

# India's role in global governance: a Modification?

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The twenty-first century has seen a recurrence of deadlocks in international organizations, while outside them a succession of crises occurs. The negotiations on the Doha Development Agenda under the umbrella of the World Trade Organization are a remarkable case in point. The negotiations were scheduled for completion in 2005; we are now into 2017 and completion even of a 'Doha-lite' is nowhere in sight.<sup>1</sup> The nuclear non-proliferation regime survives, but only just, ridden with exceptions and exemptions. Crises and wars are spreading across regimes and regions, from the war in Syria to the immigration and refugee crisis facing Europe.<sup>2</sup> In areas of high and low politics alike, global governance seems to be failing and fragmenting.

Among the various explanations that have been advanced for this recurrence of deadlock and crisis, an important one is power transition.<sup>3</sup> The relative decline of US hegemony has been accompanied by an increase in the number of participants at the high table of international negotiations. This increase in the number of players can complicate the decision-making process in global governance institutions. The fact that several of the new players around the table do not share the same visions of global order as those espoused by the established powers makes it even more difficult to keep the existing global institutions in functioning order.

A blame game and much finger-pointing on both sides has inevitably ensued. The rising powers have frequently been chided for their nay-saying attitude as 'won't-do countries',<sup>4</sup> and for acting like 'elephants hiding behind mice'<sup>5</sup> in their reluctance to share greater responsibility for providing global public goods. India

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<sup>1</sup> Amrita Narlikar, 'New powers in the club: the challenges of global trade governance', *International Affairs* 86: 3, May 2010, pp. 717–28.

<sup>2</sup> José Ciro Martínez and Brent Eng, 'The unintended consequences of emergency food aid: neutrality, sovereignty and politics in the Syrian civil war, 2012–2015', *International Affairs* 92: 1, Jan. 2016, pp. 153–73.

<sup>3</sup> Amrita Narlikar, ed., *Deadlocks in multilateral negotiations: causes and solutions* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2010); Miles Kahler, 'Rising powers and global governance: negotiating change in a resilient status quo', *International Affairs* 89: 3, May 2013, pp. 711–29.

<sup>4</sup> US trade representative Robert Zoellick, press conference, 14 Sept. 2003, <http://www.iatp.org/news/us-trade-representative-robert-b-zoellick-press-conference-september-14-2003%23sthash.05kDQdYd.dpuf>. (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 13 Oct. 2016.)

<sup>5</sup> Susan Schwab, 'After Doha: why the negotiations are doomed and what we should do about it', *Foreign Affairs* 90: 3, 2011, pp. 104–17.

has frequently borne the sharpest brunt of these criticisms. In this article, I assess the potential for change under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership. The article's inspiration derives from one of the pioneering ideas advanced by Charles Kindleberger who, when studying the causes of the Great Depression, identified the lack of both will and ability on the part of the major players to stabilize the world economy.<sup>6</sup> I argue that a rising India had, until recently, lacked the willingness and the ability to accept greater international responsibilities. The Modi regime now offers potential for change.

The article is divided into five parts. Part one provides a brief overview of India's record in global governance. Part two unpacks the mechanisms whereby India may now become more able and willing to take on global responsibilities. In part three, I investigate whether this more positive approach to global governance has in fact been evident in reality. The fourth part highlights the risks and challenges that could still derail India's evolving role in global governance. Finally, the article draws some conclusions about India's behaviour in the two regimes, ending on a note of cautious optimism.

To develop the argument, I build on three sets of theoretical writings. First, in order to understand the demands that have been placed on a rising India to accept greater global responsibilities, and also India's own conception of its evolving role, I draw on the literature on global public goods. Much of this scholarship has focused on the economic arguments, particularly the problem of free-riding and how building certain types of institutions might help us find solutions.<sup>7</sup> While these writings provide useful background for understanding the notion of evolving global responsibilities for major players, the explanations they provide are primarily interest-based. They do not take into account the different values that can underpin and shape the notion of global public goods. I address this limitation by further drawing on constructivist scholarship in International Relations, which recognizes the enabling and constraining role of culture in the making of foreign policy and strategy.<sup>8</sup> The third field of relevance for this article is negotiation analysis. Scholarship here has produced some important cognate insights on how culture affects the international positioning of states, concerning factors such as their willingness to take on leadership, cooperate with other players,

<sup>6</sup> Kindleberger had observed in his seminal study: 'In 1929, the British couldn't and the Americans wouldn't' assume the responsibility for providing the necessary conditions for preserving economic stability. See Charles Kindleberger, *The world in depression, 1929-1939* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1973).

<sup>7</sup> Classic examples of this work are Mancur Olson, *The logic of collective action* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1965), and Elinor Ostrom, Roy Gardner and James Walker, *Rules, games, and common-pool resources* (Ann Arbor: Michigan University Press, 1994).

<sup>8</sup> Examples of studies that investigate the role of culture with specific reference to foreign policy issues are Michael Barnett, 'Culture, strategy and foreign policy: Israel's road to Oslo', *European Journal of International Relations* 5: 1, 1999, pp. 5-36, and Valerie Hudson, *Culture and foreign policy* (London: Lynne Rienner, 1997). Other relevant and recent works, which have highlighted the importance of taking account of non-western cultures in international relations, include Amitav Acharya, 'Global International Relations (IR) and regional worlds: a new agenda for international studies', *International Studies Quarterly* 58: 4, 2014, pp. 648-59; Peter Katzenstein, *Civilizations in world politics: plural and pluralist perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2009); Amrita Narlikar, 'Because they matter: recognise diversity, globalise research', *GIGA Focus Global*, no. 1, April 2016, <https://www.giga-hamburg.de/en/publication/because-they-matter>.

form alliances and so forth.<sup>9</sup> This article, through its focus on India's approach to global governance negotiations under Modi, shows ways in which understanding a country's culture might help us better understand how it conceptualizes global public goods.

## **India's record in global governance: a brief overview**

India joined the international system as an enthusiastic and committed multilateralist. It participated in key international negotiations aimed at building the postwar international order. It was a founding member of the United Nations in 1945, even though it was yet to secure its independence from the British empire. It was also involved in the negotiations of the aborted International Trade Organization. Its active participation in international organizations increased after independence. For instance, India was one of the 23 original signatories to the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT), and it has also been a participant in multiple UN bodies created over the years.

This participation in international forums was not *per se* unique to India: membership of international organizations is often used by newly independent states as a mechanism through which to seek greater legitimacy and recognition. But Indian support for multilateralism was not inspired solely by the pursuit of legitimacy and recognition. Rather, independent India sought to influence the agenda of the new international organizations by highlighting the distinct—and often marginalized—concerns and causes of the developing world.

