Union, as well as China and the Soviet Union, reinvigorated the UN as a forum for multilateral cooperation on security issues.[36] In this spirit, in 1988 at a special session of the UN General Assembly, Rajiv Gandhi put forward an ambitious proposal for nuclear disarmament in a phased manner.[37]

Adjusting to a new world

Post-Cold War, the UNSC became considerably more active than it had been over the previous two decades.[38] The 1990s also saw a major increase in the number of peacekeeping missions, to which India contributed generously.[39] The rest of the multilateral system also thrived, with the exciting 1992 Rio Summit on climate change that agreed on a framework convention, the implementation of the Uruguay Round and establishment of the WTO (succeeding the less ambitious GATT) in 1995, the indefinite extension of the NPT that same year, the adoption of the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) in 1996, and the adoption of the Kyoto Protocol on climate change in 1997. In all of these discussions India was active and often played a leading role (such as at the Rio conference), but occasionally Delhi opted for a stance perceived by some as that of a 'spoiler', for example in the run-up to agreement on the CTBT in 1996.[40]

In India, the most important development, as of 1991, was a raft of economic reform promoting liberalization and deregulation that accelerated India's economic growth rate considerably and placed India onto the track of 'emerging' nation status. These were opposed strongly at first by the Indian political Left and Right alike, worried respectively about their impact on the poor and the door they might be opening to Western values and cultures.

Meanwhile, the collapse of the Soviet Union hammered the final nail in the coffin of non-alignment as a meaningful instrument. Political fragmentation within India contributed to the emergence of divergent opinions on India's role in the world, while primarily economic objectives began to colour Indian diplomacy. A new, essentially pragmatic, orientation emerged in Indian foreign policy, reflected in the statements of both Congress- and BJP-led coalition governments in Delhi after 1991.[41]

Many in the Indian foreign policy establishment and intelligentsia found these transitions distasteful. But they applauded calls for a multipolar world, a growing leitmotiv in Delhi's global projection of Indian views.[42] More complex, perhaps, was the adjustment to India's shifting stance in international economic negotiations, often bearing little relationship with the priority given earlier to Third World solidarity (although the latter line was revived whenever convenient). However, one set of analysts believed that at the WTO, in the 1990s Indian officialdom retained 'a mindset that had not fully accepted the framework under which a market economy functions'.[43] Rajiv Kumar comments: 'Indian reactions to globalization [through the WTO] cannot be considered independent of Indian reactions to liberalization.'[44] Afro-Asian solidarity had little meaning in WTO negotiations where African agricultural interests could be at odds with those of India, as Amartya Sen tartly pointed out.[45] India could no longer credibly claim to be 'a spokesman

of the Afro-Asians, the non-aligned, the under-developed and the small states' and use the UN to enhance its stature in this manner at a time when it had significant economic interests of its own to advance and defend.[46] In any event, the NAM was all but irrelevant on matters of security, being 'politically divided, economically differentiated and ideologically exhausted'.[47]

India had little choice but to re-engage with the multilateral system, as it required stabilization loans from the IMF and wider assistance from the World Bank. In the newly formed WTO, India saw an opportunity for multilateral leadership and in the growing UN debate on humanitarian intervention, the need for active involvement in a key normative debate affecting more than just UN philosophy.

Exploring alternatives: reform of the UN Security Council

Along with pragmatism in its foreign policy came the realization that increasingly India would have to pursue less universal and abstract interests in international forums, rather focusing on the promotion of its own evolving interests. Moreover, as its economy took off, India inevitably started ascending in the global hierarchy of influence and power. India's economic growth on the one hand cast it as a model for many other developing nations keen to emulate its success, but also created a potential rift between it and the poorer nations of the world, the support of whom it still might need on occasion.

Identifying early on an opportunity that India's new economic dispensation could create for it, Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in 1992 made a case for expansion of the UNSC 'to maintain political and moral effectiveness'.[48] Delhi was interested primarily in a permanent seat for itself. The US responded in 1993 with the suggestion that UNSC expansion begin with Germany and Japan only, with indications that any new permanent members might not secure veto power.[49] The American response served as a pointed reminder to India of the cost its long history of anti-Americanism in multilateral institutions could still carry.

In 1991–2, India sat as an elected member in the UNSC during one its busiest periods, at grips as it was with Iraq's invasion of Kuwait; Iraq's subsequent repression of Kurds in the north of the country; the beginnings of the disintegration of Yugoslavia, leading to a succession of wars featuring extensive UN involvement; the humanitarian plight of Somalis; as well as ambitious UN peacekeeping operations in Cambodia, Mozambique, and El Salvador. India sought to temper the enthusiasm of Western powers and some others for armed intervention (as opposed to consent-based peacekeeping), its interventions in Council debates later seeming prophetic of the risks then being courted. Its then Permanent Representative in the Security Council, Chinmaya Gharekhan, wrote:

