

**Democracy promotion in India's foreign policy:
Emerging trends and developments**

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2014 WPSA Annual Meeting

Seattle, Washington

April 17-19, 2014

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Abstract

Democracy promotion has never been an integral element of India's foreign policy. The pursuit of national interests in the international arena has traditionally revolved around security, trade and energy issues. The lack of active involvement in democracy promotion and support abroad may be explained primarily by India's history of colonialism, Cold War politics and its strategic weaknesses. This paper argues, however, that in recent times India has taken a more active stance in promoting and supporting democracy abroad. It identifies the specific ways in which India has engaged in democracy promotion and support abroad. It demonstrates how the changing nature of India's relationship with the United States and India's rising international profile may help explain this behavior. Nevertheless, democracy promotion and support abroad will need to be balanced with the pursuit of traditional foreign policy objectives. As such, there are elements of both continuity and change observed regarding the issue of democracy promotion in India's foreign policy.

Keywords

India, Foreign Policy, Democracy promotion, South Asia

India is one of the few countries in the developing world that has been relatively successful in constructing and sustaining a democratic political system. Significant changes have occurred in Indian domestic politics during the past two decades. The most permanent of these changes involved a departure from the dominant-party system under the Congress Party at the national level during the early-1990s. The transition to a truly multi-party system was gradual, spread over a period of sixty years. Today, the Indian parliament may be more fragmented but it is also more representative in nature. There is consensus among elites and masses that a democratic political system offers the best possible means to manage differences and govern a country of immense social diversity.

Given its strong commitment to democracy, one would expect India to be at the forefront of promoting democracy as an ideal political system for other countries of the developing world, including its neighbors. The US and western European countries have long engaged in such activities. Democracy promotion abroad involves various types of assistance provided by external actors to support democratization, including political party development, electoral monitoring, supporting independent media and journalists, capacity building for state institutions, training of judges, civic group leaders and legislators, enactment of pro-democracy clauses in regional bodies, and conditional development aid. Some of these activities directly support democracy through the development of institutions and capacity of political and social actors, while others indirectly support democracy by creating conditions that facilitate the transition to democracy and/or allow democracy to survive.¹

Democracy promotion has never been an integral element of India's foreign policy.² The pursuit of national interests in the international arena has traditionally revolved around security, trade and energy issues. The lack of active involvement in democracy promotion and support abroad may be explained primarily by India's history of colonialism, Cold War politics and its own strategic weaknesses. In recent times, during the post-Cold era, India has taken a more active stance in promoting and supporting democracy abroad. It has been engaged with the international community (through institutions like the Commonwealth of Nations, Community of

¹ Sonja Grimm and Julia Leininger, 'Not all good things go together: Conflicting objectives in democracy promotion', in *Democratization*, Vol.19, no.3 (2012), pp.391-414.

² See Jan Cartwright, 'India's regional and international support for democracy: Rhetoric and reality?', in *Asian Survey*, Vol.49, no.3 (May/June 2009), pp. 403-28; Siddharth Mallavarapu, 'Democracy promotion circa 2010: An Indian perspective,', in *Contemporary Politics*, Vol.16, no.1 (March 2010), pp.49-61; Pratap Bhanu Mehta, 'Reluctant India', in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.22, no.4 (October 2011), pp.97-109; C. Raja Mohan, 'Balancing interests and values: India's struggle with democracy promotion, in *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol.30, no.3 (Summer 2007), pp.99-115; S.D. Muni, *India's foreign policy: The democracy dimension* (New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2009); and Oliver Stuenkel, 'Rising powers and the future of democracy promotion: The case of Brazil and India', in *Third World Quarterly*, Vol.34, no.2 (2013), pp.339-55.

Democracies, and its offshoot, the United Nations Democracy Caucus) to promote and support democracy abroad. In addition, it has as utilized bilateral development aid and shared technical expertise with countries like Afghanistan, Bhutan and Nepal to develop the building blocks of democracy in these countries: infrastructure, education, human security and civil society.

The goal of this paper is to discuss the ways in which India has engaged in democracy promotion abroad in recent times and the reasons behind this emerging shift in the country's foreign policy. The next section identifies the reasons behind India's traditional reluctance to promote democracy abroad. Following this, India's recent activities related to democracy promotion is discussed demonstrating a shift in Indian foreign policy. The changing nature of India's relationship with the US and India's rising international profile are advanced as explanations for this shift. Finally, the paper also discusses the delicate balancing act that India has to engage in since such efforts inevitably come into conflict with the pursuit of traditional foreign policy objectives. As such, there are elements of both continuity and change observed regarding the issue of democracy promotion in India's foreign policy.

Why reluctant?

