

THE SIGUR CENTER FOR ASIAN STUDIES
ASIA REPORT

ISSUE NO. 7, JANUARY, 2010

RISING INDIA'S GREAT POWER BURDEN

The concept of India as a rising power has become almost commonplace. Yet systematic studies of India's emerging global role are rare. C. Raja Mohan, one of India's most prolific and respected foreign policy analysts, provided a skillful analysis of India's shift from leader of the third world to a rising power and its future as a possible great power. In his lecture, "Rising India's Great Power Burden," he looked at changes in India's self-perception, goals, and the mismatch between its ambitions to be a regional and world leader and its limited resources that has long persisted.

Mohan discussed the current debate within India on whether it wants to be, or should be a great power; examined the changing Indian identity and its impact on India's foreign policy aspirations; and looked at whether the current transition from developing country to a rising power is sustainable. Each of these subjects helps to illuminate not only the current debate in India, but also sheds some light on the parallel situation in China, and on the U.S. approach to India.

India, according to Mohan, is currently engaging in an internal debate about the country's future, rooted in the belief that it is emerging as a major power. While there is a lot of enthusiasm for the idea of India as a major power among the middle class, the political leadership has been much more cautious. One side of the debate, which

includes Sonia Gandhi and Ramachandra Guha, argues that India is still a developing country, with many problems, and should concentrate on internal challenges rather than focusing on external matters. Guha argues that India should never become a superpower, both for practical reasons and to remain true to its philosophical moorings—pursuing power maximization as a superpower is forced to do, contradicts India's traditional goals and morality. This sense of ambiguity about India's role on the international stage still dominates Indian liberal thinking.

Mohan argues, however, that it is not a question of whether India wants to or should be a major power, but rather, if India's economic growth continues at the same rate, it *will be* a major power. Because of India's rapid rate of growth and its central government uniting the country, its relations with the world will be fundamentally altered, inevitably increasing its weight in the global system. Despite the low per-capita income, the aggregation of the entire Indian economy carves out an important place in the world, making the question not whether India wants to be a great power, but rather when its growth will make it a great power.

The second set of issues arising from India's rise as a major power relate to the changes it has wrought in the Indian identity and consequently, in their approach to foreign

LECTURE IN THE POWER
AND IDENTITY SERIES

November 16, 2009

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policy. There have been, according to Mohan, four major shifts: from self-perception as a weak, developing country to an emerging power; from autonomy to responsibility in the international system; from third-world-ism to democracy; and from non-intervention to a willingness to use force abroad. Each of these shifts is a major change in India's self-perception that will affect how the country behaves in the future.

The first shift, from India as a weak, developing country, dependant on cultural power, to one with other indices of power is rooted in the country's traditional position as the leader of the non-aligned movement. On the surface, this looks like a drastic change, from the leader of the third world to a country that aligns more with the Western powers. However, Mohan argues that this is not as much of a shift as it seems at first glance. He points out that Nehru himself, viewed as the father of the non-alignment policy, was actually interested in creating peace between the US and the USSR, not simply in anti-imperialism. India, in this sense, has always had ambitions on the world stage, but its material power is only now beginning to catch up.

The second shift Mohan identifies is that from autonomy to responsibility. The concept of strategic autonomy, long the mainstay of Indian foreign policy, is based on a view of India as a weak country, unable to resist outside forces and thus reliant on the principle of autonomy to preserve itself. The current shift towards responsibility on the international stage shows a move towards behaving like a major power, by the government imposing its will on others, becoming more engaged abroad, and no longer relying solely on an argument of autonomy to protect India from outside influence. This also includes a change in how India partici-



pates in international organizations and treaties. Mohan sees a shift in attitude among Indian officials, from proudly wrecking international negotiations, like those at Doha, to a desire for participation, as with the global warming debates.

The third shift that Mohan discusses is from India describing itself in terms of its anti-imperial and anti-colonial stance, to one where Prime Minister Manmohan Singh describes India as a democracy. Indians seem more proud of being a democracy now, and view it as something of value they can offer the world. More emphasis is also being placed on democracy in India's international relations, helping to determine with whom and how they interact on the international stage.

The final change in Indian behavior relates to the question of intervention.

It is often said that the Chinese and Indians are both firm proponents of the principle of non-intervention and absolute sovereignty. However, India's neighbors in South Asia would most likely disagree with the idea that India does not believe in intervention. The difference, Mohan argues, is with capability rather than principle. If India was able to intervene somewhere outside the subcontinent where an Indian minority was being oppressed, they would. However, since they lack an American-style armed forces capable of such action, they do not. The idea of non-intervention as something essential is beginning to change in India as their interests abroad grow, paralleling their need to protect those interests. This leads to an increased willingness to interfere outside India's borders and a reduction in the reliance

on the principle of absolute sovereignty.

These four issues identify ongoing shifts in the Indian identity, affecting how they act on the international stage. However, none of these shifts are complete, they remain in flux as India develops. What must happen in India for these shifts to continue? Mohan describes three reforms within India that must occur if these philosophical changes are to continue. These include the creation of a consensus within the elite political class, a restructuring of the security sector, and reform of the institutions that feed into the security and foreign policy apparatuses.

One of the fundamental changes that must occur within India, Mohan argues, involves elites. India must create consensus within its political class on matters of foreign policy. The problems caused by the lack of consensus among the political elite was demonstrated vividly by the debate over the nuclear agreement with the U.S., the only foreign policy issue that had to be taken to the Indian parliament. The debate highlighted the difference between the Prime Minister, who believed the Americans could be trusted,

and many of the Indian political elite, who found such trust unacceptable. This process has been turning out to be painful and difficult, and will take time.

In addition to the creation of a foreign policy consensus within the elite, there also needs to be reform within the security sector. The institutions, created in the post-colonial period, have been unable to change with the times. Mohan argues that a comprehensive overhaul is needed, including the intelligence and defense communities, the foreign office, and the armed forces. These changes are also difficult and far off in the future.

Structural changes are not everything, however. The expansion of the institutions which support the development of foreign policy, such as universities, think tanks, and an informed elite, are vital to India's ability to continue on its current trajectory. Mohan argues that these structures will come automatically as society advances, and their current lack in India is not a cause for concern. This makes them slightly different from the elite consensus, which must be worked on, and the security sector reforms, which will need strong government initiative and support.

The institutional changes must develop slowly, in tandem with the security sector reforms and the creation of a new political consensus, which will allow India to transition from a developing country to a rising power.

When Americans discuss the idea of other states emerging to play great-power roles on the world stage, they often talk about the concept of a "stakeholder," a country that adopts the existent values and norms, and plays a role in promoting them. This idea of adopting dictated norms, however, does not appeal to the Indian government or population. In order to work together, such statements must be part of a larger package of values and issues, especially democracy. Only when India feels it has the ability to shape and influence the norms and values promoted by the great powers might it feel comfortable enough to become what the U.S. would consider a responsible power. And it is only through the addition of shared values that the idea of becoming a stakeholder in the U.S.-dominated world order might become palatable to the Indian elite.



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