> The Council has acquired the propensity to deal with all kinds of issues by the simple stratagem of defining peace in holistic terms. The developing countries [were], in a manner of speaking, the victims of their own cleverness since it was they who took the initiative in defining peace in such broad terms to squeeze funds from the affluent countries for their development plans. Now, there is practically no restriction on the authority of the Security Council to legislate on any subject.[50]

In 1996, India ran again for an elected seat in the UNSC. It competed with Japan for the single Asian seat available and lost massively. Indian foreign service members spoke privately of the debilitating effects on their campaign of Japanese 'chequebook diplomacy' in the developing world—and doubtless this factor played a role—but it seemed to occur to few in Delhi that the caustic performance of its delegation at the CTBT conference earlier that year might have alienated not a few of its NAM partners as well as many in the West.[51]

After this experience, India increasingly believed that as the world's second most populous (and leading developing) country it should be entitled to a permanent seat. Contention within the Council in 1999 over Kosovo, in 2002–3 over Iraq and its decisive resolution supporting US self-defence after the events of 11 September 2001 were doubtless further elements leading to Indian irritation that it was not part of these systemically important conversations.

Thus, losing patience with the endless and circular discussions among UN member states on whether and how to achieve UNSC reform, in the run-up to the 2005 UN Summit, India banded with Brazil, Germany, and Japan (together known as the G-4) in order to press for the creation of four new permanent seats for them (and another two for Africa, as well as four further elected seats). The G-4 essentially argued their case on the basis of entitlement to the seats given their weight in international relations, their financial share of the UN's bills, and their contributions to aspects of the UN's work such as peacekeeping. Speaking in July 2005 in the US Congress, Manmohan Singh was unequivocal: 'There *must* be comprehensive reform of the United Nations to make it more effective and also more representative . . . In this context, you would agree that the voice of the world's largest democracy *surely cannot* be left unheard on the Security Council when the United Nations is being restructured'[52] (emphasis added).

In spite of a determined push from the four capitals, the effort failed, ostensibly because of China's hostility to a permanent seat for Japan but actually because most of the existing five permanent members (each of whom could veto the Charter amendment required for reform) had their reservations and because most member states remained unconvinced that they would benefit from these proposed new arrangements, as experience suggested that countries purporting to speak for their regions or other constituencies generally looked after their own interests first. Moreover, some

worried more about the UNSC's effectiveness than the additional legitimacy a wider composition could impart, fearing that a much larger Council could become paralysed on key issues.

While disappointment over this failure was keenly felt in some quarters of Indian officialdom, in 2005, India had bigger fish to fry in the form of its negotiations with the USA over nuclear cooperation, initiated in another form by Strobe Talbott and Jaswant Singh in 1999 and 2000. India's then Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee had delivered a speech at the Asia Society in 2000 in New York claiming that the USA and India were 'natural allies'. In 1999, Washington had demonstrated unprecedented even-handedness when Pakistan attacked India at Kargil. The following year, President Bill Clinton made a successful and highly publicized visit to India. And while the first term of President George W. Bush was taken up with the events of 11 September 2001 and their fallout, during his second term, his administration energetically tackled rapprochement with India.

India's new-found status, and also quiet support from new friends, helped it cope with the renewed interventionism of the United Nations, successfully deflecting Secretary General Kofi Annan's post-1999 efforts to involve the UN in Kashmir, and allowed it to ignore UN calls for Delhi to curb its nuclear weapons and missile programmes.[53] By 2006, Delhi was supporting the candidacy of an Indian candidate, UN Under-Secretary-General Shashi Tharoor, for the position of UN Secretary-General. However, despite consistently placing at least second in the field of candidates, the effort was publicly torpedoed by the USA (doubtless much to the relief of China).

Gradually what fever there was in India for a permanent seat on the UNSC largely dissipated, particularly after the G-20 emerged as the key leader-level forum to address the global 2008–9 financial and economic crisis, with India playing a prominent role. Referring to India's campaign for a UNSC permanent seat, former Foreign Secretary M. K. Rasgotra commented in 2007: 'things of that kind will come to India unasked as its economic and other strengths grow'.[54] In October 2010, India ran for an elected seat at the Council uncontested and secured a two-year term, beginning in 2011.[55]

A more confident India

In 2007, India concluded the '123 Agreement' with Washington that would produce an end to over three decades of nuclear isolation for India. Following intense lobbying by both the USA and India, by October 2008 the deal had been approved by the IAEA, the NSG, and the US Senate, achieving for President Bush his single major foreign policy legacy. The agreement not only legitimized India's civil nuclear programme and recognized its non-proliferation record, but it also opened the channels of nuclear commerce

between India and other members of the NSG, most notably Russia and France.[56] While a prominent writer in India expressed alarm at the 'self-conscious revolt in India against multilateralism' that the US–India deal represented, he worried more about 'how much like the US we [Indians] want to become . . . unilateral, oriented towards hegemony more than stability of the world, and besotted with [our] own sense of power'.[57]