There is no single reason why democracy promotion has not been a priority in Indian foreign policy traditionally.³ During the Cold War, the West's efforts to promote democracy in the third world were seen as an extension of a neo-colonial project by India's leaders. Having achieved independence after a long and painful struggle, India was loath to join either the US or Soviet

³ Some of the reasons mentioned below are drawn from Siddharth Mallavarapu, 'Democracy promotion circa 2010: An Indian perspective,' in *Contemporary Politics*, Vol.16, no.1 (March 2010), pp.49-61; Pratap Bhanu Mehta, 'Reluctant India', in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.22, no.4 (October 2011), pp.97-109; and C. Raja Mohan, 'Balancing interests and values: India's struggle with democracy promotion, in *The Washington Quarterly*, Vol.30, no.3 (Summer 2007), pp.99-115.

bloc and attempted to chart an independent path in international politics. This became known as non-alignment. India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru played a leading role in shaping the country's foreign policy along these lines. Although a democracy, India was hesitant to join the US-led alliance because of its tendency to link capitalism with imperialism. Many Indians believed that under the guise of democracy promotion and protection, western countries were intervening in the internal affairs of non-western countries.

Building relations with newly independent countries in Asia and Africa was a priority so any unsolicited advice to these governments regarding political liberalization was avoided. Dictatorships in Algeria, Cuba, Egypt, and Zimbabwe were tolerated and sometimes embraced in the name of third-world unity and upholding the principle of sovereignty. India also failed to criticize the actions of the Soviet Union in Czechoslovakia (1968) and Afghanistan (1979), further demonstrating that support to democracy abroad was not really a priority in foreign policy.

India was also loath to overtly promote or support democracy in countries where crucial geostrategic and economic interests were involved. The desire to ensure smooth access to natural resources led India to completely eschew any kind of statements or actions that may be seen as supporting democracy in Middle Eastern countries. Another reason for this was that it could jeopardize the status of its migrant workers in these countries resulting in an adverse impact on remittance flows from these countries to India. According to the Reserve Bank of India, a third

of the total foreign remittances come from these countries.⁴ In some cases, India has not been shy about engaging even with military regimes in the pursuit of traditional security objectives. The most glaring example is Myanmar (Burma), where the attempt to counter China's influence and maintain law and order within its restive northeastern states has forced it to engage with a brutal military junta. In the past, India has sometimes ignored the ascendancy of anti-democratic forces in Nepal, most notably the monarchy, in order to ensure that this small Himalayan country remained firmly within its security orbit, thus curbing Chinese influence there.

Allegations of widespread human rights abuses by Indian security forces against civilians in some parts of the country have somewhat tarnished India's record of democracy. India has tackled the Kashmir, Punjab, Assam and Maoist insurgencies with a mix of coercive and accommodative policies. The use of coercive tactics has resulted in the characterization of the Indian state and political system as repressive and corrupt by many domestic and international observers. India's elites and masses are acutely aware of how its democracy continues to fail its people. They feel that preaching to other governments about democracy would result in uncomfortable questions regarding its own record. Enduring social and economic inequality, endemic poverty, and continuing weakness of state institutions requires India to pay more attention at home than abroad. India's limited participation in democracy promotion activities abroad may therefore be explained by both its desire to focus on internal challenges as well as lack of capacity. India is not in a position to 'proselytize' regarding democracy.

⁴ Jayanth Jacob, 'NRIs beat FDI, keep the money coming', *The Hindustan Times*, New Delhi, India, 8 October 2013 [<http://www.hindustantimes.com/business-news/nris-beat-fdi-keep-the-money-coming/article1-941337.aspx>, accessed on 8 Mar. 2014].

India has always believed that transitions to democracy are most successful in countries where the process was initiated by the locals. The international community may be in a position to assist these pro-democracy activists through statements of support and by providing financial assistance, but not through military interventions. Transitions themselves were complicated processes and there was no single blueprint that could be applied to every country out there. Sometimes, interventions by external actors actually undermined transitions to democracy. The recent experience of Afghanistan, Democratic Republic of Congo, Egypt, Iraq, Libya, Nepal, Pakistan, Yemen and many others demonstrates what democracy scholars knew long back that the process of transition is never smooth or linear.

Unlike many western countries, India does not have an institutional mechanism that facilitates the task of promoting and supporting democracy abroad.⁵ There is not equivalent agency in India to the United States Agency for International Development (USAID), the UK's Department for International Development (DFID), and the Canadian International Development Agency (CIDA). There are also no civil society organizations and think-tanks in India like the National Endowment for Democracy (NED), the Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (CEIP) and Freedom House devoted to studying and researching democracy worldwide and lobbying for democracy promotion abroad. Many of these organizations coordinate with Western governments, thereby providing more direction and purpose to the goal of democracy promotion worldwide. In the absence of such institutional capacity and absence of non-government organizations (NGOs), India's efforts to foster a representative political system abroad is likely

⁵ Christian Wagner, 'Promotion of democracy and foreign policy in India', *German Institute for International and Security Affairs*, SWP-Berlin Research Paper no.13 (October 2009), pp.1-27 [http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2009_RP13_wgn_ks.pdf, accessed 25 Mar. 2014].

to be poorly implemented and also invite the same kinds of criticism from other countries that it used to level against western countries during the Cold War.

Many scholars have highlighted the institutional shortcomings of India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) and the Indian Foreign Service (IFS).⁶ The problems associated with the MEA include inadequate staffing at headquarters and under-staffing in diplomatic and consular posts in Africa and Latin America. The IFS has also suffered from meager human resources and the lack of use of 'outside expertise'. This has resulted in India channeling its existing capacity towards the pursuit of traditional security objectives. Democracy promotion abroad was not seen as a strong contributor to national security, energy security or economic development and hence fewer resources were devoted to this enterprise.

