

Narendra Modi's Pakistan and China policy: assertive bilateral diplomacy, active coalition diplomacy

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Two years after Narendra Modi became prime minister of India, how should we understand his foreign policy? Commentators are divided on whether or not Modi has brought anything new to it. The highly respected former diplomat and Foreign Secretary, Shyam Saran, argues that Modi's external policies have built on the past; that the difference between Modi and his predecessors is a matter of energy and style.¹ By contrast, a leading Indian commentator, C. Raja Mohan, regards Modi's rule as presaging the start of a 'Third Republic' and a new foreign policy.² Central to any Indian prime minister's foreign policy is dealing with the country's chief rivals, Pakistan and China. How has he managed relations with India's old foes? And what do his Pakistan and China policies suggest about his broader foreign policy stance? In 2014, a country with the world's third biggest economy (in purchasing power parity terms) and one of the six largest conventional militaries voted for a right-wing, religious-minded leader who promised change.³ Change in India's key relationships could have consequences far beyond southern Asia.

This article argues that under Modi, India's policies towards Pakistan and China have moved from a stance of 'normal', slow-to-anger bilateral diplomacy and non-alignment to a harder, more outspoken bilateral diplomacy and a more explicit coalition diplomacy (what might be called 'Acting West', 'Acting East' and 'Acting South'). This harder bilateral diplomacy features a cooperation–defection dynamic previously largely absent from Indian foreign policy, which has hitherto tended towards a state of permanent, protracted negotiations. In addition, while Modi 'talks the talk' of non-alignment, he is moving India towards varying degrees of partnership with the United States and a number of regional states against Pakistan and China.⁴

¹ 'Seminal shift or continuity, book launch sees sharp debate on Modi's foreign policy', *The Wire*, 19 July 2015, <http://thewire.in/6794/seminal-shift-or-continuity-book-launch-sees-sharp-debate-on-modis-foreign-policy/>. (Unless otherwise noted at point of citation, all URLs cited in this article were accessible on 27 Oct. 2016.)

² C. Raja Mohan, *Modi's world: expanding India's sphere of influence* (New Delhi: HarperCollins India, 2015), pp. 1–20.

³ On India's GDP in purchasing power parity (PPP) terms in 2015, see World Bank, 'GDP ranking, PPP based', http://databank.worldbank.org/data/download/GDP_PPP.pdf. On India's military ranking, see International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS), *The military balance 2015* (London: Routledge, 2015), pp. 24–5: India has the world's third largest military in terms of active personnel; the second largest number of tanks and of artillery; and the fourth largest number of cruisers, destroyers, frigates and tactical aircraft.

⁴ Harsh V. Pant and Julie M. Super, 'India's "non-alignment" conundrum: a twentieth century policy in a

Contrary to the views of his critics, Modi's policies towards both rivals is consistent, and the cooperation–defection dynamic that observers have noticed in New Delhi's dealings with Islamabad and Beijing is the result not of confusion but rather of a willingness to practise more assertive bilateral diplomacy geared to clear goals. In addition, in respect of both countries, Modi seems determined to build a coalition that will strengthen his bargaining hand. Especially in east Asia, where New Delhi has moved unprecedentedly close to the United States and to Vietnam, Japan and Australia, this coalition strategy is moving India away from its traditional aversion to alliance-like relationships.

The article proceeds as follows. The first section shows, through a review of recent scholarship on India's foreign policy, that the foundational principles of New Delhi's external stance, notwithstanding domestic and global changes, have been characterized by (1) a rather sedate bilateral diplomacy or 'cautious prudence' and (2) an aversion to alliances. At the same time, the section suggests that in terms of operational practice Indian policy has responded to domestic and global changes, periodically shifting from cautiousness in respect of its neighbours to more hard-nosed, pragmatic, even interventionary behaviour and, when necessary, from non-alignment to coalition-building. This review sets the stage for the following two sections, which deal with Modi's policies towards Pakistan and China, respectively. The analysis shows that India is shedding its cautious prudence as well as its aversion to alignment. Each of these sections is divided into two parts, the first dealing with Modi's bilateral diplomacy and the second with his coalition diplomacy.

Continuity and change in Indian foreign policy

Recent scholarship on India's foreign policy falls into two broad perspectives. One view is that the country's policies display remarkable continuity despite enormous domestic and global changes. Thus, writing in 2012, Vipin Narang and Paul Staniland argue that the insistence on 'autonomy, flexibility, and a desire to avoid dependence on stronger powers' is at the heart of Indian foreign policy thinking 'even as there has been significant heterogeneity across individuals and over time'.⁵ Narang and Staniland describe the core, 'foundational' principles of Indian non-alignment: autonomy in security, flexibility in choosing one's partners, and caution in working with bigger powers. Strategic autonomy or non-alignment, they suggest, will remain the core for the foreseeable future.⁶

changing world', *International Affairs* 91: 4, July 2015, pp. 760–64. It is instructive that Modi has scarcely ever uttered the word 'non-alignment', and in September 2016 he became the first Indian prime minister not to attend a non-aligned summit since 1979. See Nikita Doval, 'Narendra Modi skips NAM summit, the first Indian PM to do so', *Livemint*, 15 Sept. 2016, <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/ectxbpHsJ2XUmRkXX-qVbpL/Hamid-Ansari-leaves-for-Venezuela-to-attend-17th-NAM-summit.html>.

⁵ Vipin Narang and Paul Staniland, 'Institutions and worldviews in Indian foreign security policy', *India Review* 11: 2, 2012, p. 76. Priya Chacko makes a distinction between 'foundational' principles and 'operational' practices in her 'The rise of the Indo-Pacific: understanding ideational change and continuity in India's foreign policy', *Australian Journal of International Affairs* 68: 4, 2014, p. 434.

⁶ Narang and Staniland, 'Institutions and worldviews in Indian foreign security policy', p. 90.

Another proponent of continuity, Pratap Bhanu Mehta, argues that 'Nehru's shadow' still looms large over foreign policy. New Delhi remains averse to grand strategizing, obsessed with territorial integrity and domestic legitimacy, and suspicious of balance of power politics and alignment. It seeks power, but values the power of its own example above hard power, and is reluctant to use force. Indian foreign policy in a more operational sense is typified by 'cautious prudence', which may be defined by five characteristics: deterrence of, not competition with, China; the primacy of sovereignty over interventionism in international affairs; working within existing frameworks rather than reshaping international institutions; an incrementalist accumulation of military power; and engagement with, not 'decisive leadership' over, neighbouring countries.⁷

What does the Narang/Staniand and Mehta continuity perspective suggest for policy towards Pakistan and China? First, non-aligned India will deal with its two rivals independent of Great Power alliances. Second, New Delhi will seek to deter Pakistan and China and not attempt to settle conflict through force of arms. Most importantly, if it avoids alliances and relies on deterrence, it must remain committed to dialogue and negotiations with both countries. In sum, Indian policy towards Pakistan and China will be marked by patient, militarily non-provocative bilateral diplomacy and an unwillingness to join or create an alliance against either country.

A second view is that India's policies have gone through phases and have evolved from the orthodoxies of Nehru and his successors in the Cold War, driven by global as well as domestic economic and political change. While the first perspective focuses on the foundational principles of Indian foreign policy, this second perspective emphasizes the tactical, 'operational' stances of external policy which have responded to international pressures and opportunities. The standard view here is that Indian foreign policy can be divided into three phases—an 'idealist' Nehruvian era; an increasingly 'realist' or 'self-help' era during the rest of the Cold War; and a 'realist' and 'pragmatist' era thereafter.⁸

The Nehruvian era was the classical period of non-alignment, with India seeking to build an autonomous geopolitical space for itself and the newly emerging African and Asian countries, bridge the divide between the Cold War blocs, maintain a modest military capacity, pursue autarkic economic development, and build international and regional institutions in the cause of peace and cooperation. After India's defeat in the 1962 war with China, its foreign policy moved into a more realist phase. This was marked by soft alignment with the Soviet Union against China and then the United States, expanding military power, a continued insistence on autarky, and periodic interventions against its south Asian neighbours. Finally, with the end of the Cold War and facing an internal

⁷ Pratap Bhanu Mehta, 'Still under Nehru's shadow? The absence of foreign policy frameworks in India', *India Review* 8: 3, 2009, pp. 209–33.

⁸ See C. Raja Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon: the shaping of India's new foreign policy* (New Delhi: Penguin/Viking, 2003); Sumit Ganguly and Manjeet Pardesi, 'Explaining sixty years of India's foreign policy', *India Review* 8: 1, 2009, pp. 4–19; Rohan Mukherjee and David Malone, 'Indian foreign policy and contemporary security challenges', *International Affairs* 87: 1, Jan. 2011, pp. 87–90; Pant and Super, 'India's "non-alignment" conundrum', pp. 749–59; Priya Chacko, 'The new geoeconomics of a "rising" India: state transformation and the recasting of foreign policy', *Journal of Contemporary Asia* 45: 2, 2015, pp. 326–44.

economic crisis, Indian policy entered a realist—pragmatic phase. With the collapse of the Soviet Union, India was left without a balancing partner; and with internal economic crisis, its autarkic economic stance was forced to change. India now increasingly cultivated the United States, overtly went nuclear, sought trade and diplomatic linkages including with China, and, with its growing economic and military power, reinserted itself into regional institutions, particularly in east Asia.