From universalism to individualism: the WTO

A more confident India also asserted itself in the multilateral trading regime, as it formed a loose coalition of developing countries.[58] India had spoken up at the 1999 Seattle meeting of the WTO to protest against the inclusion of labour and environmental standards on the WTO agenda.[59] In the run up to the Doha Round of 2001, India challenged the efforts of developed nations to introduce the so-called 'Singapore issues'—competition, investment, trade facilitation, and government procurement—into discussions, and emphasized the need for these countries to fully implement their Uruguay Round commitments (especially in agricultural market access, textiles, and clothing, all priority sectors for India) before launching a new round. India also opposed the strict provisions of the Agreement on Trade-Related Aspects of Intellectual Property Rights (TRIPS) on compulsory licensing for the drug industry, an issue in which Indian pharmaceutical companies had an important stake.[60] Although India acquiesced in the launch of a new trade round at Doha in 2001, it helped secure beneficial outcomes for it on labour standards (which were deflected to the ILO), a substantive discussion on agriculture, and an agreement on TRIPS and public health that reflected its concerns.[61] India's negotiating stance was aided by the fact that India found itself more prepared than other developing countries to meet Uruguay Round commitments (with the exception of intellectual property rights, services, agriculture, and quantitative restrictions) due to its economic reforms that had begun in 1991.[62]

India's multilateral preoccupations had now changed from those of a poor developing nation relying on strength in numbers to those of an emerging power with the ability to hold its own against the major players in the WTO. However, in this forum, India continued to emphasize its developing country credentials in order to form coalitions within the group of developing countries to pressure the industrialized nations for concessions in various forums.

When an opportunity to have a say in the management of the multilateral trading system arose, India was not slow to take it up. In 2004 India was included in a small high-powered group at the WTO called the Five Interested Parties—along with the USA, the EU, Brazil, and Australia—that superseded the traditional 'Quad' of the USA, the EU, Japan, and Canada. India's inclusion (along with Brazil) was a sign, beyond the economic significance of these two

countries, of the G-20's significance as a negotiating bloc. It also signalled US acceptance of India as an important player in these negotiations. The EU advocated India's inclusion due to their shared interests in agricultural policy.[63]

India was now also in a better position to confront Western powers in the WTO since its trade portfolio no longer relied on them as much (gradually shifting toward China instead).[64] An important sign of India's transformation was the shift in its position on trade in services between the Uruguay and Doha rounds. Whereas in the past India (and Brazil) had opposed the inclusion of services in trade negotiations, India's services-led growth ensured that by 2004 it was an ardent advocate of some forms of liberalization of trade in services.[65] With the exception of agriculture and TRIPS, India was now more comfortable with international trade liberalization than ever before, although it still maintained greater restrictions and higher tariff barriers than China and Brazil. India's traditional 'deep antipathy toward the global trading system' was gradually being replaced by acceptance that in order to increase its global market share, it would increasingly be to its benefit to cut mutually advantageous deals and to contemplate trade-offs.[66]

Nevertheless, the Doha Round discussions of 2007 and 2008 proved a brass knuckles affair amidst a burgeoning global food security scare (with attendant inflation of basic produce prices in most countries, including India). India and Brazil, speaking 'for' the developing countries, confronted the United States on agricultural issues in the run-up to national elections in the USA in late 2008 and in India in early 2009. While both Washington and Delhi were open to success of the talks, their political bottom lines collided in Geneva in July 2008 largely over a 'Special Safeguard Mechanism' that would have allowed a temporary increase in trade barriers to protect threatened industries. This clash proved fatal for that phase of the talks (which had still not restarted by mid-2010, becalmed by the effects of the global economic and financial crisis of 2008–9 and by the dispiriting Copenhagen conference on climate change in December 2009).

Rather damagingly for India, in the final reel at Geneva, it was abandoned in its hard line by Brazil (which, like many African countries, on balance, wanted an agreement even at the price of greater compromise) and Indian Commerce Minister Kamal Nath stood out in his vehemence within the negotiations. 'I reject everything' he was quoted as saying in response to a compromise paper others seemed to be prepared to swallow.[67] He was alone in seeming to claim credit for the talks' failure, with the EU, US, and Chinese negotiators, who had contributed considerably to the overall deadlock, only too happy to deflect responsibility for failure on to Nath and India. The endgame was—in terms clearly coloured by US official briefings—described as follows in the *Washington Post*:

> India's chief negotiator and commerce minister, Kamal Nath, may have played the biggest role in undoing the talks, repeatedly blocking attempts by developed nations to win greater access to India's burgeoning market. Nath's inflexibility was cheered as heroic in India, where his refusal to offer major concessions to rich nations was being portrayed as a classic David vs. Goliath case. 'I kept saying ''No, I don't agree'' at every point,' Nath said in a telephone interview from Geneva yesterday. 'I come from a country where 300 million people live on 1 dollar a day and 700 million people live on 2 dollars a day. So it is natural for me, and in fact incumbent upon me, to see that our agricultural interests are not compromised. You don't require rocket science to decide between livelihood security and commercial interests.'[68]