Finally, the federal structure of the country and the institutionalization of coalition politics have enhanced the role of state governments in foreign policy. The variety of actors involved in foreign-policy formulation and implementation often results in lack of consensus on long-term objectives. Democracy promotion is not an ad-hoc enterprise. It requires long-term investment and commitment to the process of fostering the rule of law and respect for human rights across the world. India's fractured polity makes it difficult to evolve a consensus on where and how to pursue democracy promotion activities. There are also no prominent actors at the national or state-level that are interested in promoting democracy abroad.

⁶ See Sanjaya Baru, *Can Indian Think Tanks and Research Institutions Cope with the Rising Demand for Foreign and Security Policy Research*, Institute of South Asian Studies, National University of Singapore, Working Paper No.67, 16 June 2009, pp.1-15; Daniel Markey, 'Developing India's Foreign Policy "Software"'. *Asia Policy*, No.8 (July 2009), pp.73-96; Kishan S. Rana, 'Inside the Indian Foreign Service', in *Foreign Service Journal* (September 2002), pp.35-41; and Rajiv Sikri, *Challenge and Strategy: Rethinking India's Foreign Policy* (New Delhi: Sage Publications, 2009).

Winds of Change?

In recent years, India appears to be gradually shifting from its traditional reluctance to participate in any meaningful foreign democracy promotion activities. Evidence of this can be seen in statements made by India's leaders praising liberal democracy as a model and expressing willingness to promote and support it abroad without sacrificing old beliefs:

“Liberal democracy is the natural order of political organization in today's world. All alternative systems, authoritarian and majoritarian in varying degrees, are an aberration.”⁷

Manmohan Singh, Prime Minister (2004-), Government of India.

“While we are convinced of democratic principles, we have been – and will continue to be – somewhat ambivalent towards the idea that external forces ought to force democratic change...India is ready to assist in the great transformation of the regional political landscape that are currently evolving in Pakistan, Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Myanmar, and share its experiences on creating a democratic society...”⁸

Jairam Ramesh, Minister of State for Commerce and Industry (2006-2009);

Minister of State for Power (2008-2009), Government of India.

“As a functioning democracy ourselves naturally we feel very comfortable and enthused if there are more democracies emerging...[W]e don't believe in the imposition of democracy or democratic values of any country. But if there is any interest in any country about our democratic institutions or in the institutions...we are ready to share these...”⁹

Shyam Saran, Foreign Secretary (2004-2006), Government of India.

⁷ “PM's speech at India Today conclave”, Address by Dr. Manmohan Singh, New Delhi, 25 February 2005, *Prime Minister of India (Speeches)* [<http://pmindia.gov.in/speech-details.php?nodeid=73>, accessed 2 Mar. 2014].

⁸ “Democracy and Development in a Globalized World”, Address by Jairam Ramesh, New Delhi, 17-18 June 2008, *International IDEA Democracy Roundtable in partnership with CSDS* [http://www.idea.int/publications/dd_globalized_world/upload/Democracy-and-Development-in-a-Globalized-World.pdf, accessed 15 Mar. 2014].

⁹ Shyam Saran, “Neighborhood Watch”, *Outlook India*, 14 February 2005 [<http://www.outlookindia.com/article.aspx?226502>, accessed 10 Mar. 2014].

These statements, indicative of a more active stance on democracy support and promotion abroad than during the Cold War years, have been backed by deeds. India has been involved in several multilateral institutions engaged in democracy promotion worldwide. India played an active role in rallying the Commonwealth of Nations to condemn military coups in Pakistan (1999) and Fiji (2000), leading to the suspension of membership of both countries from this organization.¹⁰ Earlier, it had supported the suspension of Nigeria's membership from the same organization in response to the execution of prominent dissident and activist Ken Saro-Wiwa in 1995. It also agreed with the decision of the Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) to suspend Zimbabwe's membership in 2002.

India hosted the World Movement for Democracy conference in New Delhi in 1999. The World Movement for Democracy was an initiative of the NED, designed to support pro-democracy groups in non-democratic countries and foster transnational links between them and other pro-democracy groups worldwide. India was also a founding member of the Community of Democracies, an inter-governmental organization established in 2000. The goal of this organization is to strengthen democracy worldwide by providing support to emerging democracies and civil society. In 2004, the countries belonging to the Community of Democracies organized themselves into the UN Democracy Caucus. It is supported by many democracy promotion NGOs. The purpose is to promote a democratic agenda in the UN.¹¹

¹⁰ Robert Herman and Theodore Piccone (eds.), 'India', in *Defending democracy: A global survey of foreign policy trends 1992-2002* (Washington, DC: Democracy Coalition Project, 2002).

¹¹ Christian Wagner, 'Promotion of democracy and foreign policy in India', *German Institute for International and Security Affairs*, SWP-Berlin Research Paper no.13 (October 2009), pp.1-27 [http://www.swp-berlin.org/fileadmin/contents/products/research_papers/2009_RP13_wgn_ks.pdf, accessed 25 Mar. 2014].