This agenda for reform found expression over several decades of Indian diplomatic history and over a range of disparate issue areas. Throughout the history of the GATT, India led the developing countries in challenging some of the most fundamental principles of the regime. Sir Raghavan Pillai, in the 1950s, argued: 'Equality of treatment is equitable only among equals. A weakling cannot carry the same load as a giant.'<sup>10</sup> This claim challenged a fundamental normative principle of the GATT—reciprocity. India participated in, and indeed led, the informal group of developing countries in the GATT to espouse the development concerns of what was then known as the Third World. India was instrumental, in cooperation with other developing countries, in the creation of the United Nations Conference on Trade and Development (UNCTAD) in 1964, as an alternative forum to the GATT and an institution considerably more sympathetic to the concerns of the poorer countries. In the 1970s, India participated actively in the call for the radical New International Economic Order, and appealed to principles of distributive justice.<sup>11</sup>

<sup>9</sup> e.g. Robert Janosik, 'Re-thinking the culture negotiation link', *Negotiation Journal* 3: 4, 1987, pp. 385–95; Daniel Druckman, Alan Benton, Faizunisa Ali and Susan Bagur, 'Cultural differences in bargaining behaviour: India, Argentina and the United States', *Journal of Conflict Resolution* 20: 3, 1976, pp. 413–52; Raymond Cohen, *Negotiating across cultures: international communication in an interdependent world*, 2nd rev. edn (Washington DC: United States Institute of Peace Press, 2004).

<sup>10</sup> Raghavan Pillai, speech delivered in plenary session of GATT, 9 Nov. 1954, 9th Session of the Contracting Parties, press release no. 185, 11 Nov. 1954.

<sup>11</sup> Amrita Narlikar, *International trade and developing countries: bargaining coalitions in the GATT and WTO* (London: Routledge, 2003).

In the UN General Assembly, too, India advanced different causes from those advanced by the developed world. The alternative pathway it struck for itself was typified by the Non-Aligned Movement. Raymond Cohen writes:

The policy of nonalignment, defined as India's right to determine its foreign policy orientation freely and without duress, became sacrosanct. After all, Indian forces had fought and died in two world wars without even being consulted on the decision to go to war. Not only was alignment in the Cold War rejected, but fierce opposition was consistently expressed to anything that smacked of limiting Indian sovereignty.<sup>12</sup>

Stephen Cohen rightly points out that India maintained close links with many countries in the developing world during the Cold War era because of its commitment to anti-imperialism and decolonization. In fact, it continued to maintain these links into the post-Cold War era too.<sup>13</sup>

On nuclear weapons and proliferation, India was a very strong supporter of the cause of universal disarmament. It signed up to the Partial Test Ban Treaty in 1963, and played an active role in drafting the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) as a member of the Eighteen Nations Committee on Disarmament. Its participation was influential, for the NPT came to include two key principles in large measure due to India's diplomatic efforts: that non-nuclear states would have access to nuclear energy technology for peaceful purposes, and that non-proliferation was not an end in itself but a step towards universal nuclear disarmament.<sup>14</sup> Nonetheless, India refused to sign the NPT in 1968 on the grounds that by recognizing only five nuclear weapon states (NWS) and by grouping all other countries into the category of non-nuclear-weapon states (NNWS), the treaty discriminated between the nuclear haves and have-nots.<sup>15</sup> It conducted its first nuclear test in 1974 at Pokhran, and resiliently withstood both international opprobrium and the material consequences in the form of aid cuts and the nuclear technology export restrictions of the Nuclear Suppliers Group.<sup>16</sup>

Interestingly, the rejection of certain mainstream/western values, and the upholding of alternative ones symbolizing Third World solidarity and development priorities, did not change even after India launched its programme of economic liberalization in 1991. Opposition to the conclusion of the GATT's Uruguay Round in India was vociferous.<sup>17</sup> When the GATT was succeeded by the WTO, India remained at the forefront in resisting the expansion of trade rules into new issue areas, such as labour standards and the so-called 'Singapore issues' (competition policy, government procurement, trade in investment and trade facilitation). Meanwhile in the security realm, India conducted nuclear tests in 1998. And while embracing a no first use commitment on voluntary terms, it

<sup>12</sup> Cohen, *Negotiating across cultures*, p. 57.

<sup>13</sup> Stephen Cohen, *India: emerging power* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2001).

<sup>14</sup> Sumit Ganguly, 'India's pathway to Pokhran II: the prospects and sources of New Delhi's nuclear weapons program', *International Security* 23: 4, Spring 1999, pp. 148–77.

<sup>15</sup> For details on India's opposition to the NPT, see e.g. Ziba Moshaver, *Nuclear weapons proliferation in the Indian subcontinent* (Basingstoke: Macmillan, 1991), pp. 114–18.

<sup>16</sup> Ganguly, 'India's pathway to Pokhran II'; Moshaver, *Nuclear weapons proliferation in the Indian subcontinent*.

<sup>17</sup> Narlikar, *International trade and developing countries*.

continued to question the legitimacy and fairness of the nuclear non-proliferation regime and its various instruments.<sup>18</sup> Even since gaining re-entry into the system via its strategic agreement with the United States on cooperation over peaceful nuclear technology, India has shown little change in its opposition to the NPT and Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty.<sup>19</sup> In climate change negotiations, it continued to see itself as a part of, and as representing, the voice of the South. The Copenhagen COP-15 in 2009 provided a powerful illustration of the extent to which 'North-South imaginaries' pervaded the frames of India's negotiating elite.<sup>20</sup>

Even as it has come to be recognized as a 'rising power' and a 'growth market', India has continued to challenge the agenda advanced by the established powers—sometimes in coalitions, sometimes alone.<sup>21</sup> And its position in several negotiations has attracted the ire of major players in the developed world. In trade, for instance, at Cancún in 2003, India (along with other developing countries) was categorized as a 'can't-do' country;<sup>22</sup> in 2008, India's chief negotiator at the WTO had the dubious distinction of being dubbed 'Dr No' by the *Financial Times*;<sup>23</sup> in 2011, Schwab accused India and other rising powers of acting like 'elephants hiding behind mice';<sup>24</sup> in 2013, India again attracted considerable adverse publicity for nearly causing another deadlock in the WTO;<sup>25</sup> in 2014, it was actively accused of trying to unravel what had already been agreed at Bali. India acerbically retorted that in adopting the positions that it did, it was standing for the interests of poor countries, and its own poor.<sup>26</sup> Similar patterns have also been evident in the climate change negotiations, where India positions itself distinctly and clearly on the side of, and as a part of, the global South.<sup>27</sup>

The continuities in the content of India's positioning on global governance issues have been accompanied by continuities in style. Stephen Cohen sums up India's historically tough, ideological and inflexible negotiating stance nicely:

Western diplomats were for many years put off by India's flexible nonalignment, which for a time was a pretext for a close relationship with the Soviet Union. They were also

<sup>18</sup> Ganguly, 'India's pathway to Pokhran II'; Cohen, *India*; Baldev Raj Nayyar, *India and the major powers after Pokhran II* (New Delhi: Har-Anand, 2001); Strobe Talbott, *Engaging India: diplomacy, democracy and the bomb* (Washington DC: Brookings Institution Press, 2004); Jaswant Singh, *In service of emergent India: a call to honor* (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 2007).

<sup>19</sup> Weiss further cites a particularly insightful editorial written at the time of the deal: 'Why is this deal important? Because for the first time, someone has decided to let India have its cake and eat it too. You stay out of the NPT, keep your weapons, refuse full scope safeguards, and yet get to conduct nuclear commerce in a system that is dead against such a formulation. That's the bottom line of this deal.' See Leonard Weiss, 'India and the NPT', *Strategic Analysis* 34: 2, March 2010, pp. 255–71.