India's position was shaped, above all, by domestic politics.[69] On international trade India had faced domestic opposition to its membership of GATT even back in the 1950s.[70] In the 1980s an economic analyst noted, 'India's trade policy is congealed in a mould made by the domestic political interests.'[71] The connection, according to this analyst, was simple—politicians are sustained on the votes of farmers and the money of industrialists. As a result, Indian negotiators have very little space in which to concede anything to other nations. And in 2008 agriculture remained for India the single most sensitive issue, given the 70 per cent of the population that remained rural.[72]

In India, Nath (a highly self-confident, long-time Congress stalwart with a keen eye constantly on domestic political advantage) was largely portrayed in glowing terms coming out of his confrontation with US Trade Representative Susan Schwab in Geneva. Less was said about how the Chinese delegation was only too happy to see Nath in the lead. The contradiction between Nath's raw political motivations and justifications and the Indian Prime Minister's seemingly more ethereal calls for international cooperation, were not fully recognized in India until after the national elections produced a convincing win for the Congress-led UPA. Then, Nath, long rumoured to have been seeking a major portfolio, such as Finance, was shifted to the internationally unglamorous (if domestically important) portfolio of road transport and highways. He was replaced in the commerce portfolio by another Congress party stalwart, Anand Sharma, known for his serene style. India lost no time in calling over thirty leading trade ministers to Delhi for consultations, perhaps in order to allow this change of personnel and style to sink in fully, and, in the words of one commentator, to cast India as a 'pro-active participant in multi-lateral talks rather than a thorn in the flesh as the global media had suggested in 2008'.[73]

Following the collapse of Doha Round negotiations, Delhi, in parallel to the United States, favoured bilateral and regional trade agreements, as illustrated in Chapters 9 and 10.

The shape of things to come: climate change

Although reactions to some of India's actions and positions no doubt overstate the tilt against multilateralism in Indian foreign policy, they do raise two important questions relevant today, as India emerges as a premier global interlocutor. First, what kind of power does India aspire to be, and how will it engage with others in years to come? Second, is the Indian foreign policy establishment attuned to engaging with the multilateral system not just on India's own terms but also on ones that actually will appeal to others and contribute to positive outcomes? On climate change, the signals are positive and, as in the case of India's approach to the WTO (but with opposite results), determined by political leadership rather than bureaucratic preferences.

In 2003, in the run-up to the American invasion of Iraq, the President of the Congress party, Sonia Gandhi, in a rare comment on foreign affairs, wrote: 'the paradox of [America's] power is that it cannot afford to act unilaterally. Many in the United States are impatient with multilateralism, but in today's interdependent world there is simply no alternative to working in concert and collaboration with each other.'[74] In 2004, Manmohan Singh outlined India's global philosophy, which he described as 'cooperative pluralism' enshrined in the Sanskrit phrase and Hindu philosophy of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam'—the whole world is one family. These statements suggest a cooperative outlook ideally suited to multilateral institutions, the desire to transform them constructively, and a recognition that with greater power and influence comes responsibility in international affairs.

Nonetheless there exists a gap between Prime Ministerial and other Indian aspirations for more genuinely multilateral management of international relations on the one hand, and India's positions and style in a variety of forums and issue-by-issue on the other. Delhi's negotiating posture has been described as 'defensive', 'obstructionist', and a 'spoiler' by Indian and non-Indian observers alike.[75] In early 2010, Minister of State Shashi Tharoor summarized a debate in Delhi by referring to India having 'earned us the negative reputation of running a moralistic commentary on world affairs' that Western diplomats referred to as 'sniping from the sidelines'.[76] Environment minister Jairam Ramesh stated that India needed to drop its traditional 'naysayer' approach, and instead negotiate more constructively.[77] Pratap Bhanu Mehta suggests that India is 'not good at cutting deals' in part because its traditional point of negotiating departure is Indian entitlements.[78] Such assessments surprise some Indians, while they are rejected by others, who believe Delhi is always at risk of conceding too much in multilateral negotiations.

Following the 2009 national elections, and a first term in which environmental matters received scant attention within the government, Dr Singh appointed one of India's most talented and mediagenic younger politicians,

Jairam Ramesh, to the environment portfolio. India's position had long been to stick closely to the terms of the Kyoto Protocol, under which industrialized countries committed to specific targets for emission reductions, while developing countries were not required to do so under the 'common but differentiated' responsibilities approach adopted at the UN on the issue since the Rio Conference.[79] Early on in the run-up to the Copenhagen conference of December 2009, Ramesh arranged to establish common cause with China in negotiating strategy (although China's international announcement of significant voluntary emission intensity reductions per economic unit of production at the United Nations in September of that year seemed to take India by surprise).[80]

Ramesh engaged sharply with US Secretary of State Hillary Clinton when she visited India in July 2009, telegraphing that India would concede nothing on emissions targets: 'India's position is clear and categorical that we are simply not in a position to take any legally binding emissions reductions.'[81] Responding to threats within the US Congress to penalize trading partners not matching American measures in this field, he added: 'There is simply no case for the pressure that we, who have been among the lowest emitters per capita, face to actually reduce emissions'. Ms. Clinton mildly replied that the USA would not wish to hamper India's economic growth as 'economic progress in India is in everyone's interest and not just in the interest of Indians'. This exchange made the news all over the world and seemed to suggest an unbending Indian resolve to withstand foreign pressure.

