

India's New Foreign Policy Cozying up to Japan, Befriending America, Appeasing China

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Within less than six months of taking power, new Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi embarked on a string of overseas trips that included several bilateral summit meetings. Presidents or prime ministers from six South Asian countries had attended Modi's inauguration ceremony; right after taking office, Modi toured Bhutan and Nepal before attending the summit of the five BRICS countries in Brazil. Obviously, Modi's foreign policy priority is to reconfirm friendly relations with India's neighbors. Furthermore, he intends to reclaim India's predominance in South Asia and the Indian Ocean.

Traditionally, New Delhi has regarded the Indian Ocean as its backyard. India has heightened its alert since China began in 2005 to lay claim to areas in the Indian Ocean and vicinity through its String of Pearls Strategy and began to regularly patrol the Indian Ocean after the People's Liberation Army (PLA) was dispatched to Somalia to carry out anti-piracy missions. Aside from maintaining friendly relations with its all-weather ally Pakistan, China courts Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and other countries in the region more aggressively than before. India pays close attention to these moves. Modi's party, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), used to criticize the then ruling Indian National Congress (INC) party for its inane response to the changing situation. That Modi chose Bhutan and Nepal as his very first overseas travel destinations demonstrated India's ambition to reclaim its leading role in South Asia.

Modi's main counterparts in bilateral summit meetings during his overseas trips were Japan and the United States. Modi enjoys a warm personal relationship with Japanese Premier Shinzo Abe. The two leaders are not only very close with regard to their nationalist ideas and quest to make their nations stronger and more self-confident, they have also backed each other during politically less fortunate times. During his visit to Japan, Modi did not only win a pledge from Tokyo for investments worth US\$35 billion, the two sides also launched detailed cooperation programs in the fields of technology, commerce and trade, security, and education. Another concrete example of bilateral dealings is the introduction of the Shinkansen bullet train to India for the Delhi-Mumbai and Chennai-Bangalore industrial corridors. While in Japan, Modi also implicitly criticized China in a public statement, creating the impression that India and Japan intend to join hands to contain their huge neighbor.

Although the United States also rolled out the red carpet for Modi, the U.S.-India Joint Statement clearly lacked in substance in comparison, not only for failing to list concrete sums and cooperation projects but also because it appeared inadequate for such a high-profile visit. Interaction between Modi and Obama also clearly differed from the cordial relationship between Modi and Abe. Washington invited Modi in order to build strategic cooperation between the two countries, but for Modi, the U.S. trip marks a personal diplomatic victory. Washington was

unwilling to issue a visa for Modi as recently as this past March on the ground that the Indian leader is culpable for the massacre of more than 1,000 Muslims in the western Indian state of Gujarat in 2002 when he was chief minister there. Washington's invitation to Modi amounts to a negation of its previous stance.

Among the big powers aside from Japan and the United States, China courts India with particular aggression. Well aware of the importance Modi attaches to economic development, Chinese President Xi Jinping declared during his visit to India in mid-September that China would surpass Japan with US\$100 billion investment in India. Furthermore, the two sides agreed to boost bilateral tourism by dubbing 2015 the Visit India Year and 2016 the Visit China Year. Nevertheless, these moves cannot conceal the Chinese-Indian differences with regard to military security issues and the structural reality that highlights their strategic competition in South Asia.

On the eve of Xi's visit to India, there were again reports of Chinese troops trespassing into India, setting up camp. Similar scenarios had happened during the India trip of Chinese Premier Li Keqiang last year. These intrusions only reignited tensions between India and China. While Xi refrained from visiting China's staunch ally Pakistan en route to India, he made it a point to visit the Maldives and Sri Lanka first, sending a clear message that Beijing wants to contain India. Still, despite all this, India was not afraid of upsetting China. When China adamantly demanded that India respect the one China principle, India retorted "For India to agree to a one-China policy, China should reaffirm a one-India policy." This would

include an acknowledgement from Beijing that Arunachal Pradesh, a territory in northeast India which China claims as South Tibet, and Pakistan-controlled Kashmir are integral parts of India. Moreover, Beijing would have to accept the Indian passports of ethnic Indians in South Tibet and Kashmir instead of regarding them as Chinese. On top of that, India has elevated its contacts with the Tibetan government in exile.

To conclude, Modi's foreign policy gives priority to consolidating India's leadership role in South Asia while cooperating with large nations such as Japan, the United States and China on various issues of its choosing. While such autonomous big power diplomacy is worlds apart from India's traditional non-aligned policy, India's current government leaders seem no longer restrained by the non-alignment movement. In its relations with Japan, the United States and China, India will seek even closer ties with Japan while exploring new opportunities for cooperation with the United States and maintaining a friendly, yet vigilant relationship with China. India will not deliberately antagonize China, but it is unlikely to initiate cooperation with China in international affairs but rather address bilateral ties within a multilateral framework. **BT**

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