In July 2005, India and the US announced a Global Democracy Initiative (GDI) for the purpose of promoting democracy and development. They pledged to encourage and support the UN in its electoral assistance programs, including through national capacity building, constitution drafting and providing electoral expertise for transition democracies. India and the US also jointly launched the UN Democracy Fund, which was designed to finance projects that build and strengthen democratic institutions, promote human rights, and ensure the participation of all groups in democratic processes. India was the second-largest contributor to the UN Democracy Fund. Some scholars argue that although UN voting records (in the Human Rights Council, General Assembly and Security Council) show that India is still an inconsistent advocate for democracy and human rights on the international stage, recent trends are favorable.¹² Twice it has supported UN Human Rights Council resolutions asking Sri Lanka to investigate reports of human rights violations by government troops during the last stages of the country's civil war.

In recent years, India has been supportive of democracy within its neighborhood. This is most clearly demonstrated in Afghanistan, Bhutan and Nepal. In Afghanistan, it has provided material assistance to the war-ravaged country. Assistance is concentrated in areas such as human security, roads and highways, electricity, agriculture, telecommunications, education and health.¹³ In consultation with the Afghan national government, it has initiated several projects across the country in an effort to rebuild the economy.¹⁴ India contributed \$200,000 to the multi-

¹² Ted Piccone, 'The multilateral dimension', in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.22, no.4 (October 2011), pp.139-52.

¹³ Patryk Kugiel, 'India in Afghanistan: Valuable partner of the West.' *PISM: The Polish Institute of International Affairs*, Policy Paper No.19 (October 2011), pp.1-9 [http://www.pism.pl/files/?id_plik=8865, Accessed 27 Feb. 2014].

¹⁴ "India and Afghanistan: A development initiative." *Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India*, New Delhi, India (2009) [<http://mea.gov.in/staticfile/meapublication/Report.pdf>, Accessed 27 Jan. 2014].

donor Afghanistan Reconstruction Trust Fund (ARTF).¹⁵ Most of the assistance provided to Afghanistan is in the form of small-scale, low-visibility development projects at the community level. Assistance is provided in conjunction with the efforts of the international community. The most significant infrastructure project is the construction of a 135-mile long highway from Delaram, in south-western Afghanistan to Zaranj, a town on the Afghan-Iranian border.¹⁶ Construction began in 2003 and the project was completed in 2009 at the cost of \$80 million.

These projects are designed to help create conditions that will facilitate the growth of democracy in Afghanistan. In addition, India has provided assistance with regard to the construction of Afghan parliament building, training parliamentary members and providing material support during elections, in the form of supplying Electronic Voting Machines (EVMs) and indelible ink, which is applied to the forefinger of voters to prevent them from voting multiple times. India has also expressed its willingness to share its experience with federalism, village-level administration (*panchayats*), affirmative action policies (reservations), women's rights, family law, etc., with Afghanistan, if requested. The US has supported India's efforts to provide assistance to Afghanistan, as it contributes to capacity building of core democratic institutions as well as creates conditions that allow democracy to grow. Ultimately, this is expected to result in the improvement of the law and order situation of the country, which is one of the primary goals of the US.

¹⁵ Shanthie M. D'Souza, 'India's aid to Afghanistan: Challenges and prospects', in *Strategic Analysis*, Vol.31, no.5 (2007), pp.833-42.

¹⁶ Vikash Yadav and Conrad Barwa, 'Relational control: India's grand strategy in Afghanistan and Pakistan', in *India Review*, Vol.10, no.2 (2011), pp.93-125.

In Bhutan, a gradual transition from absolute monarchy to democracy is underway. The kingdom's former ruler, Jigme Singye Wangchuk, put his country on this path of change. Although the process began in the early part of the twenty-first century and came as a surprise to many, including ordinary Bhutan, it was actually part of a series of political reforms implemented by the king during previous decades.¹⁷ In December 2006, he abdicated in favor of his eldest son, the western-educated current king Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuk. Under the current king, Bhutan held elections to choose the members of the National Council, the upper-house of Bhutan's Parliament in December 2007. Later in March 2008, the citizens voted to choose the forty-seven members of the National Assembly, the more powerful lower-house of Parliament. Later, Bhutan held local government elections in 2011. In 2013, Bhutan witnessed elections to the National Assembly again, resulting in the opposition party emerging victorious and forming a new government.

Bhutan's transition to a democratic system has been assisted by Indian constitutional experts and electoral commission staff. This assistance extended to the conduct of a series of mock elections in the country to help the electorate prepare for democracy. Bhutanese election officials have also been invited by the Election Commission of India (ECI) to witness the conduct of state assembly elections in India. India sent about four thousand EVMs to Bhutan in 2006. Election-related study tours by Bhutanese electoral officers, security officers and observers are common.

¹⁷ Mark Turner, Sonam Chuki, and Jit Tshering, 'Democratization by decree: The case of Bhutan', in *Democratization*, Vol.18, no.1 (2011), pp.184-210.