However, it soon transpired that within the government, Ramesh was arguing in favour of flexibility, in line with the reported determination of Prime Minister Singh that, at Copenhagen, India should be 'part of the solution to the problem'.[82] A letter from Ramesh to the Prime Minister, mid-October 2009, leaked to the media, argued for a new negotiating strategy, not least because India needed to curb its own emissions as a matter of national interest. Ramesh was quoted as having argued: 'India must listen more and speak less in negotiations' as its stance is 'disfavoured by the developed countries, small island states and vulnerable countries'.[83] And: 'The position we take on international mitigation commitments only if supported by finance and technology needs to be nuanced simply because we need to mitigate in self-interest.'[84] Ramesh also indicated that engaging the USA was important in terms of securing progress on climate change globally—a controversial stance for any Indian politician to take.[85]

He was soon challenged (as publicized in further leaks) by two of India's long-time negotiators. Specifically, a proposal articulated by Ramesh that India could offer to reduce its carbon intensity by 20–25 per cent of 2005 levels by 2020 was questioned by the negotiators, who queried the prudence of offering unilateral concessions without obtaining reciprocity from other

countries.[86] Ramesh was similarly criticized by some civil society commentators for India's concessions (which were in fact not all that far-reaching, particularly in light of China's unilaterally offered targets in September).[87] In the type of tactical bobbing and weaving that Indian democracy tends to require, Ramesh was quick to point out in Parliament that India's concession was not legally binding and would still permit economic growth in future, doubtless a useful tactic in parliament, but one that left India in somewhat of a negotiating quandary.[88]

Ramesh's arguments seemed to recognize on the one hand that India could not stand idly by as its own environment headed toward serious degradation, but also, implicitly, on the other that India needed to be in a position to offer something positive at the negotiating table if it wanted to play in the big leagues. Praful Bidwai offered India an extensive, erudite, and thoughtful agenda for Copenhagen that would aim for a 'strong' accord, in the national and international interest, but he was not widely echoed.[89] In the event, India's offers in the run-up to and at Copenhagen centred on:

> [agreeing] to [voluntary] emissions goals that would be subject to international 'consultation and analysis' but not scrutiny or formal review . . . [and offering to allow] international monitoring of those of its mitigation activities that are supported by international funds or technologies but not those that are domestically funded.[90]

Although the Copenhagen talks were widely perceived as a fiasco, they served India's diplomatic interests very well. They allowed India to be 'part of the solution', a last-minute truncated accord, offered by the four BASIC powers and the USA, acknowledged—however reluctantly and only by taking 'note' of it—by the conference plenary, and also in underscoring that India was now an indispensable negotiating partner on key global challenges such as climate change. Unlike its posture in Geneva at the WTO in 2008, when China shielded itself behind an assertive India, India allowed China to take the heat for frustrating delegations and NGOs campaigning for an ambitious outcome at Copenhagen.

Further, the results of Copenhagen for India were also perceived by many at home as positive. Some identified 'silver linings', but noted: 'Divisions between the West and China (and its new best friend, India) over how to evaluate domestically chosen mitigation actions haven't been solved. Simply put, without concessions from future large emitters on that, the world's current large emitters have absolutely no incentive to cut.'[91] Others argued that the 'political challenge before the BASIC four, especially India and China, is to redefine the task of drastic emissions reduction globally, led by the developed nations, in a manner that refuses to counterpose the global public good to the development imperative. Climate laggards in the developed as

well as the developing world need to be pushed aside in a dialogue that has both the scientific case and the ethical imperative in focus.'[92]

Overall, India demonstrated agility in the run-up to the Copenhagen conference, and dexterity during the meeting, allowing it to emerge as one of the forgers of a compromise. This might suggest the content and style of Indian multilateral approaches in the future.

New diplomacy: new forums

Describing the significance for India of the emergence of the G-20 (at the level of national leaders rather than, as earlier, at the level of finance ministers), Indian planning supremo, Montek Singh Ahluwalia, who has served as India's G-20 'Sherpa', comments: 'The G-20 represents a political induction into a small group which casts itself as the main forum' on global economic and financial issues.[93] The emergence of the G-20 at leader level and India's inclusion represents a politically significant graduation for the country rather than an introduction to serious consultations on global financial issues—India had for long been involved in those at the IMF and at the Bank for International Settlements in Basel, cutting an impressive figure in many instances. Indeed, Delhi's 'finance diplomacy', involving as it has many of India's leading lights over the years, has been one of its strongest contributions to international relations writ large.

Ahluwalia wonders whether the G-20 will turn out to be the key forum in the medium and long term and whether it will be able to tackle issues such as climate change, for example.[94] Unless it is able to provide impetus to progress on this contentious file and to completion of the Doha Round, it will stagnate. As well, its economic and financial mandate, while providing focus, means that political and security challenges will need to be addressed elsewhere, unless it adapts to include them.