For proponents of the change perspective, India's foreign policy in its third phase has moved beyond cautious prudence and non-alignment. As early as 2003, Raja Mohan approvingly noted a more assertive approach and a willingness to build coalitions. Thus, on Pakistan: 'India must have a mix of military and diplomatic options ... for a full exploitation of Pakistan's contradictions with its neighbours and the international system and stepping up of ... pressures against Pakistan.' New Delhi should collaborate with America on transforming 'the internal dynamics of Pakistan's society'.⁹ On China, India's 'warming ties with the United States have forced Beijing to reconsider its own relations with New Delhi'. After the Cold War, India had 'a higher profile in South-East Asia, where many nations see New Delhi as maintaining the balance of power in the region'. Closer relations with Vietnam and Japan were signs of the 'new trend of Indian assertiveness'; yet India should not 'wantonly confront China and become a front-line state in a potential American containment of Beijing'.¹⁰ In sum, in the new world order, cautious prudence was giving way to assertiveness and the aversion to alignment was giving way to international coalition-building.

The two perspectives are in some tension. The first would suggest that, notwithstanding the arrival of Modi, New Delhi will seek to continue its past espousal of a non-provocative stance and protracted bilateral negotiations. The second would suggest that Modi could build on changes already in motion since the end of the Cold War and take Indian policy ever more firmly away from non-alignment towards a coalition strategy. As we will see, Modi's policies towards Pakistan and China are not business as usual in bilateral diplomacy and, while he is building on changes initiated before his time, he has taken India much further towards a coalition strategy.

Modi's Pakistan strategy: anti-terrorism, tough bilateral diplomacy and 'Acting West'

Modi's Pakistan policy has two components: bilateral diplomacy and coalition diplomacy. Bilaterally, Modi has alternated between engaging in dialogue and disengaging from it: what game theorists could call 'cooperation' and 'defection'.¹¹ Manmohan Singh, his predecessor in the premiership, had disengaged from the

⁹ Raja Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*, p. 202.

¹⁰ Raja Mohan, *Crossing the Rubicon*, pp. 161–2 (on India's China policy).

¹¹ The terms 'cooperate' and 'defect' are widely used in game theory, across disciplines. In International Relations, for instance, see Kenneth Oye, 'Explaining cooperation under anarchy: hypotheses and strategies', *World Politics* 38: 1, 1985, pp. 1–24. Intriguingly, Oye suggests that tit-for-tat cooperation and defection over time can lead to cooperation. On this, see the classic work by Robert Axelrod, *The evolution of cooperation* (New York: Basic Books, 1984; new edn London: Penguin, 2006).

composite dialogue with Pakistan after the Mumbai 2008 terrorist attacks and was unwilling to restart talks pending Pakistani actions against the perpetrators of the attack. Modi has not reinstated the composite dialogue but instead has sought repeatedly to engage, casting himself in the lead role. He has also not hesitated to disengage when Pakistan has insisted that negotiations must focus on the Kashmir dispute rather than on terrorism, or when India has been attacked by terrorists or artillery fire from across the border. In addition to the cooperate-and-defect bilateral diplomacy, he has tried to bring to bear anti-terrorism pressures from a coalition of states, including Pakistan's neighbours in the Gulf. At the heart of Modi's efforts is the desire to make terrorism the central focus of India–Pakistan negotiations. This approach runs counter to India's policy since the 1990s, which was based on an understanding with Pakistan that a long-term composite dialogue between the countries would feature Kashmir and security (read terrorism) as the co-equal primary issues of discussion.¹² Modi has signalled that India under him will only discuss terrorism and will refuse to talk about Kashmir.

Bilateral diplomacy: cooperation, defection and anti-terrorism

Contrary to his campaign rhetoric, Modi started his term in May 2014 with an effort to reach out to Pakistan by inviting Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, along with the heads of other south Asian governments, to his inauguration.¹³ During Sharif's visit, the two convened a bilateral India–Pakistan meeting on the sidelines of the inauguration, and Modi and his officials were at great pains to underline that New Delhi had pressed Pakistan on terrorism.¹⁴ Sharif, for his part, did not mention the Kashmir quarrel.¹⁵ From this promising beginning, at least for India, relations with Pakistan alternated between cooperation and defection. Thus, Modi and Sharif agreed that their respective foreign secretaries would 'remain in touch', and in July 2014 it was announced that they would meet at the end of August.¹⁶ However, when the Pakistani High Commissioner invited the leaders of the Kashmiri separatist Hurriyat Conference to his residence for Independence Day celebrations on 14 August, India cancelled the foreign secretaries' talks. For 20 years, New Delhi had turned a blind eye to Pakistan's Hurriyat dealings, hoping that three separate sets of bilateral discussions between India, Pakistan and the separatists might obviate the need for trilateral talks.¹⁷ Modi, by contrast, took the view that Kashmir was

¹² Sajad Padder, 'The composite dialogue between India and Pakistan: structure, process and agency', Heidelberg Papers in South Asian and Comparative Politics, Working Paper No. 65 (Heidelberg: South Asia Institute, Department of Political Science, Heidelberg University, Sept. 2012), http://archiv.ub.uni-heidelberg.de/volltextserver/13143/1/Heidelberg_Papers_65_Padder.pdf.

¹³ See e.g. Rahul Roy-Chaudhuri, 'India's polarized election campaign', *IISS Voices*, 13 May 2014, <https://www.iiss.org/en/iiss%20voices/blogsections/iiss-voices-2014-b4d9/may-5382/indias-polarised-election-campaign-5e65>.

¹⁴ Aditi Phadnis, 'Nawaz's Delhi trip: at courtesy call, India gives PM "show cause"', *Express Tribune*, 28 May 2014, <http://tribune.com.pk/story/714184/nawazs-delhi-trip-at-courtesy-call-india-gives-pm-show-cause/>.

¹⁵ Phadnis, 'Nawaz's Delhi trip'.

¹⁶ Sachin Parashar, 'India, Pakistan foreign secretaries to meet on August 25', *Times of India*, 24 July 2014, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-Pakistan-foreign-secretaries-to-meet-on-August-25/article-show/38940881.cms>.

¹⁷ C. Raja Mohan, *Modi's world: expanding India's sphere of influence* (New Delhi: HarperCollins, 2015), p. 78.

a bilateral matter, and that ascertaining Kashmiri opinion on the future of the state was India's business.¹⁸ More importantly, for the new Prime Minister, it was not Kashmir but rather terrorism that was the defining issue. Cancelling the talks was a reminder to Pakistan that India was not interested in a dialogue on Kashmir.

Despite the Hurriyat fracas, Modi persisted with resuming bilateral talks, and a second cooperation–defection cycle ensued. He met Sharif during the cricket World Cup in February 2015, and sent Foreign Secretary S. Jaishankar to Islamabad in March to hold 'talks about talks'.¹⁹ In Ufa, at the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit on 11 July 2015, the two leaders agreed to a meeting of their national security advisers (NSAs) to discuss terrorism and Modi's attendance at the next summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (to be held in Pakistan).²⁰ When Sharif subsequently insisted that Kashmir must be included in the talks, India balked, arguing that the Ufa agreement limited the talks to terrorism. Terrorists subsequently struck on 17 July in Gurdaspur, Punjab, and on 5 August in Udhampur, Kashmir. Not surprisingly, this reinforced New Delhi's insistence that the talks would be about terrorism. Pakistan then insisted that its NSA would meet Hurriyat representatives when he visited New Delhi, leading the Modi government to threaten to cancel talks over the Pakistani focus on Kashmir. In the end, Islamabad cancelled the meeting, arguing that it would not accept preconditions on the scope of negotiations.²¹

Cooperation and defection went through a third cycle in late 2015 and into 2016. In November 2015, after meeting on the sidelines of the climate change summit in Paris, Modi and Sharif announced a resumption of dialogue. The two NSAs subsequently met in Bangkok and discussed a range of issues including 'peace and security' (read terrorism) and Kashmir.²² Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj then met Sharif and Pakistan's NSA in Islamabad while attending the 'Heart of Asia' conference. The two sides vowed to resume dialogue with a broader agenda.²³ On 25 December, Modi suddenly stopped off in Lahore, ostensibly to attend the wedding of Sharif's daughter. The two leaders agreed to a meeting of foreign secretaries in January 2016 to chart the future of dialogue.²⁴ Almost immediately, on 2 January, terrorists attacked an Indian air force base in Pathankot. New Delhi stopped short of inflammatory comments on responsibility for the attack, and the

¹⁸ Raja Mohan, *Modi's world*, pp. 77–80.

¹⁹ Raja Mohan, *Modi's world*, p. 82; 'Jaishankar arrives in Islamabad, Pak hopes visit will kickstart dialogue', *Hindustan Times*, 3 March 2015, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/india/jaishankar-arrives-in-islamabad-pak-hopes-visit-will-kickstart-dialogue/story-sFDLpjfWddnDSAEaCD4kJL.html>.

²⁰ Raja Mohan, *Modi's world*, p. 82; 'Full text of India–Pakistan joint statement on PM Narendra Modi–Nawaz Sharif talks in Russia', *The Hindu*, 10 July 2015, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/resources/full-text-of-the-joint-statement-by-the-foreign-secretaries-of-india-and-pakistan-in-russia/article7407431.ece>.

²¹ Baqar Sajad Syed, 'NSAs' talks cancelled over Indian conditions', *Dawn*, 23 Aug. 2015, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1202269>.

²² Shubhajit Roy, Praveen Swami and Sheela Bhatt, 'India, Pakistan break the ice off camera in Bangkok', *Indian Express*, 7 Dec. 2015, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/indo-pak-nsas-meet-in-bangkok-discuss-terrorism-jk/>.

²³ 'India, Pakistan ready for talks, says Sushma Swaraj in Islamabad', *India Today*, 9 Dec. 2015, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/india-pakistan-ready-for-talks-says-sushma-swaraj-in-islamabad/1/542889.html>.