Bhutan had sought the help of Indian legal experts during the task of drafting a new constitution for the country and a new election bill.¹⁸

India's relations with Bhutan had been strong prior to and during this transition process. India has supported the 'top-down' democratization process underway in Bhutan. It is currently Bhutan's largest trading partner. India has invested heavily in the country's hydroelectric projects and continues to be the primary destination of electricity exports from Bhutan. As in Afghanistan, such projects have contributed to economic growth and stability in Bhutan, which is critical during periods of transition to democracy.

India was involved in the peace process in Nepal that brought an end to a decade-long brutal civil war in 2006. The conflict began when the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist), inspired by Mao Zedong's teachings, began to wage a 'people's war'. The goal was to establish a one-party system in the country. As the security situation worsened, King Gyanendra decided to suspend democracy and assumed dictatorial powers. After initial hesitancy, India expressed its strong opposition to Gyanendra's decision and declared its support to Nepal's political parties agitating for the return of democracy. It was also instrumental in facilitating a peace accord between the political parties and the Maoists, which brought an end to the civil war. Two prominent Indian politicians, Sitaram Yechury of the Communist Party of India (Marxist) and D.P. Tripathi of the Nationalist Congress Party, were engaged in unofficial efforts to bring the two sides together

¹⁸ Ritu Sarin, 'Thimphu thank-you for India's democracy gift hamper: From poll experts to EVMs', *The Indian Express*, 7 February 2007 [<http://archive.indianexpress.com/news/thimphu-thankyou-for-india-s-democracy-gift-hamper-from-poll-experts-to-evms/22707/>, accessed 10 Feb. 2014].

against Gyanendra, resulting in a peace accord (Bhushan 2006; Dixit 2008).¹⁹ King Gyanendra was forced to relinquish power due to the united front presented by the political parties, the Maoists and India.

Afterwards, when the Maoist leadership insisted that the Maoist guerrillas should be integrated into the regular Nepalese army as outlined in the peace accord, India expressed its disapproval. The Indian government saw the Army as one of the pillars of stability in Nepal and feared that the inclusion of an ideologically indoctrinated group loyal to a particular political party would have an adverse effect on Nepal's fledgling democracy. The Nepalese political parties, bolstered by Indian support, disagreed with the Maoists over the specifics of the integration plan. Ultimately, the two sides were able to come to a compromise agreement. In these ways, India supported the tenuous peace process in Nepal. As in the case of Afghanistan, India has worked with the US to bring about political stability in the Himalayan country and promote the transition to a multi-party representative democracy.

The above cases are indicative of an emerging shift in India's foreign policy. Although democracy promotion may still not be a priority in India's foreign policy, there are signs that India is more actively engaged with the international community with regard to democracy promotion today. It has utilized both multilateral as well as bilateral initiatives to promote and support democracy abroad.

¹⁹ See Bharat Bhushan, 'Yechury in Nepal democracy pantheon', in *The Telegraph* (India), 29 April 2006 [<http://www.telegraphindia.com/archives/archive.html>, Accessed 15 Jun. 2012]; and Kanak M. Dixit, 'India and Nepal's Constituent Assembly', in *The Hindu*, Chennai, India, 7 March 2008 [<http://www.hindu.com/2008/03/07/stories/2008030755531000.htm>, Accessed 18 Jun. 2012].

Anatomy of democracy promotion abroad

Some conclusions may be drawn from observing the recent manner in which India has participated in democracy promotion abroad. The first and most important conclusion is that India is relatively more active in democracy promotion abroad than it used to be during the Cold War. India's leaders are not shy anymore of declaring that liberal democracy is the ideal political system. Such statements mirror those of some western leaders during the Cold War. Such statements also provided the basis for western countries to support people struggling against authoritarian regimes across the world and in the same way provide some justification of India's recent forays into democracy promotion abroad. However, the statements of India's leaders also indicate a degree of caution that they retain regarding the extent to which external actors should 'impose' democracy on countries. India's leaders have made it clear that they are willing to assist in the democratization process of other countries, but only if they are invited to do so by their governments.

In cases where an elected government has been removed from power through military coups, India has joined international organizations in condemning and isolating the new regimes. In some cases, it has actually taken a leading role in demanding that democracy be restored in these countries. This kind of behavior was observed following the military coups in Pakistan and Fiji. India rallied the members of the Commonwealth of Nations resulting in both Pakistan and Fiji having their membership suspended. Although, it was relatively muted in its criticism of Robert Mugabe's regime in Zimbabwe compared to UK, Australia, and New Zealand, ultimately it favored the suspension of Zimbabwe from the Commonwealth of Nations.

India's actions within the Commonwealth of Nations also demonstrate that its democracy promotion/support activities are primarily carried out in cooperation with other members of the international community. Multilateralism has always been a cherished ideal for India. International organizations allow India to pursue its objectives, while remaining cloaked with the legitimacy conferred on it by the norm of multilateralism. However, despite western countries urging it to join them in holding countries like Belarus, Cuba, Democratic Republic of Congo, Libya, Myanmar, North Korea and Uzbekistan accountable for their poor human rights record, India has taken a more cautious stand. Its voting record in UN forums shows increasing levels of support for democracy abroad, but it still falls squarely in the non-interventionist camp.