If not, the G-20 may well prove a transitional arrangement and another, perhaps smaller, forum will emerge to supersede it. Should this prove to be the case, India is certain to be a member. Meanwhile, the G-20 has been an ideal vehicle for an India led by Manmohan Singh. G-20 insiders report, and US President Obama confirmed after the June 2010 G-20 summit in Toronto, that given his extensive knowledge of international economic issues, Singh has consistently been one of the two or three voices most listened to around the table.[95]

India might prefer to be a 'canny negotiator' that effectively walks the North–South line.[96] However, as Nitin Desai argues, this approach may work less well at a time when India is increasingly seen internationally as advancing its own interests rather than seeking to champion (more than rhetorically) others within a highly differentiated developing world.[97]

India's balancing act is nevertheless on display with respect to the Iran file: India has consistently voted with Washington against Iran's nuclear programme at the IAEA while continuing to maintain friendly bilateral relations with Iran and defending its own nuclear weapons programme. It participates (without much current urgency) in the G-4 to demand a permanent seat on the UNSC, while actively endorsing most of the G-77 and the NAM positions at the UN. India promotes the notion of BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India, China) as a coalition of emerging economies, but Delhi is careful not to antagonize Washington by endorsing an alternative international currency to the dollar, something China and Russia were quite willing to do.[98] At the WTO it is simultaneously a member of the Five Interested Parties and the G-20, attempting to bridge the gap between the developing and developed worlds. At Copenhagen India banded together with China, Brazil, and South Africa to voice the concerns of the developing world, while also displaying awareness of its own environmental vulnerability. In brief, India does not quite sit on the fence between the developed and developing countries but rather seeks to straddle the two camps—exploiting its multiple international identities, including its status as an emerging power, to advance its interests.

While India is happy to play its part in international summits and negotiations, the real Indian foreign policy work is more focused on bilateral relations and regional groupings, as well as small 'caucus' groups within wider institutions and several new forums that have emerged in recent years. India's relationship with the USA has already paid rich dividends in terms of nuclear technology, trade, agriculture, science and technology, military cooperation, and a host of other areas. Buoyed by these successes, Delhi has established strategic partnerships (of varying depth) with other powers, including the EU, Russia, Japan, Israel, Brazil, South Africa, and China.

Today, much of India's diplomacy is organized more around smaller, plurilateral groupings of several meaningful states, and also within regional bodies.[99] In its region, India has actively pursued relationships with ASEAN and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), not least because of China's involvement in both organizations and the regions their membership covers. The SCO, because it does not include India among its full members, may actually be of greater concern to India at present, focused as it is on Central Asia, with which north India has long historical and cultural ties.[100]

In 2003 India, Brazil, and South Africa combined to form IBSA, a forum for cooperation along both political and economic lines explicitly presented as composed of the leading democracies of their continents (a rare high-profile opportunity for India to trumpet its affinity for other democracies), and a grouping Montek Singh Ahluwalia describes as a 'natural one'.[101] Initially launched at ministerial level in Brasilia in 2003, with its first official summit in Brasilia in September 2006, this 'dialogue' forum has so far focused mainly

on trade (but the three countries emphasize their credentials as multi-ethnic democracies). In 2003, IBSA formed a coalition with China and Argentina in the run-up to the WTO ministerial meeting at Cancun to effectively oppose the North's agricultural protectionism.[102] One analyst describes the forum as 'both a strategic alliance for the pursuit of common interests of developing countries in global institutions but also as a platform for trilateral and inter-regional South-South cooperation'.[103] While the economic content of IBSA is private-sector led, in keeping with the market orientation of all three economies involved, Dr Singh has been an enthusiastic cheerleader. IBSA is for India a first-of-its-kind partnership based partly on political values, though shared democratic values also underpinned India's rapprochement with the USA, its participation in several broader international gatherings of democratic nature, and its repeated upholding of the democratic character and content of the Commonwealth.[104]

One alarm bell triggered by IBSA and other such bodies is whether, rather than representing global outreach, such groupings represent a 'flight from the region', where India's own subregional organization, the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), is marking time, embarrassingly.[105] All recognize that SAARC's effectiveness as a regional forum is in part undermined by tensions between Pakistan and India, but India's own leadership of the region within which it is, to a degree, a hegemon, has been hesitant, with little credible follow-up between summits and ministerial meetings.[106] Indeed, among students of Indian policy in Delhi, there is a sense that India today would rather 'opt out' of its own region (if it could) than work hard to make something of it.[107] A more positive way of expressing this might be to describe India as reaching beyond, or outgrowing, its own region.