²⁴ Harmeet Shah Singh, 'Indian Prime Minister makes surprise visit, meets with Pakistani counterpart', CNN, 26 Dec. 2015, <http://edition.cnn.com/2015/12/25/asia/india-pm-visits-pakistan/>.

two sides agreed that a joint investigation team (JIT) should visit Pathankot at the end of March 2016. After the JIT visit, though, Pakistani sources suggested that India had 'stage managed' the attack. On 7 April, Islamabad cancelled the dialogue with India, saying that New Delhi was once again attempting to put Kashmir on the back burner and that it would not reciprocate the JIT visit by inviting Indian investigators to Pakistan.²⁵

Why did the Modi government not call off talks after the Pathankot attack as it had after the ceasefire violations in 2014 or the terrorist attacks in Gurdaspur and Udhampur? Why instead did it offer cooperation by inviting Pakistan to a joint investigation? If, as suggested here, Modi was trying from the beginning to foreground terrorism in India's interactions with Pakistan, then the invitation to a joint probe was probably a trap: for if Pakistan accepted (as it did), this would constitute at least tacit acceptance that it could not disavow cross-border terrorism. This may explain why in March 2016 New Delhi abruptly changed tack and allowed the Hurriyat to attend a Pakistan Day celebration. In an apparent volte-face, Minister of State V. K. Singh explained that, as Indian citizens, Hurriyat's leaders were free to meet the Pakistani High Commissioner even if the Indian government did not approve.²⁶ Cancelling the Hurriyat meeting would have caused Pakistan to withdraw from the probe even as India was poised to spring a diplomatic trap.

Commentators and analysts in both countries have attempted to make sense of the cooperation–defection cycle and in particular of India's policy towards Pakistan. Reflection on the cycle suggests that Modi's policies are comprehensible.

First, Modi clearly sees value in keeping the door open for engagement. Part of his motivation is his determination not to be seen—at home or abroad—as anti-Muslim and anti-Pakistani. Clearly, also, the imperatives of nuclear stability and the long-term futility of military responses to terrorism necessitate dialogue. Second, from the beginning Modi seems to have been determined to use the process of engagement to foreground terrorism. Going back to 1997, when the bilateral dialogue was first structured around the twin issues of 'peace and security' (read terrorism) and Kashmir, New Delhi had accepted these as coequal in importance.²⁷ While Atal Behari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh had insisted that dialogue with Pakistan must include peace and security, both leaders simultaneously carried on back-channel negotiations on Kashmir.²⁸ Modi, by contrast, has kept the focus firmly on terrorism and has avoided the subject of Kashmir's future altogether. Third, given his desire to pin Pakistan down on terrorism, Modi

²⁵ 'Pathankot attack staged by India, believe Pak sleuths', *Times of India*, 5 April 2016, <http://timesofindia.india-times.com/india/Pathankot-attack-staged-by-India-believe-Pak-sleuths/articleshow/51690813.cms>; 'Pakistan calls off peace talks with India unilaterally; MEA reminds Pak that JIT visit was on a reciprocal basis', *DNA Daily News and Analysis*, 8 April 2016, <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-pakistan-calls-off-peace-talks-with-india-unilaterally-2199434>.

²⁶ Devirupa Mitra, 'Hurriyat are Indian citizens, can meet any foreign representative, says govt', *The Wire*, 1 May 2016, <http://thewire.in/32924/hurriyat-are-indian-citizens-can-meet-any-foreign-representative-says-govt/>.

²⁷ Amit Baruah, 'India–Pakistan official-level talks from February 16', *The Hindu*, 28 Jan. 2004, <http://www.thehindu.com/2004/01/28/stories/2004012807400100.htm>.

²⁸ Steve Coll, 'The back channel: India and Pakistan's secret Kashmir talks', *New Yorker*, 9 March 2009, <http://www.newyorker.com/magazine/2009/03/02/the-back-channel>.

has called off dialogue when Islamabad has diverted attention to Kashmir. By August 2016, Modi had hardened his stand further. When Pakistan commented on protests in Indian Kashmir and the aggressive handling of those protests by New Delhi, and invited India to talks on Kashmir, Modi responded by accusing Islamabad of atrocities in Baluchistan, Gilgit and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir (POK).²⁹ At the UN Human Rights Council a month later, India followed up by accusing Pakistan of terrorism, illegal occupation of parts of Kashmir, and atrocities against minorities.³⁰

Coalition diplomacy: the UN, China, US and 'Acting West'

The second part of Modi's Pakistan policy entails constructing a series of international pressure points on Islamabad in a way that his predecessors were hesitant to do, fearing that this would allow outside powers to intrude into regional affairs.³¹ Since Modi's election, New Delhi has tried to build a coalition against cross-border terrorism. No coalition partner is obliged to come to India's aid against the sponsor of cross-border violence; nor is India obliged to do anything extraordinary. The coalition is largely a shaming device intended to increase New Delhi's bargaining hand with Pakistan.

Modi's efforts at an anti-terrorist coalition led him first to the UN where, in his maiden address to the General Assembly, he argued for a UN convention on terrorism and for global cooperation.³² Later, in February 2016, New Delhi asked the UN for more specific and direct action, namely, to put Jaish-e Mohammed (JeM) leader Masood Azhar and a list of extremist organizations on a sanctions list.³³ In the end, it took China's intervention to block UN action.³⁴

Modi has also worked on China and the United States to garner support for stronger action against terrorists who target India. On 1 March 2016, at a White House dinner for the Nuclear Security Summit, Modi, in the presence of President Xi Jinping, pointedly criticized the failure of the UN and, by extension, China to sanction Azhar. Indian officials publicly scoffed at Beijing's blocking actions at the UN.³⁵ Days before Modi arrived in Riyadh for an official visit in

²⁹ Shubhajit Roy and Anand Mishra, 'Narendra Modi's Independence Day speech: PM throws down Balochistan gauntlet', *Indian Express*, 16 Aug. 2016, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/pm-narendra-modi-balochistan-independence-day-congress-pakistan-salman-khushid-2977554/>.

³⁰ 'India raises atrocities in Balochistan; persecution of Hindus', *Economic Times*, 19 Sept. 2016, <http://economic-times.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-raises-atrocities-in-balochistan-persecution-of-hindus/articleshow/54414651.cms>.

³¹ An insistence on bilateral conflict resolution with Pakistan has been central to Indian foreign policy going back to the late 1960s and was enshrined in the Simla accord signed after the 1971 India-Pakistan war. See Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 'Simla Agreement, July 2, 1972', <https://mea.gov.in/in-focus-article.htm?19005/Simla+Agreement+July+2+1972>.

³² 'Full text of PM Narendra Modi's address at UN General Assembly', *NDTV*, 27 Sept. 2014, <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/full-text-of-pm-narendra-modis-address-at-un-general-assembly-671757>.

³³ 'India writes to UN to include Masood Azhar on terrorist list', *Times of India*, 26 Feb. 2016, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-to-push-UN-to-include-Masood-Azhar-on-terrorist-list/articleshow/51151277.cms>.

³⁴ Namrata Brar, 'India hits back at China after it blocks ban on Masood Azhar at UN', *NDTV*, 2 April 2016, <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/india-hits-back-at-china-after-it-blocks-ban-on-masood-azhar-at-un-1299955>.

³⁵ Chidanand Rajghatta, 'Subtext of India's statement on Masood Azhar: China, you are shielding terror-

April 2016, the United States and Saudi Arabia acted together to disrupt various fundraising and support networks of the Taliban, Al-Qaeda and Lashkar e Toiba.³⁶ The India–US joint statement at the end of Modi's summit with President Obama in June 2016 committed the two countries to a series of actions: to cooperate in the UN against three Pakistan-based terrorist organizations; to insist that Pakistan 'bring to justice' the perpetrators of the 2008 Mumbai and 2016 Pathankot attacks; and to support the idea of a UN convention on terrorism.³⁷ The 2016 statement built on the 'US–India joint declaration on combatting terrorism' of 2015, which had condemned Pakistani-related terrorist organizations and various terrorist attacks on India organized from Pakistan—perhaps the strongest statement ever of India–US cooperation on cross-border terrorism.³⁸

Most importantly, Modi seems to have devised an 'Acting West' policy.³⁹ During visits to four key Gulf states that have close relations with Pakistan—Iran, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE)—Modi persuaded his hosts to include strong references to terrorism in the joint statements. Thus, in Dubai, the joint statement with the UAE noted that:

They [India and UAE] condemn efforts, including by states, to use religion to justify, support and sponsor terrorism against other countries. They also deplore efforts by countries to give religious and sectarian colour to political issues and disputes, including in West and South Asia, and [to] use terrorism to pursue their aims.

The statement went on to say that the two sides

denounce and oppose terrorism in all forms and manifestations, wherever committed and by whomever, calling on all states to reject and abandon the use of terrorism against other countries, dismantle terrorism infrastructures where they exist, and bring perpetrators of terrorism to justice.⁴⁰

In the months that followed, India's joint statements with Iran, Qatar and Saudi Arabia all featured rather similar language.

To conclude, Modi's Pakistan policy is not confused if we take account of the systematic alternation of cooperation and defection in Indian policy since he came to power. Under Modi, India has focused on one central issue—getting Islamabad to rein in cross-border terrorism. At the same time, as Pakistanis point out, it has

ists—and Pakistan', *Times of India*, 2 April 2016, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Subtext-of-Indias-statement-on-Masood-Azhar-China-you-are-shielding-terrorists-and-Pakistan/articleshow/51655510.cms>.