India's bilateral aid to countries in its immediate neighborhood demonstrates both elements of direct and indirect democracy promotion. In Afghanistan, Bhutan, and Nepal India has supported the establishment and growth of democratic institutions. It has also provided training to a host of bureaucratic officials and politicians preparing them to tackle the challenges associated with transition to democracy. Every key step in Bhutan's transition to democracy has involved participation of India. It also demonstrates that the extent of India's participation is solely in line with the request of the governments in those countries (as mentioned by India's leaders in their statements).

In the case of Nepal, India's involvement in the transition process is arguably much greater than in either Afghanistan or Bhutan. The 1950 Treaty of Friendship and Cooperation signed between India and Nepal obligates Nepal to consult India on matters of internal and external threats in return for India granting 'national treatment' to Nepalese citizens in matters of employment,

business and property ownership. Nepal is heavily dependent on India for both security and economic development. Instability in this land-locked Himalayan country heightens India's sense of insecurity, particularly because Nepal shares a border with its long-standing rival China.

In Nepal, India has followed a more interventionist policy unlike in other countries. It has taken the initiative to bring the feuding sides of the Nepalese civil war to the discussion table. It has facilitated reconciliation and supported the efforts of the political parties and the Maoists to draft a new constitution that will re-define the political system of the country. However, it has also intervened in the internal affairs of Nepal by openly expressing its disapproval regarding the wholesale integration of former Maoist guerrilla fighters into the Nepalese Army. However, even such actions may ultimately help support democracy in Nepal, because the large presence of heavily indoctrinated fighters in the national army undermines the neutrality of the Army to the point that it may even become a tool of the Maoists to pressure their political opponents.

The nature and extent of India's support to democracy worldwide in recent times demonstrates that: (1) it increasingly rejects the use of the principle of sovereignty as a shield by governments to act with impunity (as in Fiji); (2) it supports democracy promotion efforts when it coincides with traditional security objectives like enhancing its international status and achieving regional stability (as in Afghanistan) and where there is strong internal support for democracy (as in Nepal); and (3) it continues to exercise a degree of caution with regard to supporting the scrutiny of the record of non-democracies and refuses to authorize military actions against such countries (indicated by UN voting record). As such, there are elements of both continuity and change observed regarding the issue of democracy promotion in India's foreign policy.

Why promote democracy abroad?

Two major factors may be identified as responsible for this emerging shift in India's foreign policy. These factors also offer a possible explanation for the nature and extent of India's participation in democracy promotion efforts worldwide. These include the changing nature of India's relationship with the US and India's rising international profile.

(a) Changing nature of India's relationship with the US:

Since the end of the Cold War, India's relations with the US have improved. The two countries have found that their interests have converged on many issues, including trade, defense, science, education and international terrorism. India's economic rise continues to draw the two countries towards each other. A rising middle class, an emerging market, increased trade and an increasingly influential Indian-American community in the US has been the catalyst of change in bilateral relations in the post-Cold War era. Greater visibility of the US in many of its neighboring countries is no longer deemed a threat to its security.

Some scholars have pointed out that India's improving relationship with the US has made it more confident and less prone to using coercive methods to address regional concerns.²⁰ It may also have made India less tolerant of dictatorships in the region. Its comfort level with the US leads it to believe that the latter would not undermine its position in South Asia. In case India decided to take a strong stance against dictatorships within its region, the US would not use it as

²⁰ See Jan Cartwright, 'India's regional and international support for democracy: Rhetoric or reality?' in *Asian Survey*, Vol.49, no.3 (2009), pp.403-28; Bakhtawar M. Jain, *India in the new South Asia: Strategic, military and economic concerns in the age of nuclear diplomacy* (London: I.B. Tauris, 2010); S. Paul Kapur and Sumit Ganguly, 'The transformation of US-India relations: An explanation for the rapprochement and prospects for the future', in *Asian Survey*, Vol.47, no.4 (2007), pp.642-56; and Subrata K. Mitra, 'Nuclear, engaged and non-aligned: Contradiction and coherence in India's foreign policy', in *India Quarterly: A Journal of International Affairs*, Vol.65, no.1 (2009), pp.15-35.

an opportunity to embrace such regimes in pursuit of enhancing its global influence. This belief appears to have been bolstered by India-US cooperation on Nepal, which ultimately led to the return of democracy there.

‘The War on Terror’ has led to deeper US engagement with many of the South Asian countries, including India. The political, economic and diplomatic support provided by the US to some of the smaller countries during the process of democratic transition has proved invaluable. The US is helping to develop the rule of law, independent media, grassroots activism, good governance and transparency in the region.²¹ According to US policymakers, these are crucial to addressing extremism, security and development in the region. While the US has been primarily concerned with the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan, it has also supported other governments in South Asia engaged in their own struggles against terrorism.

India has cautiously welcomed US presence in the South Asian region. In Afghanistan, India perceives the US as an indispensable actor. Continued US support to the Afghan regime and pressure on the Taliban and Al Qaeda serve India’s geopolitical interests. In fact, India has been concerned about the 2014 deadline set by the US to draw down from Afghanistan. India hopes that even if the US withdraws most of its forces, it would continue to closely monitor the security situation in Afghanistan. In recent times, the US has also recognized the stabilizing role India has played in Afghanistan. Mutual interests on Afghanistan will facilitate continued bilateral cooperation in the region.