Another reservation over much of the 'variable architecture' available to India in its diplomacy today, a veritable 'alphabetic soup' on each issue, according to economist Shankar Acharya, is that most of the bodies mentioned above are not yet mature, have no secretariats, and may well prove of transitional rather than longer-lasting value.[108] This does not mean that they are irrelevant. Rather, India will need to remain nimble in assessing where it wishes to invest its effort at a time of significant fluidity in plurilateral, regional, and multilateral arrangements.[109]

Reverting to India's wider profile and ambition internationally, David Mulford, US Ambassador in India, 2004–9, and earlier a senior US economic negotiator as Assistant Secretary of the Treasury for International Affairs, comments: 'India could aspire to be much more than a regional power if it were in a frame of mind to do so. This is especially true in the new and highly amorphous grouping of the G-20, where clever coalition building and initiatives with the leading country members could be used to advance Indian ideas and leadership. At present India continues to undersell itself.'[110] This would,

of course, require the sort of compromises and give (as well as take) that many Indian commentators would find distasteful and would condemn.

Conclusions: Table manners and domestic politics

A noted denizen of India's Ministry of External Affairs, a keen bilateralist at that, when asked what India does best internationally replied without a moment's hesitation 'multilateral diplomacy'.[111] And yet, queries about Indian performance at the UN and elsewhere in the multilateral sphere hardly validate that judgment: 'arrogant', 'moralistic', and 'confrontational' are terms more invoked by developing and industrialized country counterparts, despite recognition that Indian negotiators are rarely less than 'impressive' and often 'brilliant'.[112] Indeed, there is much about multilateral diplomacy as practised in some of the world that India is not yet attuned to. In discussing the peer review process at the OECD, one Indian economist stated: 'Why would we be interested in peer review? We can afford the best advice commercially available.'[113]

As India continues to seek a greater role in the management of the multilateral system at the high table of international relations alongside actors such as the USA, the EU, China, Brazil, and South Africa, there is a dichotomy between how Indians perceive their engagement with the multilateral system on the one hand, and how India's interventions play out and are at times perceived by its partners on the other.

The gap in perceptions is emphasized by a commentator on the climate change issue: 'In an ironic and to most Indians quite disturbing turn, India is increasingly portrayed as an obstructionist in the global climate negotiations. How did a country likely to be on the frontline of climate impacts—with a vast proportion of the world's poor and a reasonably good record of energy-related environmental policy and performance—reach this diplomatic *cul de sac*?'[114] The story is the same in trade—India holds up its economic liberalization as a major achievement in facilitating the free flow of goods and services across borders, yet gets saddled with the blame for upending the Doha Round. Similarly on nuclear technology, India trumpets its record in non-proliferation and nuclear safety yet is excluded for three decades from multilateral access to nuclear technology and is consistently chided for refusing to sign up to the NPT and CTBT (and even to seriously discuss the possibility until quite recently).

India's stance is influenced by a variety of factors in multilateral forums. As we have seen repeatedly, domestic politics play a key role in determining India's positions on 'hot button' international issues, more so now in the information age than ever before, with accelerated 24/7 news cycles and

non-stop internet commentary constraining political initiative. Thus, Indian negotiators have often found themselves on a short leash, for fear they may sell the country out. As well, Jaswant Singh, India's former Foreign Minister (1998–2002) comments: 'Multilaterally, many Indian voices have been very conscious of years of colonial ''subjecthood''. The result has been excessive Indian touchiness at times. Underlying Indian positions in some international economic negotiations has been a fear of foreign economic looting rooted in our history.'[115]

Climate change provides a case in point. India's representatives are routinely castigated by the domestic political left and the right for caving into US pressure at the slightest hint of a conciliatory stance. In the days preceding Copenhagen, Environment Minister Jairam Ramesh, under pressure in parliament, laid out a clear logic behind the need to make concessions in the climate negotiations. 'We are showing some flexibility because we do not want to become isolated. We do not want to earn a reputation as a deal-breaker', he said.[116] In October 2009 at a conference, Ramesh stated that India shared the responsibility of arriving at an agreement.[117] However, 'on cue, he was torn apart by sections of the domestic constituency, as he [had] been before, for making such utterances'.[118]

At the conclusion of the Copenhagen summit, while Ramesh described the final outcome as a 'good deal' and India's climate envoy agreed that India's 'red lines have been met', an editorial in the *Hindu* described the summit as 'a concerted US strategy to corner the major developing economies in the climate negotiation'.[119] In contrast, another editorially respected major Indian newspaper criticized the G-77 for 'grandstanding and delays', and India and China for their 'dilatory tactics' at the conference.[120] But Indian experts know that a grouping like BASIC works well as long as its central purpose is to counter Western (particularly US or EU) positions—but it hardly creates, at least in its current form, a forum for active cooperation among its members.

While other countries are not immune to the push and pull of domestic politics, India's challenge remains that it is has not yet developed a habit of conciliating domestic pressures with a results-oriented stance in some multilateral institutions. As well, Indian experts point to a wariness of 'multi-motive' gains and a tendency by Indian negotiators to default to zero-sum calculations.[121] Likewise, the organization of Indian arguments around 'principles' largely precludes compromise; whereas advancement of its 'interests' might more greatly favour 'give and take' in order to achieve overall positive outcomes.[122] Despite India's new membership of the multilateral power elite, and running counter to Prime Minister Singh's open and confident stance, the domestic chorus on multilateral deal-making too often remains a resounding 'No'.