³⁶ Chidanand Rajghatta, 'US, Saudi Arabia join hands to sanction Pakistani entities ahead of PM Modi's visit to Riyadh', *Times of India*, 1 April 2016, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/US-Saudi-Arabia-join-hands-to-sanction-Pakistani-entities-ahead-of-PM-Modis-visit-to-Riyadh/articleshow/51644304.cms>.

³⁷ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 'Joint statement. The United States and India: enduring global partners in the 21st century', 7 June 2016, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2016/06/07/joint-statement-united-states-and-india-enduring-global-partners-21st>.

³⁸ Office of the Spokesperson, Department of State, Washington, DC, 'U.S.–India joint declaration on combatting terrorism', 23 Sept. 2015, <http://www.state.gov/r/pa/prs/ps/2015/09/247201.htm>.

³⁹ This is not a term that Modi or the Indian government has used, as far as I am aware. I use it as a convenient way of typifying Modi's Gulf strategy.

⁴⁰ 'Joint statement between the United Arab Emirates and the Republic of India', *The Hindu*, 17 Aug. 2015, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/resources/joint-statement-between-the-united-arab-emirates-and-the-republic-of-india/article7550706.ece>. Modi also made a point of referring to terrorism in all his central Asian visits in 2015.

ignored the Kashmir dispute. To get Pakistan to change its approach to terrorism, New Delhi has 'defected' from talks and negotiations when Islamabad has forced the Kashmir issue or when there have been terrorist strikes and surges in cross-border artillery fire. For the longer term, Modi is attempting to build an international coalition including key Gulf countries that will bring pressures to bear on Islamabad to rein in terrorist activities from its soil and to bring to book those involved in organizing cross-border attacks. Modi's approach has departed from India's Pakistan policy 'script' in two ways: he has sought to change the terms of engagement by focusing on terrorism to the exclusion of the Kashmir dispute; and he has gone beyond India's insistence on bilateralism in dispute resolution by embracing a coalition strategy.

It is perhaps too early to say how well Modi's approach is working. However, the cross-border terrorist attack in Uri in the Jammu Division of Kashmir on 18 September 2016, which came on the heels of two months of unrest in the state, has raised hard questions about its effectiveness.⁴¹ The Indian government blamed Pakistan for the Uri attack as well as the earlier unrest in the disputed state, and amid calls for retaliation New Delhi rejected Islamabad's calls for a Kashmir dialogue.⁴² Even as Indian security experts debated possible retaliatory measures, reports circulated of a covert operation by Indian special forces as early as 20 September. The government denied that such an operation had occurred and indicated instead that it would stick with its strategy of exerting bilateral and international pressure.⁴³ Accordingly, New Delhi stepped up its critical commentary on Pakistan's internal troubles.⁴⁴ Responding to the Pakistani Prime Minister's speech to the UN General Assembly, which was devoted to Kashmir, the Indian representative described Pakistan as 'host to the Ivy League of terrorism'.⁴⁵ In a veiled threat, India's official spokesperson reminded Pakistan that the Indus Rivers Treaty of 1960 required 'mutual trust and cooperation', and on 26 September Modi chaired a well-publicized meeting on the treaty.⁴⁶ On 24 September, Modi promised to isolate Pakistan diplomatically, saying: 'India has

⁴¹ '50 per cent Indians disagree with Modi's Pakistan policy: Pew Survey', *Indian Express*, 19 Sept. 2016, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/india-pakistan-policy-modi-pew-research-centre-survey-3039372/>.

⁴² 'India blames Pakistan as Kashmir attack kills 17 soldiers', Reuters, 18 Sept. 2016, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-india-kashmir-idUSKCN11Oo4J>.

⁴³ On the special forces strike, see Chandan Nandy, 'Exclusive: Uri avenged, army conducts surgical strikes across LoC', *The Quint*, 29 Sept. 2016, <https://www.thequint.com/uri-attack/2016/09/21/uri-avenged-2-india-paras-special-forces-cross-loc-uri-sector-jammu-and-kashmir-pakistan-neutralise-20-terrorists>. This story originally appeared in *The Quint* on 21 September. It was revised on 29 September. On the denial, see Avarnita Mathur, 'Has India already avenged Uri by killing 20 Pakistani terrorists in PoK?', *India Today*, 22 Sept. 2016, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/uri-attack-indian-army-pakistan-terrorists-pok-loc/1/770625.html>.

⁴⁴ 'India raises atrocities in Balochistan; persecution of Hindus', *Economic Times*, 19 Sept. 2016, <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/politics-and-nation/india-raises-atrocities-in-balochistan-persecution-of-hindus/articleshow/54414651.cms>.

⁴⁵ 'Full text of India's response to Nawaz Sharif's speech at UN', *NDTV*, 22 Sept. 2016, <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/full-text-of-indias-response-to-nawaz-sharifs-speech-at-un-1464985>.

⁴⁶ Shorbori Puryakayastha, 'Did MEA hint at rethinking Indus Waters Treaty with Pakistan?', *The Quint*, n.d., <https://www.thequint.com/politics/2016/09/22/mea-hints-at-scrapping-indus-water-treaty-with-pak-amid-uri-tensions-vikas-swarup>; 'PM Narendra Modi chairs meeting on Indus Waters Treaty', *Times of India*, 26 Sept. 2016, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/PM-Narendra-Modi-chairs-meeting-on-Indus-Waters-Treaty/articleshow/54521487.cms>.

succeeded in isolating you [Pakistan] in the world. We will ramp it up and force you [to] live alone in the world.⁴⁷ Five days later, New Delhi announced that it had indeed conducted 'surgical strikes' across the Line of Control on 28 September.⁴⁸ Modi's broad approach of bilateral and international pressure looks therefore likely to be continued, even though to date Islamabad has shown no signs of being intimidated by it.

Modi's China strategy: border conflict, tough bilateral diplomacy and 'Acting East' / 'Acting South'

Modi's China policy, too, has run along the twin tracks of bilateral and coalition diplomacy. Bilaterally, as with Pakistan, he has alternated between cooperation and defection: between engagement with China at the summit level, on the one hand, and a series of provocations—blunt public disagreements with Beijing and high-level engagements with putative coalition partners (Australia, Japan, the United States and Vietnam, as well as Indian Ocean islands)—on the other hand. Modi's second track is coalition diplomacy. While his predecessors had begun the process of coalition-building in the 'Look East' policy of the 1990s, Modi has committed India not just to *Look East* but also to *Act East*: New Delhi continues to extol the Association of South-East Asian Nations' 'anchor' role in east Asia, but looking ahead its goal is to enter into partnership with selected regional powers and the United States to contain China.⁴⁹ India is also giving more attention to its coalition partners in the Indian Ocean—in effect, it is Acting South. The core objective is to strengthen New Delhi's bargaining hand with Beijing by assembling an anti-China coalition. With Pakistan, Modi has tried to make terrorism the centrepiece of interaction; with China, he has insisted that progress on a border settlement will be vital to a normal relationship and not the other way round. This represents a reversal of India's stance since 1988.

Bilateral diplomacy: cooperation, defection and the border

In Pakistan's case, Modi cooperated and defected by holding and cancelling talks outright. China is too powerful to be treated so summarily. Nor would the state of India–China relations warrant it. With Beijing, the cooperation–defection dynamic expresses itself in the alternation between summit meetings with Chinese leaders and two forms of defection: blunt public disagreements with Beijing, and highly active summitry with putative strategic partners, namely Australia, Japan,

⁴⁷ Praveen Swami, 'In PM Modi Kozhikode speech, a powerful case for strategic restraint', *Indian Express*, 26 Sept. 2016, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/narendra-modi-kozhikode-speech-powerful-case-for-strategic-restraint-pakistan-3048718/>.

⁴⁸ Nivedita Dash, 'India hits Pakistan back with surgical strikes across Line of Control, 38 killed', *India Today*, 29 Sept. 2016, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/indian-army-crosses-loc-surgical-strikes-pakistani-territory/1/775983.html>.

⁴⁹ 'India is now the bright hope for sustaining Asian dynamism and prosperity: PM Modi in Singapore', Narendra Modi website, <http://www.narendramodi.in/text-of-37th-singapore-lecture-india-s-singapore-story-by-prime-minister-during-his-visit-to-singapore--377134>.

the United States and Vietnam. At the heart of Modi's endeavour is the intent to put pressure on China to speed up border negotiations and not leave a solution, as Beijing would prefer, to another generation.

The first cooperation–defection cycle with China began with a relatively cordial set of interactions. Despite Modi's provocations during his election campaign, China reached out to him.⁵⁰ Premier Li Keqiang was the first dignitary to call him on the telephone after the elections, and in early June 2014 Foreign Minister Wang Yi arrived in Delhi. Modi reciprocated with complimentary words about China; and President Pranab Mukherjee, in listing India's 'strategic partnerships', mentioned China first, ahead of the United States and Russia. Modi was quick to invite President Xi to visit India, in the autumn of 2014.⁵¹ In July that year, after his meeting with Xi at the BRICS⁵² summit, New Delhi agreed that the BRICS New Development Bank would be headquartered in Shanghai; and in return, China accepted that the first president of the bank would be an Indian. It also invited India to attend the Asia–Pacific Economic Cooperation (APEC) meeting in China in November.⁵³ This positive beginning with Beijing was immediately followed by the first in a series of high-level visits by Modi and his team to putative coalition partners. Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj, Modi himself and the Indian President made trips to the two most anti-Chinese states in east Asia, Vietnam and Japan, prior to Xi's India visit. First, in August 2014, just after the BRICS summit, Foreign Minister Swaraj visited Vietnam. Modi's keenly awaited trip to Japan was made between 30 August and 3 September. Then from 14 to 17 September President Pranab Mukherjee went to Hanoi, returning to New Delhi just in time for Xi's state visit to India from 18 to 20 September.