<sup>20</sup> Shangrila Joshi, 'Understanding India's representation of North-South climate politics', *Global Environmental Politics* 13: 2, May 2013, p. 129.

<sup>21</sup> Amrita Narlikar, 'India and the WTO', in Tim Dunne, Amelia Hadfield and Steve Smith, eds, *Foreign policy: theories, actors, cases*, 3rd edn (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2016).

<sup>22</sup> Author's interviews with trade negotiators at Cancún ministerial, 2003; for specific reference to 'can't do' countries see, for example, Larry Elliott, Charlotte Denny and David Munk, 'Blow to world economy as trade talks collapse', *Guardian*, 15 Sept. 2003, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2003/sep/15/business.politics>.

<sup>23</sup> Alan Beattie, 'Expectations low as Doha talks begin', *Financial Times*, 21 July 2008.

<sup>24</sup> Schwab, 'After Doha'.

<sup>25</sup> See Rahul Jacob, 'Can we speak for the world's poor?', *Business Standard*, 11 Dec. 2013, [http://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/rahul-jacob-can-we-speak-for-the-world-s-poor-113121101083\\_1.html](http://www.business-standard.com/article/opinion/rahul-jacob-can-we-speak-for-the-world-s-poor-113121101083_1.html).

<sup>26</sup> Narlikar, 'India and the WTO'.

<sup>27</sup> Joshi, 'Understanding India's representation of North-South climate politics'.

irritated by the style of Indian diplomats. While professional and competent, they seemed compelled to lecture their British or American counterparts on the evils of the cold war, the moral superiority of India's policies, or the greatness of its civilization.<sup>28</sup>

What C. Raja Mohan refers to as the 'prickly' negotiating style of India in its pre-liberalization, Cold War days<sup>29</sup> has in fact not gone away. Stephen Cohen's India—the India that cannot say yes—has been very much present across international institutions and issue areas. Even David Malone, in an account that is largely sympathetic to India, thus argues:

A noted denizen of India's Ministry of External Affairs, a keen bilateralist at that, when asked what India does best internationally replied without a moment's hesitation 'multilateral diplomacy'. And yet queries about Indian performance at the UN and elsewhere in the multilateral sphere hardly validate that judgement: 'arrogant', 'moralistic', and 'confrontational' are terms more invoked by developing and industrialized counterparts, despite recognition that Indian negotiators are rarely less than 'impressive' and often 'brilliant'.<sup>30</sup>

At one level, this agenda of persistent developmentalist reform—a sort of trade union activism—seems counter-intuitive in a rising power like India, especially as India has done very well out of the system as it stands and should be invested in its preservation. Interviews with and writings of Indian negotiators, however, clarify the question somewhat as to why India—even as a rising power—has seemed reluctant to provide global public goods. Two sets of explanations stand out.

The first response one gets from Indian negotiators, when pushed on India's nay-saying behaviour, is: we cannot be expected to provide *these* public goods, that is, ones we had no choice in identifying in the first instance.<sup>31</sup> The public goods that many international institutions seek to provide and uphold are, even today, based on interests and choices that were made by the established powers of the post-Second World War system, when developing countries were still rule-takers.<sup>32</sup>

In other words, the reluctance that one encounters on the part of Indian negotiators with respect to the provision of global public goods is not one of general principle; rather, their nay-saying stems from their questioning of the particular shape of the global governance agenda. Were India to have a greater voice in identifying the particular public goods that global institutions choose to provide, it might be more enthusiastic in taking on new international responsibilities. But if the first response is one that suggests at least potential Indian willingness to take on greater leadership as its power rises, the second highlights a serious constraint in terms of ability.

That second response, voiced by many Indian politicians and negotiators, is that India simply cannot be expected to provide public goods at this stage in its

<sup>28</sup> Cohen, *India*, p. 66.

<sup>29</sup> C. Raja Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon: the shaping of India's new foreign policy* (Basingstoke: Palgrave, 2004).

<sup>30</sup> David Malone, *Does the elephant dance?* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011), p. 270.

<sup>31</sup> Amrita Narlikar, 'India rising: responsible to whom?', *International Affairs* 89: 3, May 2013, pp. 595–614.

<sup>32</sup> Shyam Saran, *The evolving role of emerging economies in global governance: an Indian perspective*, 7 June 2012, <http://www.kcl.ac.uk/sspp/sga/kii/documents/EmergingEconomiesPaper--final.pdf>.

development, when such a large proportion of its own population is living in abject poverty. India's stance in the WTO's agricultural negotiations is a case in point.<sup>33</sup>

When Indian trade ministers claim that if they agree to open up India's agricultural markets, 'hundreds of millions' of farmers will have their livelihoods jeopardized as a result of agricultural liberalization, they are not exaggerating. India has a very unproductive agriculture sector (56 per cent of its workforce is involved in farming, and yet the sector contributes only 18 per cent of India's GDP),<sup>34</sup> in which very many farmers barely survive on unsustainably small landholdings. Their ability to withstand some of the consequences of market opening in this area—such as possible import surges—is almost non-existent. The fact that India has a poorly developed industrial sector means that farmers do not have any other occupation into which they can transfer. Similar arguments apply to other sectors and issue areas as well, including climate change mitigation policies set against India's energy needs for growth and development. According to this line of argument, as long as India has the low per capita income that it does, it cannot be expected to prioritize international concerns for future survival over domestic concerns that deal with survival in the present day.

Together, these two issues—*willingness* and *ability*—have acted as major deterrents to India's willingness to take on new responsibilities involving greater global burden-sharing. And on both these issues, the Modi factor has the potential to make an important difference.

## **The mechanisms of Modi-fication**

The Modi government's first and foremost mandate, which also won the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) the overwhelming majority in 2014, is to address growth and development.<sup>35</sup> The task of replicating the Gujarat growth model at the national level is far from an easy one. It involves dealing with corruption, reforming India's perverse labour laws and land acquisition laws, providing a single-window approach to investors, undertaking agricultural reform, and so forth. And in contrast to China, all these will have to be confronted with a human face, not only for moral reasons but for all the political reasons that go with being a democracy. But if the BJP is able to make even some headway on the programme of what its manifesto referred to as the 'Economic Revival',<sup>36</sup> the gains of growth will be very significant for Indian citizens but also for the international community. Indian development will matter internationally, and it will matter in more interesting ways than the simplistic Goldman Sachs story of the benefits of growth markets providing drivers for the world economy.

<sup>33</sup> Trade Negotiations Committee Meeting, statement of Kamal Nath, 23 July 2008, [https://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/dda\\_e/meeto8\\_stat\\_ind\\_21jul\\_e.doc](https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/dda_e/meeto8_stat_ind_21jul_e.doc).

<sup>34</sup> 'India Trade Review 2015', summary, WT/TPR/S/313, India, [https://www.wto.org/english/tratop\\_e/tp\\_r\\_e/s313\\_sum\\_e.pdf](https://www.wto.org/english/tratop_e/tp_r_e/s313_sum_e.pdf).

<sup>35</sup> BJP election manifesto, *Ek Bharat—Shreshtha Bharat*, 2014.

<sup>36</sup> BJP election manifesto, *Ek Bharat—Shreshtha Bharat*.