India therefore finds itself somewhat disabled, constrained by domestic constituents while not yet endowed with the weight necessary internationally

to implement a domestically determined agenda, sometimes improvising counterproductively in a 'spoiler' stance. Delhi's growing drive to break free of the developing country mold and join the major powers in managing the multilateral system thus creates a tension and a degree of unpredictability on India's likely positions in years ahead. An Indian interlocutor comments: 'Indian leaders may yet recognize the difference between perching themselves on a high chair at the high table where they must cooperate with those that really run the show, and sitting at the head of the developing nations' table where they can hold sway and appear to matter.'[123] Nitin Desai, a grandee of UN climate negotiations over many years, colourfully points out that the final Copenhagen agreement was achieved by the two '20% players' (the USA and China in terms of carbon emissions) while India, which was among the '5% players' (with Japan and Russia), was only needed to provide some extra ballast on the Chinese side along with the two '2% players', Brazil and South Africa.[124] Given that the future of the international system is likely to be determined to a significant degree for some years by Sino-US understandings and disagreements, India can keep its options open while its weight in international relations grows. Meanwhile, as India demonstrated on climate change, it is likely to become more rather than less nimble in key negotiations in the future.

Over the years, like many others', Indian practice of multilateralism has been inconsistent relative to the principles it espouses. While India has consistently been a (selective) rule taker in the multilateral system, it likely harboured the desire to be a rule maker and occasionally acted accordingly. Thus while effusively committing itself to the UN Charter and the cause of peace, India forcibly evicted the Portuguese from Goa in 1961, adopted a militarily aggressive posture on the border issue with China in 1962, intervened in the East Pakistan conflict in 1971, annexed the kingdom of Sikkim in 1975, and intervened in the Sri Lankan conflict in 1987. India has consistently championed disarmament at the UN, yet it has conducted nuclear tests twice and refuses to sign non-proliferation and non-testing treaties, advancing a variety of 'principles' that many countries—not just those of the West—find confounding, to justify its actions.

A country that perceives itself as geographically, economically, and culturally entitled to meaningful international power is likely to resent external constraints and rules, as the USA often does. But the USA recognizes that it benefits from most of the multilateral regimes it has done so much to design and develop since the Second World War. As India has gained in international stature, the transition of its foreign policy remains incomplete, but it is increasingly called on to contribute as well. Such are the rules of the high table.

Thus, while India does take its international legal—particularly Treaty—obligations very seriously, pooled or shared sovereignty is, in the words of one Western envoy in Delhi, 'not India's thing'.[125] For many Indian

practitioners and analysts, multilateralism is at best a defence against the unilateralism of others, just as arguments for multipolarity have been largely articulated with reference to the unipolar policies of Washington after September 2001. Indeed, in the view of another foreign envoy in Delhi, India's multilateral diplomacy is strikingly 'defensive rather than assertive and creative'.[126] But among other advantages that its current multilateral prominence provides is that it allows India to manage its neighbourhood challenges with greater confidence and serenity. Far from Pakistan being in a position today to outflank India within the NAM, or in the UN General Assembly, it is not even a member of the G-20.

India has not yet thought through the extent to which it must, and can, shoulder domestically costly global burdens. It is not just Western powers that will look to it to do its part; poorer developing countries will as well. The voluntary, non-binding route in defining its commitments, as at Copenhagen, is more attractive for now, but as its economy and weight grow further, it will likely not find it possible to stick to this path. Indeed, the Kyoto Protocol has foundered as an effective tool for burden-sharing because it so blatantly put all of the burden on the industrialized countries while letting large emitters of the South off the hook: a conceivable approach in 1998, but no longer a practicable one in 2010 when both India and China are recording robust growth while the West largely stagnates.

One very attractive feature of Indian foreign policy is that the country's leaders have never obscured the daunting internal challenges that remained their primary task. As the first architect of independent India's foreign policy said, 'I do not pretend to say that India, as she is, can make a vital difference to world affairs. So long as we have not solved most of our own problems, our voice cannot carry the weight that it normally will and should.'[127] And as earlier chapters suggest, India's internal deficits in security, equity, and governance remain daunting. Other countries will need to bear its particular circumstances, many of them admirable, others worrying, in mind, knowing that India possesses the capacity over time to tackle them successfully. In conversation with Indian politicians, business leaders, writers, and civil society figures, the dominant recurring theme is that India must, above all, attack what veteran Congress grandee and former Governor of Jammu and Kashmir, Karan Singh, describes as 'the citadels of poverty'.[128] If India's greater glory internationally needs to take a decidedly secondary place to this objective, so be it for the vast majority of Indians, including a wide range of elites.

Like other large and complex countries, India would prefer the world to adapt to it than to engage in the messy business of give and take required by meaningful engagement with others.[129] But those shaping Indian foreign policy today know that Delhi will increasingly need to meet its international partners half-way, often in multilateral settings.