The first summit with Xi was the occasion for a second cooperation–defection interaction. Modi received Xi with fanfare, contrary to protocol, in his home state of Gujarat. Given the strong domestic positions of both leaders, it was widely expected that the summit might conclude with some fairly substantive agreements. For instance, it was rumoured that China would trump Japan's investment offers to India by promising up to US\$100 billion.⁵⁴ In the event, the outcomes of the visit were modest. Beijing's investment offer turned out to be US\$20 billion. India in return committed itself to providing the land for two industrial parks for Chinese manufacturers. There was no progress towards a border settlement.⁵⁵

⁵⁰ Andrew MacAskill, 'India frontrunner Modi slams China expansion amid poll gain', *Bloomberg*, 24 Feb. 2014, <http://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2014-02-23/india-s-modi-attacks-chinese-expansion-in-tougher-border-stand>.

⁵¹ Ankit Panda, 'Chinese foreign minister makes inroads with Modi government', *The Diplomat*, 10 June 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/06/chinese-foreign-minister-makes-inroads-with-modi-government/>.

⁵² Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa.

⁵³ AFP, 'New BRICS bank to be based in China, India to have presidency', *Economic Times*, 16 July 2014, <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/international/business/new-brics-bank-to-be-based-in-china-india-to-have-presidency/articleshow/38442417.cms>.

⁵⁴ Piyush Pandey, 'China to invest \$100 billion in India over 5 years', *Times of India*, 13 Sept. 2014, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/business/india-business/China-to-invest-100-billion-in-India-over-5-years/article-show/42386772.cms>.

⁵⁵ Nayanima Basu, 'China dashes \$100-bn hope, to invest \$20 bn over 5 years', *Business Standard*, 19 Sept. 2014, http://www.business-standard.com/article/economy-policy/china-dashes-100-bn-hope-to-invest-20-bn-over-5-years-114091800557_1.html.

While the summit was ostensibly cordial and amicable, it was in fact notable for Modi's tougher diplomatic stance. This harder line emerged in the shadow of the military confrontation between Indian and Chinese troops in Chumar, Ladakh, which had begun a week before the summit. Modi used the confrontation to send two blunt messages. First, he was prepared to be more aggressive militarily. The confrontation was reminiscent of the Daulat Beg Oldi standoff that had occurred in April–May 2013, during Premier Li Keqiang's visit to Manmohan Singh. The difference in 2014 was the Indian government's reaction. In 2013, under Manmohan, in response to PLA incursions Indian border troops had set up a similar encampment some 300 metres away without challenging the Chinese presence.⁵⁶ In 2014, under Modi, New Delhi moved three battalions of troops to the disputed site.⁵⁷ General V. K. Singh, former army chief under the previous government and a minister of state under Modi in 2014, later revealed that the government had taken office with a view to toughening India's responses to China: 'You keep giving a concession, it only perpetuates the problem. So somewhere up the hierarchy someone has to say "let's hold on".'⁵⁸

Second, the confrontation gave Modi the opportunity to complain about Chinese behaviour and to shift the terms of India–China interactions over the border dispute by means of a public *démarche*. At a press conference with Xi, he referred to the Chumar confrontation, noting plainly: 'I raised our serious concern over repeated incidents along the border.' More important, though, was Modi's insistence that peace was the prerequisite for a better all-round relationship, rather than vice versa—reversing the Indian (and Chinese) stand, going back to 1988, that the development of a 'normal' relationship would lead to peace. Thus Modi noted: 'There should be peace in our relations and in the borders. *If this happens, we can realise [the] true potential of our relations.*' For good measure, he added: 'We [India and China] have to address the boundary question very soon.'⁵⁹ The latter statement was designed to ruffle the Chinese further, since it is Beijing's standard view that a final settlement should be left to future generations.⁶⁰

Immediately after Xi's visit, Modi was once again involved in a series of visits with India's putative coalition partners. At the end of September, he left for the United States to speak at the UN General Assembly but also, more crucially, to meet President Obama for the first time. On 27–28 October the Vietnamese Prime Minister visited India—the third high-level contact between the two countries in as many months. In November, Modi became the first Indian prime minister to visit Australia since 1987. Then President Obama arrived in New Delhi as a

⁵⁶ Sandeep Dikshit, 'China ends stand-off, pulls out troops from Daulat Beg Oldi sector', *The Hindu*, 6 May 2013, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/china-ends-standoff-pulls-out-troops-from-daulat-beg-oldi-sector/article4686606.ece>.

⁵⁷ 'LAC stand-off: nearly 1,000 Chinese soldiers enter India', *Times of India*, 18 Sept. 2014, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/LAC-stand-off-Nearly-1000-Chinese-soldiers-enter-India/articleshow/42774889.cms>.

⁵⁸ Sanjeev Miglani, 'Insight—With canal and hut, India stands up to China on disputed frontier', Reuters, 25 Sept. 2014, <http://in.reuters.com/article/india-china-modi-chumar-army-ladakh-idINKCNoHJ2FU20140924>.

⁵⁹ Frank Jack Daniel and Manoj Kumar, 'China not warlike, says Xi, as border standoff dominates India trip', Reuters, 18 Sept. 2014, <http://in.reuters.com/article/india-china-idINKBNoHDoNI20140918> (emphasis added).

⁶⁰ Jeff A. Smith, *Cold peace: China–India rivalry in the twenty-first century* (New York: Lexington, 2015), p. 65.

guest at the Republic Day parade on 26 January 2015—the only US president ever to be honoured in this way. This was followed in March by Modi's three-nation trip to the Indian Ocean islands of the Seychelles, Mauritius and Sri Lanka. The substance of these visits will be dealt with below; here it suffices to say that cooperation in terms of summitry was followed by a series of strategic defections.

The third cooperation–defection cycle began with Modi's China visit in May 2015. The second summit was less eventful than the first. Modi charmed his hosts in his public diplomacy, contracted business deals worth US\$22 billion, and signed a slew of other agreements; but there was little progress on key issues, including the border.⁶¹ Crucially, the buildup to the meeting became an occasion for Modi to communicate India's tougher-minded bilateral diplomacy. Before Modi landed in Xi'an, Indian officials went out of their way to underline the claim to Arunachal Pradesh ('South Tibet' in China's terminology). First, Foreign Secretary Jaishankar very publicly insisted that Arunachal was an inalienable part of India. Then the Home Minister and Deputy Defence Minister travelled to the state to ram home the point. Modi also met the state's legislators before his departure.⁶² Beijing routinely protests at the visits of high-level Indian leaders to Arunachal; Indian actions were therefore intended as a clear message of defiance. This provocation was followed by Modi once again raising points of conflict and difference very publicly. In a careful analysis of the trip, China-watcher Tanvi Madan has shown that Modi was 'more candid in his remarks about Indian concerns than is normal for Indian leaders during China–India summits'. The Indian Premier urged China to review its approach on various issues including the border, visas, river waters, China's regional diplomacy and bilateral economic relations.⁶³

After the 2015 summit, India once again resorted to some assertive bilateral diplomacy. Barely a month after the summit, Modi remonstrated with Xi at Ufa over Pakistan's release of the alleged mastermind of the Mumbai terrorist attacks. New Delhi had asked the UN to take action in the matter, but China had stalled the process.⁶⁴ Also in July, Foreign Secretary Jaishankar publicly confirmed that India was not ready to be part of China's 'one belt, one road' (OBOR) initiative because it had not been consulted on the idea at its inception, and it regarded OBOR as a vehicle for Chinese national interests.⁶⁵ In 2016, New Delhi stiffened its diplomacy further. In April, as noted above, it protested against China's

⁶¹ See Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 'Joint Statement between India and China during Prime Minister's visit to China', 15 May 2015, http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/25240/Joint_Statement_between_the_India_and_China_during_Prime_Ministers_visit_toChina; 'India and China sign deals worth \$22bn as Modi ends visit', BBC News, 16 May 2015, <http://www.bbc.com/news/world-asia-china-32762930>.

⁶² Tanvi Madan, 'Indian prime minister Modi visits China', Brookings, 13 May 2015, <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/up-front/posts/2015/05/13-modi-china-visit>.

⁶³ Tanvi Madan, 'Modi's trip to China: 6 quick takeaways', Brookings, 15 May 2015, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2015/05/15-modi-china-takeaways-madan>.

⁶⁴ 'In talks with Xi Jinping, PM Modi raises China's stand in UN on Lakhvi's release', *NDTV*, 9 July 2015, <http://www.ndtv.com/india-news/fifth-meeting-in-a-year-shows-depth-in-india-china-ties-pm-modi-to-chinese-xi-jingping-779530>.

⁶⁵ Tanvi Madan, 'What India thinks about China's One Belt, One Road initiative (but doesn't explicitly say)', Brookings, 14 March 2016, <http://www.brookings.edu/blogs/order-from-chaos/posts/2016/03/14-india-china-asia-connectivity-madan>.

stopping the UN from putting JeM leader Azhar on the terrorist list.⁶⁶ Soon afterwards, it issued a visa to Uighur dissident Isa Dolgun to allow him to attend a conference on democracy to be held in Dharamsala, the Indian home of the Dalai Lama. The visa was cancelled after China objected, but the move was seen as a riposte to Beijing's UN veto on sanctioning Azhar.⁶⁷

What does this repeated pattern of cooperation and defection—of summitry succeeded by strategic coalition-building and tough talk—indicate? As with Pakistan, there is a pattern. First, Modi has kept the door open for engagement. This is at least in part to convey that he is moderate and not anti-China. The need for an economic relationship with China and India's vulnerability to Chinese diplomatic pressures or interventions in its domestic politics also necessitate engagement. In addition, as in the case of Pakistan, Modi understands the need for military stability, in this case with a potential opponent that outguns India by some margin in both nuclear and conventional arms. He also understands the limitations of force in realizing political goals (such as regaining territory). In these circumstances, dialogue is inescapable.