²¹ Christina B. Rocca, ‘United States Policy toward South Asia’, in *DISAM Journal of International Security Assistance Management*, Vol.28, no.1 (2005), pp.99-103.

With regard to Nepal, the US has modified its stance regarding the Maoists in line with India. Initially distrustful of the Maoists, the US declared that it would not remove the sanctions imposed against the Maoists unless there was a demonstrable commitment from them to abjure violence. This despite the Maoists' willingness to participate in talks with mainstream political parties, aimed at bringing lasting peace in Nepal. Today, the US no longer proscribes the Maoists as a terrorist group and has welcomed the participation of all groups in Nepal's constitution-writing process. It has extended support to Nepal in the form of developmental assistance through agencies like USAID. This is in response to India's request to the US to modify its stand. With respect to Sri Lanka, the US has helped promote the cause of democratic accountability and the rule of law by insisting that the government takes steps to address allegations of human rights violations by Sri Lankan soldiers against Tamil civilians, particularly during the last few weeks of the country's civil war.

India supports the US engagement with the South Asian countries. India expects the US to exert pressure on actors within Afghanistan (Taliban and Al Qaeda), Nepal (Maoists), and Sri Lanka (government), thus contributing to both regional stability and democratization. This is a crucial element in India's overall regional strategy. In the past, monarchies and military regimes in the smaller South Asian countries have considered India an adversary and promoted religious and sectarian extremism.²² This has allowed them to deflect public pressures and survive in office. Democracy in the neighborhood would therefore contribute to stability in bilateral relations. Democratic regimes will have more incentives to cooperate with India building on the traditional cultural and economic links and unlikely to encourage extremist forces.

²² S.D. Muni, *India's foreign policy: The democracy dimension* (New Delhi: Foundation Books, 2009).

Many of India's emerging democracy promotion activities correspond with major bilateral initiatives with the US. The Community of Democracies, UN Democracy Caucus, and UN Democracy Fund have all resulted from agreements and understandings between India and the US. One can argue that India's participation in democracy promotion activities are seen as a means to enhanced ties with the US. India has supported democratic transitions in its neighborhood. In this regard, India has received US support and more importantly has been conferred legitimacy by the US to undertake actions that promote democratization. This encouragement has led India to take a more active stance on democracy promotion abroad, particularly within its region.

(b) India's rising international profile

India is often described as one of the influential rising powers of the world alongside Brazil, Indonesia, South Africa, and Turkey.²³ All of these countries are classified as democracies. They have witnessed steady to remarkable economic growth over the last decade or more, which has contributed to improved living standards. They desire at the very least to maintain their current status in the international system. Various terms are used to describe these countries, including middle powers, emerging market-democracies, and newly-industrialized countries. Brazil, India and South Africa are part of BRICS along with two non-democracies, China and Russia.

These influential rising powers have recently undertaken activities designed to promote democracy and human rights throughout the world. In the new century, these rising powers will likely transform democracy promotion from a western project to a global project. Their status in the international community may help explain their views with regard to democracy promotion.

²³ Ted Piccone, 'The multilateral dimension', in *Journal of Democracy*, Vol.22, no.4 (October 2011), pp.139-52.

Since this paper focuses on India, participation in democracy promotion-related activities is analyzed in terms of the country's rising international profile.

India sees itself as an emerging power and aspires to achieve a status befitting its size and importance. Since the end of the Cold War, India has attempted to raise its profile across the world. It has expanded trade links with Southeast Asia leading to greater engagement with the region, described as the "Look East Policy".²⁴ India has utilized bilateral as well as regional and sub-regional institutions in pursuing relations with these countries. The quest for natural resources and business opportunities has been the driving force behind India's engagement with African countries.²⁵ India has invested heavily in oil and natural gas resources not only in Africa but also other parts of the world. Some have argued that India's energy and resource requirements were the primary factors responsible for the reorientation of India's foreign policy.²⁶ Others argued instead that energy diplomacy constitutes just one facet (albeit an important one) of India's engagement with the outside world, including Africa.²⁷

In line with its rising international profile, India has pressed for admission into the UN Security Council, recognition as a nuclear-weapons state and greater voice in international organizations like the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank. As India rises further, the western

²⁴ See Sanjaya Baru, *Strategic Consequences of India's Economic Performance* (New Delhi: Academic Foundation, 2006); and Rajiv Sikri, 'India's "Look East" Policy', in *Asia-Pacific Review*, Vol.16, no.1 (2009), pp.131-45.

²⁵ Peter J. Pham, 'India's Expanding Relations with Africa and their Implications for US Interests', in *American Foreign Policy Interests*, Vol.29, no.5 (2007), pp.341-52.

²⁶ Manjeet S. Pardesi and Sumit Ganguly, 'India and Energy Security: A Foreign Policy Priority', in Harsh Pant (ed.), *Indian Foreign Policy in a Unipolar World* (New Delhi: Routledge, 2009), pp.99-127.