Recall the problem discussed in the previous section, that is, the not unreasonable argument that low development levels make it impossible for Indian participation to make concessions in international negotiations and accept greater international responsibilities. Growth and development are therefore prerequisites for India's assumption of these responsibilities. Under Modi, we are already beginning to see some important and positive changes. The IMF predicted in early 2015 that the Indian growth rate was expected to surpass the Chinese growth rate in 2016.<sup>37</sup> Not only has Modi met this expectation (admittedly helped by the upheavals in the Chinese stock markets); India's mid-year financial review revealed that at US\$30 billion, India has also outperformed China in terms of incoming foreign direct investment.<sup>38</sup> India is in fact the only one of the BRIC countries—Brazil, Russia, India, China—that now seems to be fulfilling its promise. These favourable conditions of growth are accompanied by specific policies—already spelt out, if yet to be implemented—that target both agriculture and industry for reform. The attention to infrastructure building and maintenance as part of various initiatives, including 'Make in India', promise improvements in both these sectors. If growth and development do go according to plan, or even come close to approaching the plan, India's *ability* to contribute to the provision of at least certain global public goods will increase. This ability will derive from better safety nets for its poor, economic resilience, and improved and impressive per capita income levels. For example, if the condition of the country's subsistence farmers were to become less precarious, via agrarian reforms to improve efficiency and productivity and also via better transition mechanisms and job opportunities in the industrial sector, India would find it more feasible to make concessions in the WTO's agriculture negotiations. And the international community, too, would be better positioned to ask India to participate more proactively in global governance across a range of issues.

Modi's leadership may be just as important in enhancing India's *willingness* to take on the role of an international leader as it seems to be in improving India's *ability* to do so. This is because India is arguably now at a turning point when it may be starting to develop an answer to the question: 'If not *these* global public goods, then *which* public goods will a rising India provide/share the burden of providing?'<sup>39</sup> The BJP's ability to answer this question stems from the fact that this government is not afraid to draw on India's distinctive historical and cultural roots (in contrast to ideas of a secular, syncretic and synthesizing India, on which some of the other parties have traditionally relied<sup>40</sup>). While striving for modernity, for example via the 'Digital India' project, Modi's developing vision of global order (and India's role in it) is one that could also—effectively and almost seamlessly—draw on Indian traditions. In explicitly combining modernity and tradition, the potential of Modi's leadership is unprecedented.

The roots into which Modi and his team can tap are deep and many, and—depending on how they are framed and used—may have wide-ranging implications

<sup>37</sup> IMF, *World Economic Outlook* update, Jan. 2015, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2015/update/01/>.

<sup>38</sup> Courtney Fingar, 'India on track to win foreign direct investment crown', *Financial Times*, 30 Sept. 2015, p. 22.

<sup>39</sup> Narlikar, 'India rising'.

<sup>40</sup> I thank one of the anonymous referees for bringing this point to my attention.



for global governance. The universalism of some of ancient India's political ideas is especially striking when compared with ancient China's more hierarchical vision: unlike the Chinese self-conceptualization as the Middle Kingdom surrounded by tributary states,<sup>41</sup> the ancient Indian world-view was more universalist and more egalitarian. Even very 'realist' texts which emphasize a power-dominated view, such as Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, do so in terms that recognize the importance of legitimization and due processes of accountability and legitimacy, and also the possibility of power shifts that necessitate the mobilization of soft as well as hard power. Ancient Indian literary and religious texts also show an awareness of the notions of public goods, collective action and the shared global commons. One well-known Sanskrit saying has been cited not only by Prime Minister Modi, but also by President Obama in his address to the Indian parliament during a visit to India in 2010.<sup>42</sup> It translates as follows:

This is mine, this is yours, only mean-minded people indulge in keeping count in this manner. For the generous-minded, the entire world is one family. (*Mahopnishad*, VI: 71–72)<sup>43</sup>

The reason why this realm of ideas is especially important at this point is that one of the most serious gaps in global governance derives from the following problem: while it is clear what the rising powers do not want from the system, there is much less clarity on what it is that the rising powers *do* want.<sup>44</sup> If India wants to go beyond its veto-player status to become an international agenda-setter, this is a question that it cannot avoid. Tapping into its cultural roots may allow India to develop an answer. Through its mandate, ideational roots and sometimes sheer gumption, the government may be able to define and frame the alternative public goods that a rising India might be willing to provide, and the vision

<sup>41</sup> David Kang writes that ancient China lacked a messianic vision of transforming the world, but 'creating civilization also entailed creating the contrasting idea of an other or "barbarian"'. The Confucian world order was fundamentally 'hierarchical and formally unequal', irrespective of the leeway that it actually allowed Sinitized neighbouring states for 'informal equality and independence'. See David Kang, 'Civilization and state formation in the shadow of China', in Peter Katzenstein, ed., *Civilizations in world politics: plural and pluralist perspectives* (London: Routledge, 2010), p. 92. It is worth mentioning that certain strands of Indian thought also have a notion of the outsider (*mlechha*), which some equate with the Greek concept of 'barbarian' (many thanks to Kate Sullivan de Estrada for alerting me to this). But overall, these are concepts that relate more to social order rather than political order.

<sup>42</sup> President Obama, address to joint session of the Indian parliament, 8 Nov. 2010, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2010/11/08/remarks-president-joint-session-indian-parliament-new-delhi-india>.

<sup>43</sup> Nor is this public-mindedness limited to humankind; significant strands of ancient Hindu philosophy embrace environmentalism and also defy anthropocentrism. Taking note of their universal scope that extends to humans and non-human animals alike, R. Panikkar pithily remarked that in the Indian context, 'Human Rights are not Human only'. See R. Panikkar, 'Is the notion of human rights a western concept?', *Diogenes*, 30 Dec. 1982, pp. 75–102. Among numerous examples, here is just one from the *Bhagwat Gita*: 'A truly wise man is one who regards a noble Brahmin, a cow, an elephant, a dog, and an outcast as equals' (*Bhagwat Gita*, V.18). The *Yajur Veda* abounds with verses asserting that the trees represent the shared heritage of not one king or kingdom, but the entire earth. A selection of these is cited in India's submission of its 'intended nationally determined contributions' to the Paris conference of 2015: 'India's intended nationally determined contribution: working towards climate justice', <http://www4.unfccc.int/submissions/INDC/Published%20Documents/India/1/INDIA%20INDC%20TO%20UNFCCC.pdf>. The important point to take away from all these examples is the wide-ranging, inclusive and surprisingly advanced conceptualization of the idea of the global commons in some of India's ancient texts.

<sup>44</sup> Amrita Narlikar, guest ed., *Negotiating the rise of new powers*, special issue, *International Affairs* 89: 3, May 2013.

of global order it could bring to the negotiating table. The process of ‘Modi-fication’—via its appeal to the country’s ancient traditions and their relevance for modern-day negotiations—could be key to giving India this will. But how far is this potential borne out in reality?

### **The comparative realities of ‘Modi-fication’: India’s role in climate change mitigation and multilateral trade negotiations**

Although these are still relatively early days—Modi’s government was elected to power just two years ago—have we begun to see a change in India’s role in global governance along the lines suggested in the previous section? This section compares India’s role in the multilateral negotiations on climate change mitigation and on trade.<sup>45</sup> While there are important differences of degree, a trajectory of change is clearly evident in India’s role in both cases.