Second, Modi has argued that the normalization of intercourse between the two countries since 1988 has not delivered a political solution to the border conflict and that, looking ahead, progress on the border will be vital if more normal relations are to be achieved. Modi's blunt, public venting of differences at the summits is intended to change Beijing's stance on 'leaving the border to history', much as his more assertive policies towards Pakistan are aimed at changing Islamabad's stance on terrorism.

Third, Modi has reacted strongly when China has taken actions India finds threatening or unhelpful. His decision to react forcefully in the Chumar confrontation was the first instance. When China offered Pakistan US\$46 billion towards the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), New Delhi protested, saying that the infrastructure projects involved would traverse Pakistani-held Kashmir, which India claims.⁶⁸ Again, Beijing's veto of the UN sanctions against Masood Azhar prompted India to criticize China publicly.⁶⁹ In spite of India's campaign to marshal support for its admittance to the Nuclear Suppliers Group, China held fast to its objections. New Delhi came out flatly pointing the finger at Beijing, even though other countries too were equivocal about India's entry.⁷⁰

⁶⁶ 'India protests China's move to block UN blacklisting of Jaish chief Masood Azhar', *Dawn*, 2 April 2016, <http://www.dawn.com/news/1249535>.

⁶⁷ 'Red faces in govt, Uighur leader Dolkun Isa's visa cancelled after Chinese protests', *Indian Express*, 26 April 2016, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/india-withdraws-visa-issued-to-uyghur-leader-dolkun-isa-after-chinese-protests-2769087/>.

⁶⁸ 'Pakistan criticizes India for opposing its \$46 billion economic deal with China', *F. World*, 6 June 2015, <http://www.firstpost.com/world/pakistan-criticizes-india-for-opposing-its-46-billion-economic-deal-with-china-2276754.html>.

⁶⁹ 'India protests China's move to block UN blacklisting of Jaish chief Masood Azhar'.

⁷⁰ Shubhajit Roy, 'No entry in NSG: India blames one country (China), others said no too', *Indian Express*, 25 June 2016, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/no-entry-in-nsg-india-blames-one-country-china-others-said-no-too-2874377/>.

Coalition diplomacy: Acting East, Acting South

Beyond his tough bilateral diplomacy in dealings with China lies Modi's coalition diplomacy. At the core of the coalition are Australia, Japan, the United States, Vietnam, and the Indian Ocean island states of Mauritius, Seychelles and Sri Lanka. Since an alliance entails a formal commitment by members to come to one another's aid in the event of an attack, Modi's objective is coalition-building, not alliance-building. He does not expect China to attack India, nor does he expect India to go to anyone's aid. His objective is to strengthen India's bargaining hand by suggesting that Beijing's intransigence on territorial conflicts could push these various states into an alliance.⁷¹

In the case of Vietnam, with an eye to the South China Sea conflict, India publicly voiced its support of freedom on the high seas and the international law of the sea in 2014, the first time it had done so jointly with Hanoi. It also renewed its commitment to oil and gas exploration with Petro Vietnam, which had provoked Chinese protests in the past.⁷² More importantly, New Delhi promised to play a greater role in strengthening Hanoi's military capabilities. On offer from India are a number of items, including US\$100 million in defence credits for the purchase of four ocean patrol vessels, surveillance equipment, assistance for Vietnam's space and satellite programmes, and, at some point in the future, the BrahMos hypersonic cruise missile being jointly developed with Russia. New Delhi also offered to expand its training programmes for Vietnamese pilots, submariners and IT specialists.⁷³

Modi's visit to Japan in August–September 2014—his first state visit—was notable not just for the personal warmth of his dealings with Prime Minister Abe but also for the deepening of economic, defence and political ties, with a clear eye on China. Economically, Modi got Tokyo to commit US\$35 billion towards infrastructure. On defence, the two countries entered into the most serious discussions ever.⁷⁴ At the heart of these was India's desire to co-produce arms with Japan and to buy Japanese equipment, including the US-2 aircraft and Soryu submarine.⁷⁵

⁷¹ This is not merely soft balancing, that is, a combination of economic, diplomatic and institutional instruments deployed to complicate the calculations of an overwhelmingly powerful opponent. India's relations with its partners have a military component—arms sales, access to facilities, military exercises, intelligence-sharing, strategic dialogues and so on. On soft balancing, see Robert A. Pape, 'Soft balancing against the United States', *International Security* 30: 1, 2005, pp. 7–45.

⁷² Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 'Joint statement on the state visit of Prime Minister of the Socialist Republic of Vietnam to India (October 27–28, 2014)', 28 Oct. 2014, <http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/24142/Joint+Statement+on+the+State+Visit+of+Prime+Minister+of+the+Social+ist+Republic+of+Vietnam+to+India+October+2728+2014>.

⁷³ Carl Thayer, 'India and Vietnam advance their strategic partnership', *The Diplomat*, 11 Dec. 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/12/india-and-vietnam-advance-their-strategic-partnership/>; Indrani Bagchi, 'India ignores China's frown, offers defence boost to Vietnam', *Times of India*, 29 Oct. 2014, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-ignores-Chinas-frown-offers-defence-boost-to-Vietnam/articleshow/44965272.cms>.

⁷⁴ On the extent of defence discussions, see Kiyoshi Takenaka, 'Japan and India vow to boost defense ties during summit', Reuters, 1 Sept. 2014, <http://www.reuters.com/article/us-japan-india-idUSKBN0GW13U20140901>.

⁷⁵ 'India interested in buying Japan's Soryu-class submarines', *Japan Times*, 29 March 2015, <http://www.japantimes.co.jp/news/2015/03/29/national/politics-diplomacy/india-interested-in-buying-japans-soryu-class-submarines/#.Vjdwl2ugzcw>. Indian interest in the US-2 goes back to Manmohan's time: see Vivek Mishra, 'The benefits for India of a US-2 deal with Japan', *The Diplomat*, 24 Oct. 2013, <http://thediplomat.com/2013/10/the-benefits-for-india-of-a-us-2-deal-with-japan/>.

The most important moment of Modi's trip, though, was a political one. At a meeting with Japanese businessmen, the Prime Minister publicly derided China, only days before President Xi's arrival in India:

The world is divided in two camps. One camp believes in expansionist policies [i.e. China], while the other believes in development. We have to decide whether the world should get caught in the grip of expansionist policies or we should lead it on the path of development.⁷⁶

The reference to expansionism was a repetition of views expressed by Modi during the Indian election campaign, but it attracted attention because of its combativeness in the lead-up to Xi's visit. This statement, along with the economic and defence discussions during the visit, were clearly part of an effort to give expression to Modi's view that India and China should 'look at each other eye to eye, not lower our eyes'.⁷⁷

After Xi's departure, Modi turned his attention to India's relations with the United States and to moving closer to Washington than any Indian premier had previously done. In a co-authored article in the *Washington Post*, timed to coincide with Modi's visit to the United States, Modi and Obama pledged to 'jointly work to maintain freedom of navigation and lawful commerce across the seas'—the first time India and the US had referred to a partnership in the East and South China Seas.⁷⁸ The India–US statement issued at the end of the visit ranged over various areas of defence and security cooperation. The crucial clauses dealt with access to defence technology that India had long sought, collaboration with Asia–Pacific countries (especially Japan) to ensure peace and stability in the region, and maintaining freedom of navigation in the South China Sea.⁷⁹

Modi's visit to the United States was quickly followed by Obama's arrival in India. The joint statement that ensued repeated the partnership theme: 'India's "Act East Policy" and the United States' rebalance to Asia provide opportunities for India, the United States, and other Asia–Pacific countries to work closely to strengthen regional ties.'⁸⁰ In addition, the two sides signed a formal partnership document, the 'US–India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia–Pacific and Indian Ocean Region'.⁸¹ In 2016, India and the United States went further in announcing more material cooperation, with the Americans making a commitment to help India develop an aircraft-carrier as well as submarine safety and anti-submarine

⁷⁶ Bruce Einhorn, 'Visiting Japan, India's Modi pokes at China', *Bloomberg*, 2 Sept. 2014, <http://www.bloomberg.com/bw/articles/2014-09-02/visiting-japan-indias-modi-pokes-at-china>.

⁷⁷ 'I want to run the government professionally: Narendra Modi', *ANI*, 17 April 2014, <http://www.narendramodi.in/i-want-to-run-the-government-professionally-narendra-modi-3173>.

⁷⁸ Narendra Modi and Barack Obama, 'A renewed U.S.–India partnership for the 21st century', *Washington Post*, 30 Sept. 2014.

⁷⁹ Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 'Joint statement during the visit of Prime Minister to USA', 30 Sept. 2014, <http://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/24051/Joint+Statement+during+the+visit+of+Prime+Minister+to+USA>.

⁸⁰ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 'U.S.–India joint statement', 25 Jan. 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/25/us-india-joint-statement-shared-effort-progress-all>.

