



RISING POWERS INITIATIVE

SIGUR CENTER FOR ASIAN STUDIES

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Indian and U.S. Experts Exchange Mixed Views on India as a Global Power

India's foreign policy has become increasingly contested in domestic Indian politics, calling into question some of the assumptions and expectations that American policy-makers may have about the future of US-India relations. This divergence in opinion was highlighted at the "India as a Global Power: Contending Views from India" conference.

Assessing India's Threat Environment

The speakers from India at the conference disagreed on a wide range of issues, one of which was the question of India's threat environment. Bharat Karnad, Professor at the Center for Policy Research in New Delhi, identified China's military build-up and proliferation activities as the top threats to Indian security. Former Indian Foreign Secretary Lalit Mansingh also expressed grave concern over China's naval presence in the Indian Ocean, though he did not consider it an imminent threat.

In contrast, Mani Shankar Aiyar, Member of the Indian Parliament, was more optimistic that India could forge cooperative solutions with China on issues of common interest, such as freedom of the seas. He instead argued that Pakistan remains the most prominent threat to India. T.N. Ninan, Chairman and Chief Editor of the *Business Standard*, while concurring on both the Chinese and Pakistani threats, emphasized economic development as India's top priority and said energy security and interna-

tional pressure to act on climate change could hinder India's growth trajectory.

Whether or not India could or should become a global power appeared to frame the debate on threats to national security. Karnad discussed India's threat environment in the context of balance-of-power politics. Aiyar on the other hand argued that India should "eschew the quest for dominance" and instead "use diplomacy to pursue peaceful coexistence." While Mansingh said "the world is large enough for both [India and China] to grow and prosper" and that the issues at stake were not about dominance, he did stress India's "right to exist as a nation," implying the need for vigilance in the face of external challenges to its economic development.

Indian Schools of Thought

The range of views expressed by the conference panelists was a reflection of the diversity in opinion on Indian foreign policy, explained Deepa Ollapally, co-director of the Rising Powers Initiative and Associate Director of the Sigur Center. Since the end of the Cold War, India's economic liberalization, its nuclear power status, the growth of coalition politics and the rise of China have brought out sharp differences within India over the direction of the nation's foreign policy. One of the goals of the Rising Powers Initiative is to understand the landscape of these debates, which Olla-

The Sigur Center's Rising Powers Initiative examines how domestic political debates and identity issues affect international relations in Asia.

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More information on the Rising Powers Initiative can be found at:

<http://www.risingpowersinitiative.org>

This Policy Brief is based on an international conference on "India as a Global Power: Contending Views from India," held at the Elliott School of International Affairs on Monday, January 23, 2012. The conference was co-sponsored by the Sigur Center for Asian Studies and the Center for a New American Security and featured Nirupama Rao, Indian Ambassador to the U.S. Participants included:

- **Mani Shankar Aiyar** (Rajya Sabha)
- **Doug Bandow** (Cato Institute)
- **Sadanand Dhume** (American Enterprise Institute)
- **Richard Fontaine** (Center for a New American Security)
- **Bharat Karnad** (Centre for Policy Research, New Delhi)
- **Lalit Mansingh** (Indian Foreign Service)
- **Henry R. Nau** (GWU)
- **TN Ninan** (*Business Standard*)
- **Deepa Ollapally** (GWU)
- **George Perkovich** (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace)
- **Daniel Twining** (German Marshall Fund)

Additional information on the conference including audio recordings and press coverage can be found [here](#).

pally has categorized into five main schools of thought: Standard Nationalist, Neo-Nationalist, Hyper-Nationalist, Great Power Realist, and Liberal Globalist. These schools differ in their attitudes on India's foreign policy goals, as well as their preferences over political, economic or military means to achieve those goals.¹

American Views on India's Role

Disagreement over foreign policy may be a relatively new development in India, but is by no means unfamiliar to the American political scene, pointed out Henry Nau, co-director of the Rising Powers Initiative and Professor at the George Washington University. The American panelists at the conference represented a range of political perspectives on U.S. foreign policy, and they also differed to some extent in their views on what to expect from India in the US-Indian relationship.

Doug Bandow, Senior Fellow at the Cato Institute, argued that India's rise and its potential to play a counter-balancing role against China comes at a helpful time when the U.S. is retrenching from the region. India should be America's partner in security, said Bandow, and not one that is merely expecting security guarantees from the U.S. However, George Perkovich, Vice President of Studies at the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, warned that the U.S. should not have overly high expectations about India's ability to project military power in the region. Not only is India's military lacking in domestic political clout, he said, but India's "body politic is also ambivalent about military cooperation."

The two other American speakers underscored the uniqueness of India's democratic status, as a contrast to its uncertain military power. It is more relevant to consider India in the context of a "balance of values" rather than a balance of power, said Sadanand Dhume, Resident Fellow at the American Enterprise Institute, "because India is already a compelling example of democracy." Dhume further argued that as China increases its influence in the South China Sea, it will increasingly be in India's interest to have democratic partners in the region, such as Bangladesh and Sri Lanka. Dan Twining, Senior Fellow at the U.S. German Marshall Fund, characterized India as a "swing vote" in the future of the global order, stressing that India's success as a rising democracy has important "spillover effects." Although India doesn't talk about democracy promotion, said Twining, it played a critical role in Afghanistan's reconstruction, provided electoral assistance to Egypt, and could work with the U.S. in Myanmar's ongoing liberalization.

Indian Views on America's Decline

Underlying this issue of India's role in the bilateral relationship is the impact of U.S. retrenchment from the region, and whether the Indians see the U.S. as a power in decline. Rather than a real decline in resources, the U.S. seems to be declining in its willing-

ness to act as a great power, said Karnad. If such is the case, Karnad argued, it would help India for the U.S. to "retrench more formally," so that "the ball will then be in the court of the Indian government to make up its mind" on whether to continue as a "habitual freerider in security." Mansingh saw the U.S. on a trajectory of relative decline "because other countries are becoming stronger," but noted that "this is not a cause for panic." Instead, America's relative decline will put its relationship with India on more equal footing, and U.S. withdrawal from the region will make India become more self-reliant and strengthen its defense. Aiyar also welcomed U.S. retrenchment, but for different reasons. He stressed the principle of opposing military force in the name of diplomatic interests, and reiterated his view that India should eschew balance of power politics so that it can focus on the country's economic development.

The Indian and American panelists exchanged views on a variety of other topics throughout the daylong conference, including Pakistan, Iran, Tibet, nuclear proliferation, terrorism, free trade, and the United Nations Security Council, amongst many other key issues in the U.S.-India relationship. Ninan noted that the Americans at the conference all seemed to recognize India's desire for strategic autonomy, but that this kind of attitude was not evident in U.S. policymakers. If that is the case, the conference not only highlighted the divergence in opinion amongst Indians, but also the outstanding gaps in understanding between the U.S. and Indian governments.

By Amy Hsieh, Research Assistant, Rising Power Initiative and Ph.D. Candidate, Political Science Department, GWU.

1. For further analysis of the Indian domestic debates, see Deepa Ollapally and Rajesh Rajagopalan, "[The Pragmatic Challenge to Indian Foreign Policy](#)," *The Washington Quarterly* 34, 2 (Spring 2011): 145-162. On the Indian schools of thought, see Ollapally and Rajagopalan, "India: Foreign Policy Perspectives of an Ambiguous Power" in *Worldviews of Aspiring Powers*, eds. Henry R. Nau and Deepa Ollapally (Oxford University Press, forthcoming).