²⁷ See Tanvi Madan, 'India's International Quest for Oil and Natural Gas: Fueling India's Foreign Policy?', *India Review*, Vol.9, no.1 (2010), pp.2-37; and Harsh Pant, *Contemporary debates in Indian foreign and security policy: India negotiates its rise in the international system* (New York: Palgrave, 2008).

countries will likely call upon India to play a leading role in taking up global responsibilities, including democracy promotion. Membership in exclusive international organizations, something that India desires, may well depend upon its willingness to take up such responsibilities. As the idea of democracy becomes universal, India needs to keep pace with new imperatives in the international system. Membership in certain international organizations allows India the opportunity to play an important role in international affairs. It can utilize organizations like the Commonwealth of Nations to pursue its goals and interests across the world. At the same time, it can demonstrate to the world that it is a responsible stakeholder in international peace and stability by not hesitating to cooperate with the international community in condemning the reversal of democracy in some countries.

India's desire to be accepted as a responsible power also leads it to join the US in establishing organizations like the Community of Democracies. It is seen as a stepping stone in its efforts to assume membership in other prominent international organizations. Supporting multilateral efforts at democracy promotion is seen as a significant means to playing a deeper role in global governance. India also hopes that participating in multilateral organizations will provide it with an opportunity to advertise its own success as a democratic country, hoping that others will see it as a model that they can follow. An indicator of status in the international system is the degree to which other countries are attracted by your political and economic system, aspire to achieve your status, and attempt to emulate your performance.

As India continues to rise, it will engage with the US to a far greater degree than any time in the past. Both countries will be expecting to develop a mutually beneficial relationship. As India draws closer to the US it will be drawn to issues like democracy promotion, which the latter considers important. In addition, as India continues to rise and aspires to a greater role in international affairs, it will be expected to cooperate with other members of the international community in addressing the most significant challenges facing the world. The spread of democracy enhances international peace and security and encourages a wider discussion of societal problems like poverty, inequality, corruption and unemployment within countries. India's ability to maintain and indeed enhance its status in the international system depends on a peaceful international environment. To that extent, it should not come as a surprise to see India taking a more active stance in promoting democracy abroad.

Why India remains cautious

There are both elements of change and continuity in India's approach to the issue of democracy promotion. Despite its recent participation in democracy promotion activities, India continues to take a cautious approach to this enterprise. There are several reasons for this but it may be primarily traced back to the value it has placed on the principle of sovereignty since independence. India continues to remain deeply suspicious of strongly interventionist approaches to democracy promotion. As such, India continues to have reservations about country-specific resolutions. India is likely to be most active at promoting/supporting democracy when a military coup has deposed an elected government and most likely to be reluctant in promoting/supporting democracy in cases involving military actions by external actors, i.e., regime change.

While it considers cooperation with the US to be of vital importance, it does not want to be perceived as being too close to the world's sole superpower. Its cautious approach to democracy promotion may be explained by the fact that it doesn't want to be seen as simply pursuing the goals and interests of the US. Finally, traditional security imperatives force it to cooperate with brutal dictatorships like Myanmar. However, it believes that the West is no different in this regard when it comes to relations with oil-producing countries of the Middle East or China. During the Cold War, the US was not shy about embracing brutal dictators like Saddam Hussein in Iraq.

The above mentioned factors explain why there are some elements of continuity in India's policy towards democracy promotion. In the end, India's level of commitment to democracy promotion will be determined by its dealings with its South Asian neighbors. In its own backyard, India often accepted the demise of elected governments so long as the new authoritarian dispensation did not adopt an overtly hostile attitude towards India. In the interests of political stability and continuity in bilateral relations, India often ignored pleas from pro-democracy activists to support their struggle. In recent times, India has contributed to democratization in Afghanistan, Bhutan and Nepal. However, this has been primarily because democracy promotion in these countries has coincided with its goals of enhancing its status and maintaining regional stability. The real test in the future will be whether India supports the process of democratization in its neighborhood even when the results may not bring immediate material benefits to it. On the other hand, many people would argue that the strengthening of democracy and establishment of rule of law in these countries will inevitably unleash actors and interests that will have a stake in

developing strong ties with India so there would be no little reason for India to oppose democratization.

Conclusion

Democracy promotion has never been an integral element of India's foreign policy. Traditional security imperatives have shaped India's relations with other states in the international community. A history of colonialism, Cold War politics and strategic weakness were responsible for keeping democracy promotion off the agenda of India's international engagements during much of its history. However, in recent times, India has taken a more active stance in promoting and supporting democracy abroad. Both multilateral and bilateral mechanisms have been utilized to support and/or promote democracy abroad. Various types of assistance have been provided to countries to both develop institutional capacity as well as create conditions that allow democracy to take root. The changing nature of its relationship with the US as well as its rising international profile helps explain this emerging shift in India's behavior. Nevertheless, democracy promotion and support abroad continues to be balanced with the pursuit of traditional foreign policy objectives. This tension is already visible in India's relations with some of its immediate neighbors, like Myanmar. As such, there are elements of both continuity and change observed on the issue of democracy promotion in India's foreign policy.