⁸¹ The White House, Office of the Press Secretary, 'U.S.–India Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia–Pacific and Indian Ocean Region', 25 Jan. 2015, <https://www.whitehouse.gov/the-press-office/2015/01/25/us-india-joint-strategic-vision-asia-pacific-and-indian-ocean-region>.

warfare capabilities. India in turn prepared to sign a defence logistics agreement it had long resisted. The agreement—the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)—would allow both sides to access supplies, spare parts and services from land facilities, air bases and ports.⁸² The United States is in addition likely to support the proposal by Boeing and Lockheed Martin to produce F-16s and F-18 Super Hornet fighter aircraft in India.⁸³

Modi also made a decision to develop a stronger partnership with Australia. During the Cold War, particularly in the 1980s, the two countries had looked at each other with suspicion. In the 1990s they were in conflict over nuclear proliferation and India's nuclear tests. A thaw had begun in the 2010s as a function of both growing bilateral trade and China's rise. Nevertheless, New Delhi remained reluctant to talk openly about a strategic partnership.

Modi's trip to Australia in November 2014, the first by an Indian prime minister in 28 years, signalled a clear change. His address to the Australian parliament—the first ever by an Indian prime minister—was enthusiastically received, and he got on well personally with Prime Minister Tony Abbott. Most importantly, the two sides agreed on a framework for security cooperation that provides for annual dialogues between the respective prime ministers, foreign ministers and defence ministers, regular interactions between senior officials and military leaderships, counterterrorism cooperation, collaboration in defence R&D, the sale of uranium to India and regular maritime exercises.⁸⁴ Manmohan Singh had prepared the ground for the security partnership but had been unwilling to embrace it openly. By contrast, Modi was effusive in his speech to the Australian parliament, saying:

We see Australia as one of our foremost partners in the region. Australia will not be at the periphery of our vision, but at the centre of our thought. I see a great future of partnership between India and Australia and a shared commitment to realize it.⁸⁵

Acting East with Vietnam, Japan, the United States and Australia has led to a series of military and strategic moves to build a loose coalition. For instance, India is contemplating a trilateral dialogue with Japan and Vietnam 'to coordinate positions on security and economic policies'.⁸⁶ In 2015, Modi invited Japan to join the India–US Malabar naval exercises as a permanent member rather than as an intermittent 'foreign invitee'. Under Manmohan, mindful of China, India had been ambivalent about inviting Japan to the exercises.⁸⁷ Modi too was ambivalent initially—inviting Japan in 2014 and then delaying the invitation in 2015 prior to

⁸² Vivek Raghuvanshi, 'India, US reach agreement on logistics, boost defense ties', *Defense News*, 12 April 2016, <http://www.defensenews.com/story/defense/international/2016/04/12/india-us-reach-agreement-logistics-boost-defense-ties/82936758/>.

⁸³ Sujan Datta, 'India, US seal military pact on hold for 14 years', *The Telegraph* (India), 13 April 2016, http://www.telegraphindia.com/1160413/jsp/nation/story_79909.jsp.

⁸⁴ 'Framework for security cooperation between India and Australia', Narendra Modi website, 18 Nov. 2014, <http://www.narendramodi.in/framework-for-security-cooperation-between-india-and-australia-6907>.

⁸⁵ 'Narendra Modi's speech to the Australian parliament in full', *Wall Street Journal*, 18 Nov. 2014, <http://blogs.wsj.com/indiarealtime/2014/11/18/narendra-modis-speech-to-the-australian-parliament-in-full/>.

⁸⁶ Bagchi, 'India ignores China's frown'.

⁸⁷ Akhilesh Pillamarri, 'India, Japan, and the US hold joint naval exercises', *The Diplomat*, 25 July 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/07/india-japan-and-the-us-hold-joint-naval-exercises/>.

his China visit.⁸⁸ After the visit, however, New Delhi made amends and upgraded Japan's status.⁸⁹ The United States had urged India also to include Australia in the Malabar exercises, but Modi stopped short of convening a quadrilateral event. Instead, India and Australia held a first-ever bilateral naval exercise in the Bay of Bengal in October 2015, rather pointedly in the same month as the India–US–Japan trilateral.⁹⁰ In addition to the bilateral exercise, India also proposed the first-ever India–Australia–Japan security dialogue.⁹¹

While Acting East is aimed at strengthening India's bargaining hand with Beijing, its efforts to consolidate a friendly coalition in the Indian Ocean—'Acting South', as it were—have a much more direct military objective. The 2016 naval doctrine paper *Ensuring secure seas: India's maritime security strategy*, distinguished between 'primary' and 'secondary' interests of maritime security. In this formulation, the primary area of interest is the Indian Ocean, while the Asia–Pacific falls into the secondary area.⁹² New Delhi's long-term worry is that the Chinese Navy will project force right up to the Gulf, with facilities in the Indian Ocean states, the East African littoral, Gwadar in Pakistan, and perhaps even the Gulf itself. The objective here is to deny the Chinese Navy strategic space and to link India closely with key island states as part of a denial strategy.

While Australia and the United States are at the centre of New Delhi's Indian Ocean defence partnerships, Modi is also trying to increase India's influence with the key Indian Ocean states—the Maldives, Mauritius, the Seychelles and Sri Lanka—and bring them into a maritime coalition to block China's growing diplomatic and military inroads into the region.⁹³ As part of the effort to reclaim Indian influence, Modi visited the latter three island states in March 2015.⁹⁴

New Delhi intervened in Mauritius and the Seychelles in the 1980s to prevent internal insurrections, and has since been closely involved with the security of both states.⁹⁵ For instance, an Indian intelligence officer advises Mauritius on security, an Indian has commanded the coastguard, and Mauritian military personnel receive Indian training. The Indian Navy patrols the seas around

⁸⁸ Bharat Karnad, 'Flinching on Japan in Malabar', *Security Wise*, 13 May 2015, <http://bharatkarnad.com/2015/05/13/flinching-on-japan-in-malabar/>.

⁸⁹ 'India shuns China, allows Japan in Malabar naval drill', *Times of India*, 13 July 2015, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/India-shuns-China-allows-Japan-in-Malabar-naval-drill/articleshow/48047379.cms>; Franz Stefan-Gady, 'Confirmed: Japan will permanently join US-India naval exercises', *The Diplomat*, 13 Oct. 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/10/confirmed-japan-will-permanently-join-us-india-naval-exercises/>.

⁹⁰ Prashantha Parmeswaran, 'Australia, India to hold first ever naval exercise amid China concerns', *The Diplomat*, 1 Sept. 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/09/australia-india-to-hold-first-ever-naval-exercise-amid-china-concerns/>.

⁹¹ Manu Pubby, 'India kicks off trilateral talks with Japan and Australia; joint training, naval exercises on agenda', *Economic Times*, 8 June 2015, <http://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/india-kicks-off-trilateral-talks-with-japan-and-australia-joint-training-naval-exercises-on-agenda/articleshow/47579881.cms>.

⁹² Directorate of Strategy, Concepts and Transformation, Integrated Headquarters, Ministry of Defence (Navy), Government of India, *Ensuring secure seas: India's maritime security strategy* (New Delhi, Oct. 2015), pp. 31–2.

⁹³ On China–India competition in the region, see C. Raja Mohan, *Samudra Manthan: Sino-Indian competition in the Indo-Pacific* (Washington DC: Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, 2012), pp. 133–55.

⁹⁴ The Maldives was dropped from the itinerary owing to political unrest on the island. See Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury, 'Prime Minister Narendra Modi cancels Maldives trip due to political unrest', *Economic Times*, 7 Mar. 2015, http://articles.economictimes.indiatimes.com/2015-03-07/news/59869381_1_mohammed-nasheed-prime-minister-narendra-modi-indian-ocean-region.

⁹⁵ David Brewster, *India's Ocean: the story of India's bid for regional leadership* (Abingdon: Routledge, 2014), pp. 71–9.

Mauritius and runs radar surveillance facilities. In addition, New Delhi is to lease the Mauritian Agelga Islands to operate air surveillance.⁹⁶ In the Seychelles, India provides advisers on security and military affairs, manages a military training academy, trains personnel, patrols the extended economic zone, has provided naval equipment and is building a coastal surveillance radar (CSR) system.⁹⁷ In March 2014, just before Modi came to power, New Delhi disclosed that it was setting up an Indian Ocean maritime security grouping consisting of India, the Maldives, Mauritius, the Seychelles and Sri Lanka (IO5) to be linked in an overall CSR system.⁹⁸ The system would consist of 32 surveillance radars across the four island states and 50 sites in India.⁹⁹

During his visits to Mauritius and the Seychelles, Modi largely built on Manmohan's policies of economic, technical, energy and infrastructure assistance. In addition, New Delhi handed over military equipment promised by the previous government, signed an agreement to build sea and air infrastructure on the Agelga Islands, and opened a radar facility in the Seychelles linked to the Indian-run CSR system.¹⁰⁰ When Seychelles Prime Minister James Michel returned Modi's visit in August 2015, he affirmed that his country was also 'actively considering' India's invitation to join the maritime security group of India, the Maldives and Sri Lanka.¹⁰¹ While Modi broke no new ground with either country, he was the first Indian prime minister to visit the Seychelles in 34 years and the first to visit Mauritius in a decade.

Modi's Indian Ocean visits ended in Sri Lanka, where he met the newly elected president, Maithripala Sirisena. While the agreements signed during the visit were modest, the trip was vital for India's coalition strategy. Colombo had drifted away from the Indian sphere of influence during its civil war. Modi's trip to the island, the first by an Indian prime minister since 1988, was intended to pull it back into a closer relationship and embed it in the emerging Indian Ocean coalition aimed at constraining China.

Chinese influence in the island had grown on the back of its role in the Sri Lankan armed forces' victory in the civil war.¹⁰² After the war, New Delhi found itself torn on how to deal with Colombo—for instance, now voting with,

⁹⁶ Brewster, *India's Ocean*, pp. 74–6.

⁹⁷ Brewster, *India's Ocean*, pp. 74–9.