#### *Climate change mitigation*

Climate change negotiations provide an important illustration of Modi’s ability to use Indian traditions and thereby claim and reshape the agenda. On his three-day visit to Germany in April 2015, Modi is quoted as saying that treating nature well ‘comes naturally’ to Indians.<sup>46</sup> In his speech he provided examples of this, and pointed to India’s unique traditions and practices of worshipping nature as divine. He further argued that solutions to global warming may lie in India’s own traditions and customs, and that the country has no reason to be defensive on this front. This speech was an important and welcome move by India, whose negotiators had, until very recently, almost always pitted the conservation agenda against the development agenda. Modi’s willingness to embrace the conservation agenda—and even root it in India’s own traditions—represented a landmark moment. By appealing to ideas from India’s ancient past, Modi paved the way to building domestic support for conservation, clean energy and climate change mitigation policies in a manner that no previous leader of post-independence India has done.<sup>47</sup> It did not signal that India would simply roll over and cave in to western demands. But it opened the way for India to do much more than it had been willing to do hitherto.

The seriousness of Modi’s commitment to environmental ethics and sustainability was already evident in the submission by India in October 2015 of its ‘intended nationally determined contribution’ text in advance of COP-21 in

<sup>45</sup> Note that the purpose of this section is to investigate *India’s role* in the two sets of negotiations, rather than the *outcomes* or relative successes of the two conferences as a whole.

<sup>46</sup> Narendra Modi, ‘India will set climate change conference agenda’, *Indian Express*, 14 April 2015, <http://indian-express.com/article/india/india-others/india-will-set-climate-change-conference-agenda-narendra-modi/>.

<sup>47</sup> Some argue that at least some of Modi’s appeal to traditional ideas is explicitly Hindu; Manjari Chatterjee Miller and Kate Sullivan de Estrada make this point in their article in this special issue, with reference to the government’s promotion of the International Yoga Day. See ‘Pragmatism in Indian foreign policy: how ideas constrain Modi’, pp. 27–49 in this issue.

Paris.<sup>48</sup> The text was replete with references to national literary and religious traditions as it advanced the case for India's commitment to climate change mitigation. It began with a quote from the *Yajur Veda* and pointed out in the very first paragraph that: 'India has a long history and tradition of harmonious co-existence between man and nature. Human beings have regarded fauna and flora as part of their family. This is part of our heritage and manifest in our lifestyle and traditional practices.' In making these associations, the text took ownership of the sustainability and mitigation agenda and gave it a positive homegrown twist. It took new steps in reconciling the development and environmental protection agenda by advancing the idea of 'development without destruction'. Rather than pit the goal of environmental protection against that of development, the submission explicitly tried to reconcile the two: 'Just because economic development of many countries has come at the cost of environment, it should not be presumed that a reconciliation of the two is not possible.'<sup>49</sup> The text made the unprecedented commitment to source 40 per cent of India's electricity from non-fossil fuel sources by 2030. The immediate international response to the text was one of enthusiastic support.<sup>50</sup> But the real test of India's commitment to climate change governance lay in the actual COP negotiations, which took place in the first two weeks of December 2015.

Warning bells began to ring out on 'the India challenge' even before the formal talks opened. On 11 November, the *Financial Times* reported the following comments by the US Secretary of State John Kerry:

While he praised China for its role in the talks, he raised concerns about other countries, including India, which he suggested was more resistant even as he applauded Narendra Modi, its prime minister. 'India has been more cautious, a little more restrained in its embrace of this new paradigm, and it is a challenge,' he said. 'We've got a lot of focus on India right now to try to bring them along.' Mr Kerry said India was 'regrettably' talking about using its domestically produced coal—which is dirtier than some imported coals—which he said was 'not the direction that we ought to be moving in'.<sup>51</sup>

A BBC headline asked on 26 November 2015: 'Can Paris climate talks overcome the India challenge?' India's own positioning did not reassure participants or observers. In an opinion piece in the *Financial Times*, just when global leaders were congregating in Paris, Modi wrote on the COP talks: 'Justice demands that, with what little carbon we can safely burn, developing countries are allowed to grow. The lifestyles of a few must not crowd out opportunities for the many still on the first steps of the development ladder.'<sup>52</sup> Many saw a very real risk that India could once again hold up the negotiation process.<sup>53</sup> Interestingly, however, the COP-21

<sup>48</sup> 'India's intended nationally determined contribution'.

<sup>49</sup> 'India's intended nationally determined contribution'.

<sup>50</sup> Adam Vaughan, 'India unveils climate change plan', *Guardian*, 2 Oct. 2015, <http://www.theguardian.com/world/2015/oct/02/india-pledges-40-percent-electricity-renewables-2030>.

<sup>51</sup> 'Paris climate deal will not be a legally binding treaty', *Financial Times*, 11 Nov. 2015.

<sup>52</sup> Narendra Modi, 'Do not let the lifestyles of the rich deny the dreams of the rest', *Financial Times*, 30 Nov. 2015.

<sup>53</sup> See e.g. Natalie Obiko Pearson, 'India's Modi poised to make or break climate talks in Paris', Bloomberg, 26 Nov. 2015, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2015-11-26/india-s-modi-poised-to-make-or-break-climate-talks-in-paris>.

negotiations, lasting from 30 November to 12 December 2015, ended in an agreement. And this was at least in some measure due to India's positive role.

India injected the Paris negotiations with a healthy dose of realism; it curtailed excessive ambition, particularly in relation to what could be expected of developing countries, by consistently reiterating the notion of 'common and differentiated responsibility'. It is worth recalling that India (as part of the BASIC group: Brazil, South Africa, India, China) had firmly resisted a drive by the developed countries to impose binding emissions targets on poorer countries at Copenhagen in 2009. This time, having learned the lessons of Copenhagen, COP-21 worked with not externally imposed targets but 'intended nationally determined contributions' or INDCs.<sup>54</sup> This is a clear success for India in terms of its own negotiating position. Another significant feather in India's cap is the commitment in the Paris Agreement to development goals,<sup>55</sup> plus the obligation on developed countries to provide assistance to developing countries in implementing various measures to reach the temperature goal: 'Developed country Parties shall provide financial resources to assist developing country Parties with respect to both mitigation and adaptation in continuation of their existing obligations under the Convention.'<sup>56</sup>

These Indian successes were, in fact, a result of the considerable flexibility that it showed on other issues. Arun Jaitley, India's finance minister, in an article in the *Telegraph*, reasserted India's right to development and poverty eradication. But he also expressed recognition that climate change could wreak havoc on India's development ambitions, and further pointed to concrete mitigation measures that India had already put in place to address the problem. In doing so, he struck a chord with Modi's earlier speeches, and laid claim to an intrinsic ownership of the mitigation agenda within India (as opposed to acceptance of a western priority that was being imposed on poor countries).<sup>57</sup> And only after demonstrating the serious effort and resources that India was investing in the mitigation and adaptation agenda did Jaitley then go on to ask for international financial assistance for poor countries to 'prioritise and accelerate' their initiatives.

