



**Rising Powers Initiative- Sigur Center for Asian Studies
Policy Alert #93- February 2, 2015**

President Obama's Trip to India Prompts Reactions from Rising Powers

U.S. President Barack Obama's three-day trip to India last week concluded with a lengthy, [59-paragraph-long joint statement](#) containing agreements on a variety of issues, from much awaited progress on India's nuclear liability law, to the [strengthening of defense ties](#) involving technology trade, to [U.S. \\$4-billion investment](#) in Indian businesses, to [counterterrorism](#) and [climate change cooperation](#), along with an expansive strategic vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean region. In this Policy Alert, we examine commentary from India, China, and Japan on the recent summit between President Obama and Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

INDIA

Indian newspapers and critics welcomed President Obama's visit as a "[new chapter](#)" in U.S.-India relations.

- Former foreign secretary Shyam Saran called the summit "[a milestone event](#)" in bilateral relations, as the symbolism of the "personal chemistry" between the two leaders was matched with the substance of the bilateral agreements.
- Indian political commentator Ashok Malik stated that the agreements reached "[have gone well beyond expectations](#)." "Modi has pushed ahead with much of what Singh started, including the nuclear deal, or wanted to start (serious defense cooperation, the India-Pacific thrust) but was blocked from doing by naysayers in his own party and government."

However, there was some skepticism about the content of the bilateral agreements.

- "On the business side, there were [no significant outcomes](#) to talk about except for the resolve to expand trade ties and a [\\$4-billion commitment from the U.S.](#) in investment and loans," said *The Hindu*, comparing the U.S. commitment to Japan's \$35-billion investment package agreed on during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's last visit to Tokyo, and noting the fact that Washington is "unhappy with the 'Make in India' policy, especially in the renewable energy sector where it sees great prospects for its own companies," and where the half of the U.S. investment will be spent.
- The newspaper also called for more openness in the [bilateral nuclear deal](#). "[T]he Indian public [must be informed](#) about exactly what assurances have been given to U.S. officials in return for their acceptance of the Indian liability law, and what the added costs would be."
- *The Indian Express* [expressed skepticism](#) about the nuclear deal, arguing that some tweaks in the rules and definitions of India's liability law may not be able to stand domestic legal scrutiny. The newspaper concluded that the government eventually needs to amend the law.
- "On defense cooperation, the results are [less than impressive](#), given the hype built around the Defense Technology and Trade Initiative," said former foreign secretary Kanwal Sibal. "The four projects announced are supposed to be 'pathfinders.' No big-ticket item is included."

The technologies mentioned may be significant, but do not seem cutting edge."

- M.M. Bahadur, a retired Air Vice Marshall and Fellow at the Centre for Air Power Studies, New Delhi, also noted the limited nature of defense cooperation. "Presently, despite the large number of defense exercises that are conducted, the Indo-U.S. defense interaction is [limited to one between a buyer and seller](#)...India sees improved defense ties as means of acquiring cutting edge technologies...[to] retain its strategic autonomy."

Commentators also discussed the implications of the summit for India-China relations.

- Indian journalist Jhinuk Chowdhury called the summit "a clear statement that India is finally shedding ambiguity from its foreign policy and making tough choices, a stance that's [putting Beijing on guard](#)." Having expressed concerns about the region's [rising tensions over maritime territorial disputes](#)" in the joint statement, "India wants to regain its lost importance in the region, especially in Southeast Asia and the Indian Ocean region. It has made a clear choice who it wants to partner with for this."
- Hardeep S. Puri, former permanent representative to the United Nations, dismissed the interpretation of President Obama's visit as anti-China. "India clearly is undertaking a multi-aligned approach. Both India and the US [want to engage a new and rising China](#) in the interest of global economic and political well-being."
- Prashant Jha, associate editor for the *Hindustan Times*, called the summit India's "balancing act" between the two superpowers. The Modi government "now subscribes to the theory that [closer engagement with the U.S. may well open up more possibilities with Beijing](#)," as it sees the U.S.-India relations as "an insurance policy" in engaging with China.
- *The Hindu* warned that strengthening the U.S.-India relationship "[should not come at the cost of other relationships](#). The [vision statement](#) on the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean region is likely to have a more lasting impact on relations with China, as it seeks to portray an India-U.S. front against diplomatic, economic and security challenges in the region."