This was a significantly different positioning from India's past negotiation patterns, and it received recognition and appreciation. *Time* magazine quoted one observer as noting that the Indian message in Paris had changed: "The presentation is just really different from what we saw earlier." Their message has become: "We can be flexible, we just need help getting where we want to go."<sup>58</sup>

Not only did India try to present itself as a facilitator of the Paris Agreement, it had also played a major role in pioneering a new agenda on renewable sources

<sup>54</sup> The INDCs are not meaningless. The language of the agreement is not couched in soft clauses of good faith but with fairly strong requirements of commitment, progression and ambition (in terms not of 'should' or 'might' but of 'shall' and 'will'). See the Paris Agreement, United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change, FCCC /CP/2015/L.9, 12 Dec. 2015, <http://unfccc.int/resource/docs/2015/cop21/eng/109r01.pdf>.

<sup>55</sup> Robert Falkner, 'The Paris Agreement and the new logic of international climate politics', *International Affairs* 92: 5, Sept. 2016, pp. 1107–25.

<sup>56</sup> Paris Agreement, para. 9: 1.

<sup>57</sup> See e.g. the figures provided by Arun Jaitley, 'India can't go it alone on climate change', *Daily Telegraph*, 9 Dec. 2015.

<sup>58</sup> Alyssa Ayres, quoted in 'Why no country matters more than India at the Paris Climate Talks', *Time*, 11 Dec. 2015.

of energy. At the start of the Paris conference, Modi, together with the French President Hollande, launched the International Solar Alliance. This comprises 120 countries working together with the goal of better harnessing solar energy through technology sharing and mobilization of financial resources. India showed leadership not only by developing these ideas but also by committing an initial US\$30 million to setting up the Alliance's headquarters in India.<sup>59</sup>

In Paris, then, India finally showed that it could transform itself from a veto-player into an agenda-setter. The fact that Modi had taken trouble to make a clear linkage between India's more positive stance on climate change and traditions of environmental protection in India also helped sell the agreement at home. This philosophical narrative was accompanied by an economic narrative, which reinforced the importance of committing to effective mitigation strategies. The Indian press and pundits reacted positively to the deal.<sup>60</sup>

### *Multilateral trade negotiations*

To some extent India's role in the Doha Development Agenda (DDA) negotiations shows a similar trajectory to that in the climate change negotiations, particularly in so far as agreement was ultimately reached. Some unanticipated compromises made by India contributed in an important way towards reaching agreement. But the trade case is less straightforward than the climate change case. Whereas in the latter Modi had sought to build a solid domestic base by rooting his altered approach in India's cultural heritage, his government's commitment to a pro-trade agenda was not so systematically justified with reference to India's cultural traditions. As a result, the buildup to adopting a more positive and less obstructionist approach took longer, and the agreement was also a harder sell at home.

Before the election of the Modi government, at the Bali ministerial of December 2013, India and the United States had locked horns.<sup>61</sup> India had sought an indefinite peace clause on public stockholding of agricultural products for food security purposes; the US would agree only to a four-year peace clause. India had originally enjoyed the backing of the G33 group of developing countries, but ended up almost isolated in its strict adherence to the hard line.<sup>62</sup> A compromise was finally

<sup>59</sup> Arthur Neslen, 'India unveils global solar alliance of 120 countries at Paris climate summit', *Guardian*, 30 Nov. 2015; see also working paper on the International Solar Alliance, available on the website of the Indian Ministry of New and Renewable Energy, <http://mnre.gov.in/file-manager/UserFiles/ISA-Working-Paper.pdf>.

<sup>60</sup> e.g. Navroz Dubash, 'A climate more congenial to India', *The Hindu*, 16 Dec. 2015, <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/op-ed/cop-21-and-paris-agreement-a-climate-more-congenial-to-india/article7992802.ece>. For a round-up of media views on the role India played at COP-21, see Anna Norman, 'What the media is saying about India at COP21', Tata Center, 16 Dec. 2015, <http://tatacenter.mit.edu/what-the-media-is-saying-about-india-at-cop21/>.

<sup>61</sup> For a detailed analysis of the Bali ministerial, see Amrita Narlikar and Diana Tussie, 'Breakthrough at Bali? Explanations, aftermath, implications', *International Negotiation* 21: 2, June 2016, pp. 209–32.

<sup>62</sup> *Bridges*, a trade journal, reported that several countries in the G33 effectively deserted India. It quotes one trade official from the G33 as saying: 'There is no G33 anymore ... India has left and joined ALBA' (ALBA includes Latin American anti-free trade hard-liners such as Bolivia, Cuba, Surinam and Venezuela). Similarly, Jacob reported: 'At the press conference last Thursday, a journalist from Benin shouted at Mr Sharma, "You don't speak for us"' (Jacob, 'Can we speak for the world's poor?').

reached at the end of a lengthy and difficult negotiation. The decision at Bali established ‘an interim mechanism’ that would remain in place ‘until a permanent solution is found’. But it also specified that members would agree ‘to negotiate an agreement for a permanent solution, for the issue of public stockholding for food security purposes for adoption by the 11th Ministerial Conference’.<sup>63</sup>

After the Bali breakthrough, 2014 should have been a good year for the WTO. The next step involved a relatively simple procedural matter: to sign off a ‘protocol of amendment’ by the deadline of 31 July, which would bring the Trade Facilitation Agreement (which many developed countries, particularly the United States, had strongly supported) officially within the WTO’s legal framework. Especially with the new government at its helm and its commitment to economic liberalization, India should have been an especially amenable partner. But India, despite having agreed to the Bali package the previous December, now made a clear negative issue linkage between food security and trade facilitation,<sup>64</sup> and blocked the protocol. India’s Ambassador to the WTO explained the country’s position to the Indian parliament as follows:

In contrast to their efforts on Trade Facilitation in the WTO, some developed countries have been reluctant to engage on other issues. Seeing the resistance to taking forward the other Decisions, the apprehension of developing countries was that once the process of bringing the Trade Facilitation Agreement into force was completed, other issues would be ignored, including the important issue of a permanent solution on subsidies on account of public stockholding for food security purposes. India, therefore, took the stand that till there is an assurance of commitment to find a permanent solution on public stockholding and on all other Bali deliverables, including those for the Least Developed Countries (LDCs), it would be difficult to join the consensus on the Protocol of Amendment for the Trade Facilitation Agreement.<sup>65</sup>

This July deadlock was especially serious because India was effectively challenging what had already been achieved at Bali.<sup>66</sup>

The standoff of July 2014 was finally overcome in November, as a result of intensive bilateral talks between President Obama and Prime Minister Modi in September, and further between various government officials. The bilateral agreement signed between the two countries on trade facilitation includes clear reference to food security, and puts the food security issue on ‘an intensified program of work and negotiations’ for a permanent solution.<sup>67</sup> The agreement was sold as a major victory for India’s firm bargaining stance in the Indian domestic press.

<sup>63</sup> WTO, ‘Public stockholding for food security purposes’, Ministerial Decision, 7 Dec. 2013 (WT/MIN(13)/38, para. 1, [https://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/minist\\_e/mc9\\_e/desci38\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/minist_e/mc9_e/desci38_e.htm)).

<sup>64</sup> Shawn Donnan, ‘Q&A: last ditch efforts to save WTO deal’, *Financial Times*, 31 July 2014; Katie Allen and Angela Monaghan, ‘World Trade Organization’s future in doubt as India blocks trade deal’, *Guardian*, 1 Aug. 2014.

<sup>65</sup> Statement by Nirmala Sitharaman in the Lok Sabha regarding India’s stance in the WTO, 5 Aug. 2014, Press Information Bureau, Government of India, Ministry of Commerce and Industry, <http://pib.nic.in/newsite/PrintRelease.aspx?relid=107999>.

<sup>66</sup> Donnan, ‘Q&A’; Allen and Monaghan, ‘World Trade Organization’s future’.

<sup>67</sup> US–India agreement on trade facilitation, fact sheet, Office of the United States Trade Representative, <http://www.ustr.gov/about-us/press-office/fact-sheets/2014/November/US-India-Agreement-on-Trade-Facilitation>.

Thus far, there was little evidence to suggest that Modi's leadership had had any impact in changing India's negotiating stance in the WTO.

India's reputation as a nay-sayer dogged it well into the run-up to the Nairobi ministerial of December 2015. Analysts argued that India would not be shy of causing another deadlock this time too, were its demands on food security not met.<sup>68</sup> Interestingly, however, in contrast to the predictions, a role reversal took place, with India now expressing its fullest support for the DDA, and the US declaring the round dead in advance of the Nairobi ministerial. The US trade representative, Michael Froman, announced in an op-ed in the *Financial Times* that: 'It is time for the world to free itself of the strictures of Doha.'<sup>69</sup> This was a remarkably irresponsible statement on the part of the United States (even in a personal capacity as an op-ed), especially in the run-up to a ministerial that was dedicated to negotiating the Doha round. In contrast, India's support for the DDA was clear. The statement of the Indian Commerce Minister, Nirmala Sitharaman, was unambiguous in the country's commitment to Doha:

We have come to Nairobi with an open mind, determined to make this Conference a success for us, for Africa and for the world ... The DDA may have run into obstacles but it is in our collective interest to continue to work on all pillars, keeping its development dimension intact. We are of the firm view that this Ministerial must clearly re-affirm the Doha Development Agenda and all Ministerial Declarations and Decisions taken since 2001 when we launched the Doha Round. These are all important ... We must respect our negotiating mandates and work within the established framework of the DDA and the tried and tested WTO principles.<sup>70</sup>

At least in comparison to the US, India had now emerged as the more responsible power, declaring not just its willingness not to disrupt the system but its commitment to uphold it.

As the negotiations progressed, again in contrast to prior expectations and predictions about its negotiating stance, India's role was less obstructionist. True, it did not go quite as far as it had done in the climate change negotiations by acting as an agenda-setter. It continued to push its agenda of food security, which had already proved to have a polarizing effect in prior discussions, and it continued to berate the developed world over 'the cavalier manner' in which the priority concerns of developing countries were being sidelined. But it did not follow its usual tactic of holding up the end-game over the point. The Nairobi ministerial declaration was duly agreed upon.<sup>71</sup> But two important points are worth noting to assess how much of a departure from India's usual negotiation stance this agreement really represented.

<sup>68</sup> e.g. 'India holds out for right to keep high grain stocks despite fears that it could lead to deadlock', IPSOS, 17 Dec. 2015, pp. 12–13, [http://www.ipsos.co.ke/NEWBASE\\_EXPORTS/AGRI%20EXPERIENCE/151217\\_Business%20Daily\\_12,%2013\\_a93dd.pdf](http://www.ipsos.co.ke/NEWBASE_EXPORTS/AGRI%20EXPERIENCE/151217_Business%20Daily_12,%2013_a93dd.pdf).

<sup>69</sup> Michael Froman, 'We are at the end of the line on the Doha Round of trade talks', *Financial Times*, 13 Dec. 2015.

<sup>70</sup> Address by Ms Nirmala Sitharaman, Minister of State (Independent Charge) for Commerce and Industry of India, at the plenary session of the 10th ministerial conference of the WTO, 16 Dec. 2015, [https://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/minist\\_e/mc10\\_e/statements\\_e/ind\\_e.pdf](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/minist_e/mc10_e/statements_e/ind_e.pdf).

<sup>71</sup> WTO, Nairobi ministerial declaration, 19 Dec. 2015, WT/MIN(15)/DEC, para. 30, [https://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/minist\\_e/mc10\\_e/mindecision\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/minist_e/mc10_e/mindecision_e.htm).

First, while the ministerial did not produce the ‘permanent solution’ on food security which India had emphasized, it did establish a work plan towards this. Significantly, this work plan decouples the negotiation over public stockholding for food security purposes from the agriculture negotiations, and establishes the food security negotiation within an ‘accelerated time-frame’.<sup>72</sup> This could legitimately be sold as a ‘win’ for India, domestically and internationally, even though it fell short of the ‘permanent solution’.

Second, this ‘win’ arguably came at a potentially serious cost: the Nairobi ministerial declaration is unprecedented in that it ends by stating that there is a lack of consensus among the members on the Doha mandates. This is a new low for the WTO; until now, despite extremely polarized negotiation positions, members would manage to come up with a final consensual document. Even worse, this lack of consensus explicitly refers to the Doha Development Agenda:<sup>73</sup> the round that India had played a lead in framing, and the round that was supposed to place developing countries and their concerns at the heart of the WTO. So India may have won a concession via the ‘declaration on public stockholding for food security purposes’; but it may have lost out (together with other developing countries) by accepting the unravelling and delegitimization of the DDA. For the purpose of this article, the point to take away from the Nairobi negotiations is the fundamental change in India’s negotiating position from nay-sayer to pragmatic deal-maker. It would have been very unexpected, even unthinkable, for a pre-Modi India to have accepted such a deal.

The Nairobi case shows similarities with the Paris case in that an agreement was achieved in the end. Further, despite predictions of Indian recalcitrance in both cases, India in fact played a constructive role that contributed to reaching these agreements. In both cases, former Indian obstructionism and strict distributive bargaining were transformed into willingness to make concessions, and act in ways that sought to preserve and reinforce the system as a whole. Within these overall similarities, however, the differences are also very palpable.

First, India did not display the same level of agenda-setting in trade as it had done in climate change. In Paris, for instance, it played a leading role through its push for the renewables agenda, particularly solar energy. In Nairobi, in contrast, it stuck to defensive positions and did not seem to make any attempts at value creation. Second, a particularly striking difference was the change in framing tactics in Paris, via Modi’s referencing of and drawing on Indian traditions and thus reclaiming ownership of the mitigation agenda; these philosophical arguments were nicely reinforced by the economic arguments. In Nairobi, the main frames continued to be economic, particularly the plight of poor subsistence farmers. But there was little appeal to classical Indian traditions. The use of cultural arguments in respect of climate change, and their absence in discussion of trade, may have helped root the former agenda and sell it at home; in contrast, the trade agenda lacked these

<sup>72</sup> WTO, ‘Public stockholding for food security purposes’, ministerial decision, 19 Dec. 2015, WT/MIN (15) 44-WT/L979, [https://www.wto.org/english/thewto\\_e/minist\\_e/mc10\\_e/l979\\_e.htm](https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/minist_e/mc10_e/l979_e.htm).