CHINA

Chinese media expressed unease at the strategic implications of President Obama's visit to India on Sino-Indian relations while simultaneously downplaying the significance of U.S.- India relations.

- At a [regular press conference](#), Chinese spokesperson Hua Chunying stated that, "It is hoped that the development of U.S.-India relations will help promoted mutual trust and cooperation among countries in the region, and safeguard peace, stability, and prosperity of the region."
- "A zero-sum game is not what China and India are asking for, but under Western influence, [India is sliding into it](#)," stated *Global Times* journalist Wen Dao. "Putting aside debates over specific issues, China and India must keep in mind that their relations cannot take a life-or-death struggle as a foothold."
- Another *Global Times* op-ed by report Sun Xiaobo expressed skepticism towards the fanfare of President Obama's visit. "The seemingly enthusiastic approaching of the U.S. and India and the [bromance](#) between the two leaders do not suggest any substantial improvement in the bilateral ties of the two countries...India intends to maximize its interests from the important relationship with the U.S., but it has its own strategies to follow and carefully measures its critical relations with other big powers such as China."
- "The Obama trip in India may succeed in propelling the U.S.-India relationship forward, but it could hardly change the ground reality that [India also needs China](#) as a crucial cooperation partner," wrote writer Wang Haiqing in the state-run *Xinhua*.
- "No matter how successful the trip, it should not come at the [expense of relations](#) with other countries, China among them," warned an editorial in the *South China Morning Post*.

JAPAN

Japanese newspapers mainly focused on the security implications of President Obama's trip.

- The *Nikkei Shimbun* attributed the success of the trip to "[the great personal chemistry](#)" between President Obama and Prime Minister Modi, noting a shift in India's foreign policy that has traditionally "[kept a certain distance](#)" from the United States.
- The "top priority" of President Obama's visit was to create an "[encirclement](#)" of China involving

New Delhi, explained the *Nikkei*, as India plays an important role in maintaining the stability of the Asia-Pacific region.

- The *Mainichi Shimbun* posited that the strengthening of the U.S.-India relations was [driven by concerns over the rise of China](#) and its increasing maritime assertiveness in the region.
- The newspaper also concluded that India [achieved more accomplishments](#) than the U.S., because the summit met many of New Delhi's demands-the nuclear deal, further defense and economic cooperation, and counter-terrorism efforts concerning Pakistan-but not Washington's demands on climate change, such as specific greenhouse gas reduction goals.

POLICY ALERTS of the Rising Powers Initiative inform U.S. policymakers and media professionals of the ongoing debates in China, India, Russia, Japan, and South Korea on current issues and events relevant to American foreign policy. The Rising Powers Initiative includes a research project that identifies and tracks the worldviews of major and aspiring powers in Asia and Eurasia. This project is supported by a grant from the Carnegie Corporation of New York.

The Elliott School's new [Brazil Initiative](#) has joined the Rising Powers Policy Alerts, giving voice to the 'B' in 'BRIC.' The Brazil Initiative promotes improved understanding of Brazil through hosting special events and research related to Brazil.

Find the Brazil Initiative online: esbi@gwu.edu; [Facebook](#); [Twitter](#)

For further information and analysis, visit the Rising Powers website and blog at <http://www.risingpowersinitiative.org>

Rising Powers Initiative

Sigur Center for Asian Studies
The Elliott School of International Affairs

1957 E St., NW, Suite 503
Washington, D.C. 20052



Join the Sigur Center's mailing list