<sup>73</sup> WTO, Nairobi ministerial declaration, 19 Dec. 2015, WT/MIN(15)/DEC, para. 30.



deep roots of support. Third, the Ministry of Commerce and Industry attracted a lot of criticism at home over its performance in Nairobi, and many saw Indian diplomacy here as too concessionary to the US and other OECD countries.<sup>74</sup> In contrast, Paris by and large produced considerable praise, domestically and internationally, for the role India had played in helping secure agreement.

While both cases demonstrate a similar and positive trend in India's evolving role in global governance, they also reveal an important difference and potential limitation. In climate change, the reliance on economic arguments, and the importance of a green economy for India's own development, helped make the case in favour of mitigation in terms of growing *ability*. But more importantly, sourcing and justifying India's agenda-setting diplomacy in Indian traditions helped facilitate greater *willingness* on the part of a range of constituencies to shoulder this burden within the country. In trade, India made the economic case convincingly—both in its initial resistance to certain offers and subsequently in justifying acceptance of the deal. But the absence of the accompanying philosophical and cultural argument made India's concessionary diplomacy in trade much harder to sell domestically. The difference between the two cases suggests that the cultural variable may need to be more systematically factored in, for both explanatory and policy-making effectiveness.

## Challenges and risks

The previous section has illustrated a positive trend in India's role in global governance, but with some important differences of degree that revolve around the pivot of culture. It remains to be seen whether Modi will be able to use the culture variable to generate and justify a role of greater responsibility across different areas of global governance. Two challenges loom especially large.<sup>75</sup>

First, the use of the culture variable entails an especially difficult balancing act. In the climate change case, Modi used Indian traditions effectively to work in tandem with a growth and development agenda, and successfully cultivated a greater *willingness* for India to take on international responsibilities. But culture can also be misused and misinterpreted for narrow, sectarian purposes. Modi and his government must walk the tightrope of using culture as a powerful instrument to advance the cause of modernity on India's own terms, while simultaneously resisting the pressures from more right-wing supporters to use it for nationalist projection.

Second, while foreign investors seem to be signalling their faith in India as an attractive destination, domestic challenges seem to be growing as Modi attempts

<sup>74</sup> e.g. 'Nothing at Nairobi: WTO ministerial leaves India and other developing countries in the lurch', *First Post*, 21 Dec. 2015, <http://www.firstpost.com/business/nothing-at-nairobi-wto-ministerial-leaves-india-and-developing-countries-in-the-lurch-2553428.html>; Ujal Singh Bhatia, 'Paris to Nairobi: trade negotiations did not have the same happy ending as COP21', *Indian Express*, 23 Dec. 2015, <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/paris-to-nairobi/>.

<sup>75</sup> For a more detailed analysis of the risks and potential difficulties, see Amrita Narlikar, Sandra Destradi and Johannes Plagemann, 'Am Wendepunkt: Die Erwartungen an Premier Modis Reformprogramm sind hoch', *Internationale Politik*, IP-Länderporträt Indien 3, Nov. 2015, pp. 6–13.

to implement some aspects of his reform agenda. The necessary but nonetheless controversial bill on land acquisition ran into major difficulties in 2015. In the same year, the defeat of the BJP in the Bihar elections drove home the extent of opposition to some of Modi's reforms. Similarly, while foreign and national investors alike recognize the urgent need to reform India's outdated labour laws,<sup>76</sup> the strike organized by India's trade unions in early September 2015 illustrates what an uphill task it will be to reform India's labour market. Modi's attempts to reduce red tape for foreign investors have attracted criticism from numerous local sources, including green NGOs that claim that not sufficient attention is being paid to protecting rural areas. Arun Jaitley's attempts to rationalize the complexities of India's federal taxation system, by putting in place an India-wide goods and services tax, have finally gained parliamentary approval. But even here, many challenges remain—not least the political support that the reform needs from state governments, and also the controversial technical details that must still be worked out. The international press has been quick to pick up on these criticisms and difficulties.<sup>77</sup> And if growth slows down, India's *ability* to play a more constructive global role will take a hit.

## Conclusions

India may indeed be at a turning point under the leadership of Prime Minister Modi. Never before has the commitment to growth and development been so clearly mandated; nor has it been manifest in such a clear set of second-generation economic reforms. As a government committed to economic growth, the Modi regime is more heavily invested in the existing rules and structures of global economic governance than most previous administrations since 1991. This is translating into a growing *ability* to take on a more constructive role in global governance. This article has illustrated the proactive agenda-setting role that India played in the Paris conference, and also the less obstructionist role that it played in the Nairobi ministerial.

As I have argued in this article, the commitment to economic growth and development is becoming connected with a newfound respect for, appeal to, and political use of India's own traditions, which the Prime Minister is applying—at least selectively—to his reform agenda with aplomb. We have seen this play out most effectively in the climate change negotiations. This mix of modernity and tradition is a potent combination, partly because it may help in indigenizing India's growth model and building ownership for the reform process. But it is also extremely important for global governance, and India's own emergence as a potential leader in the international system. At a time when the world faces a clear leadership vacuum and undergoes systemic power transitions, the last 15 years

<sup>76</sup> e.g. Edward Luce, *In spite of the gods: the rise of modern India* (New York: Anchor, 2008).

<sup>77</sup> e.g. Victor Mallet and James Crabtree, 'Narendra Modi: one direction', *Financial Times*, 17 May 2015, and Amy Kazmin, 'Indian business hails approval of long-awaited national tax system', *Financial Times*, 4 Aug. 2016; Swaminathan Aiyar, 'India's one nation tax depends on local statesmanship', op-ed, *Financial Times*, 10 Aug. 2016.

have revealed a desperate dearth of creative ideas on the shape that global order might take. Modi's growth strategy may make India better *able* to take on new international responsibilities, while his reliance on Indian cultural traditions may make the country more *willing* to develop new ideas on alternative global public goods, come up with a clear grand strategy, and contribute to the building of a shared vision of global order.

The trade case is an example where this potential was not used. Here India's stance was less obstructionist, but not quite as pioneering or agenda-setting as in the climate change negotiations. India alone cannot be blamed for the lacklustre nature of the Nairobi conference; a far greater portion of the blame must go to the United States and other developed countries, which effectively walked away from Doha. But a key difference between India's own behaviour at Paris and at Nairobi was in the use of historical and philosophical traditions for sourcing and justification in one and not the other. In Paris, India took on a more ambitious role in its intellectual leadership and also managed to sell the outcome more effectively at home; in Nairobi, it did not.

Whether Modi will be able to develop a similar vision of global order across different issues areas as well as climate change remains to be seen. Developing this vision will require a process of careful negotiation, internally and externally. The last year has revealed how fraught this process of internal negotiation can be: Modi will have to prove himself to be a very efficacious and persuasive coalition-builder if he is to carry the country with him and implement his reform programme. Modi has initiated the external process in a pioneering way with his recent stance on environmental sustainability, green technology and climate change mitigation. But this external negotiation will require timely and positive engagement on the part of the established powers too, and this engagement will need to be made in a manner that treats India as an equal partner and recognizes it on its own terms. The West seems to have done this more readily with China than with any of the other BRIC countries, partly because of China's economic prowess but also because of a better knowledge of its negotiating culture. If India does indeed fulfil its promise to become an economic powerhouse, and backs this rapid evolution with a tradition-inspired set of complementary new ideas on public goods and global governance, the gains will be high for India and for the international community.