⁹⁸ On the Indian Ocean five (IO5), see David Brewster, 'Indian strategic thinking about the Indian Ocean: striving towards strategic leadership', *India Review* 14: 2, April–June 2015, p. 234.

⁹⁹ C. Raja Mohan, 'Modi and the Indian Ocean: restoring India's sphere of influence', Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, Center for International and Strategic Studies, 18 June 2015, <http://amti.csis.org/modi-and-the-indian-ocean-restoring-indias-sphere-of-influence/>.

¹⁰⁰ Dinakar Peri, 'In Seychelles, Modi boosts security cooperation', *The Hindu*, 11 March 2015, <http://www.thehindu.com/news/national/in-seychelles-modi-boosts-security-cooperation/article6982284.ece>.

¹⁰¹ Ankit Panda, 'India and Seychelles strengthen ties around maritime security, economic cooperation', *The Diplomat*, 31 Aug. 2015, <http://thediplomat.com/2015/08/india-and-seychelles-strengthen-ties-around-maritime-security-economic-cooperation/>. The trilateral maritime security partnership aims to expand cooperation in maritime domain awareness, maritime search and rescue, managing marine pollution, information-sharing on illegal maritime activities, military exercises and anti-piracy. See M. Samatha, 'India, Sri Lanka and Maldives trilateral maritime security cooperation: political and economic constraints in implementation', Indian Council of World Affairs Policy Brief, 8 July 2015, p. 4, <http://www.icwa.in/pdfs/PB/2014/IndiaSriLankaMaldivesPB08072015.pdf>.

¹⁰² Raja Mohan, *Samudra Manthan*, p. 151.

now abstaining, and now voting against the Rajapaksha government on human rights. At odds with the western powers and India, Colombo turned to China for succour. By 2014, China was the largest provider of foreign direct investment and Sri Lanka's second biggest trade partner (after India). It had built a massive new port facility in Hambantota and was involved in other large infrastructure projects.¹⁰³ Then, in September and November 2014, a Chinese submarine and support ship docked at the Chinese-run port in Colombo.¹⁰⁴ This may have been the final straw for New Delhi. There is evidence that India's primary foreign intelligence agency, the Research and Analysis Wing (RAW), subsequently played a role in persuading Sirisena to defect from the ruling party and opposition parties to coalesce around his candidacy. That RAW interfered in the election process is strongly denied by the Indian government, but it is widely accepted that National Security Adviser Doval met Sirisena in the days before the election with a view to bolstering his bid for the presidency.¹⁰⁵ By the time Modi arrived in Colombo, the Sirisena government had promised to return to a middle path between China and India and to review Chinese-funded projects.¹⁰⁶

India under Modi has made its intentions in the Indian Ocean clear. It has pushed harder for a closer military partnership with Australia and the United States. The Manmohan government had rather timidly embarked on a stronger security relationship with both; Modi's energetic visits to Washington and Canberra considerably speeded up the process. Similarly, on the back of Modi's visits, India has sought to move ahead with the CSR system and the maritime security partnership in the Indian Ocean islands. While neither of these initiatives amounts to an anti-China alliance, both are intended to tie these states into a deep, long-term relationship with India, contain Chinese influence, and provide New Delhi with military listening posts in the Indian Ocean.

To conclude, Modi's China policy, like his Pakistan policy, is clear and consistent. He has emphasized the need to resolve the border problem and other differences if the overall relationship is to progress, thus reversing the approach adhered to by New Delhi since 1988. He has engaged with the Chinese leadership but has departed from conventional summitry with some assertive bilateral diplomacy and active coalition diplomacy before and after the summits. More so than with Pakistan, Modi is attempting to construct a coalition to strengthen India's bargaining hand and, in the case of the Indian Ocean states, its maritime security.

Has Modi's China policy worked? As with his Pakistan policy, it may be too early to tell, but here too there are disquieting signs for India. Two years on,

¹⁰³ Jack Goodman, 'Sri Lanka's growing links with China', *The Diplomat*, 6 Mar. 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/03/sri-lankas-growing-links-with-china/>.

¹⁰⁴ Vijay Sakhuja, 'Chinese submarines in Sri Lanka unnerve India: next stop Pakistan?', *China Brief* 15: 11, 29 May 2015, http://www.jamestown.org/programs/chinabrief/single/?tx_ttnews%5Btt_news%5D=43960&cHash=a78005ce4ef4d128216bf3c97b8b9f8e.

¹⁰⁵ Rohan Venkataramakrishnan, 'Why even the murmur that India's RAW interfered in Sri Lanka's elections is dangerous', *Scroll.in*, 19 Jan. 2015, <http://scroll.in/article/701176/why-even-the-murmur-that-indias-raw-interfered-in-sri-lankas-elections-is-dangerous>.

¹⁰⁶ 'Wary China hopes Sirisena will continue pro-Beijing policies', *Economic Times*, 9 Jan. 2015, http://articles.economicstimes.indiatimes.com/2015-01-09/news/57883841_1_maritime-silk-road-sirisena-indian-ocean.

Beijing has shown no signs that it intends to speed up the border negotiations or make any concessions. In the meantime, with the signing of the CPEC agreement with Pakistan, it has committed itself to working with Islamabad as never before. Beijing has also succeeded in thwarting New Delhi's aspirations to NSG membership. In early May 2016, New Delhi applied for admission, arguing that it had been a good citizen in respect of non-proliferation and that its energy and climate change commitments in the wake of the Paris summit would be easier to honour if it were part of the suppliers group.¹⁰⁷ India hoped for a decision on its application at the NSG plenary meeting in Seoul in late June. In the event the application was blocked, an outcome for which Indian officials and then Indian Foreign Minister Swaraj publicly blamed China.¹⁰⁸ Beijing had indicated its opposition to non-NPT members being allowed into the NSG as early as December 2015, despite Modi's push for support during his visit to China in May 2015.¹⁰⁹ After the NSG plenary in Seoul, it continued to argue that non-signatories of the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) were barred from membership, and that, if they were to be admitted, this should occur under a general set of criteria applicable to all non-NPT aspirants including Pakistan.¹¹⁰

Consistent with his dogged and open style of assertive diplomacy with China, Modi used both bilateral and international meetings to try to win Beijing round. When President Mukherjee visited China in May 2016, India's NSG membership was an explicit focus of his discussions.¹¹¹ During Modi's visit to the United States in June 2016, Washington came out in support of India's application.¹¹² Modi then stopped off in Mexico and Switzerland to get their support as well.¹¹³ Barely two weeks later, at the SCO summit, on the very day that the NSG was discussing India's application in Seoul, Modi pleaded the Indian case with Xi, asking China to make a 'fair and objective assessment' of the application.¹¹⁴ When China nevertheless blocked India (with help from nine other countries that also rejected New Delhi's application), Modi apparently returned to the issue in his meeting with

¹⁰⁷ Devirupa Mitra, 'Exclusive: India's 300-page application for NSG membership', *The Wire*, 1 July 2016, <http://thewire.in/47017/revealed-indias-300-page-application-for-nsg-membership/>.

¹⁰⁸ 'Centre names China as country blocking India's entry into Nuclear Suppliers Group', *Indian Express*, 21 July 2016, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/nsg-china-blocking-india-entry-sushma-swaraj-2926704/>.

¹⁰⁹ 'China calls for talks among NSG members to admit India, others', *Indian Express*, 25 Dec. 2015, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-others/china-calls-for-talks-among-nsg-members-to-admit-india-others/>.

¹¹⁰ Shyam Balasubramanian, 'Why China opposes India's NSG membership: Chinese newspaper explains', *Times of India*, 21 June 2016, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Why-China-opposes-Indias-NSG-membership-Chinese-newspaper-explains/articleshow/52848120.cms>.

¹¹¹ Saibal Dasgupta, 'Pranab Mukherjee raises thorny issues with Chinese leaders', *Times of India*, 26 May 2016, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/Pranab-Mukherjee-raises-thorny-issues-with-Chinese-leaders/articleshow/52454802.cms>.

¹¹² 'US strongly supports India's NSG bid, Barack Obama tells PM Modi', *Times of India*, 8 Sept. 2016, <http://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/US-strongly-supports-Indias-NSG-bid-Barack-Obama-tells-PM-Modi/articleshow/54196661.cms>.

¹¹³ 'PM Modi heads home after 5-nation tour', *Indian Express*, 9 June 2016, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/pm-modi-heads-home-after-5-nation-us-mexico-afghanistan-qatar-switzerland-tour-2842686/>.

¹¹⁴ 'PM Modi meets Xi Jinping, urged China to make "fair assessment" of India's NSG bid', *Indian Express*, 23 June 2016, <http://indianexpress.com/article/india/india-news-india/pm-narendra-modi-china-zi-jinping-tashkent-nsg-sco-2871475/>.

Xi on the sidelines of the G20 summit in early September.¹¹⁵ In the end, the only concession Beijing made was to agree to discuss NSG membership at the level of officials. Even this concession may have resulted less from Modi's diplomacy and more from China's desire in August 2016 to persuade India not to support any references to the South China Sea dispute during the G20 meeting.¹¹⁶

In sum, Modi's China policy, like his Pakistan policy, seems to have run into trouble. Beijing has not been persuaded to change its course. Like Pakistan, China is used to operating in strategically very challenging environments. Relations with China have not become as poor as with Pakistan—the border is largely stable—but they are arguably no better than when Modi took charge.

Conclusion

Does Modi represent continuity or change in Indian foreign policy? Those who argue for continuity see the persistence over time of a slow-to-anger, non-provocative bilateral stance ('cautious prudence') and an aversion to alliances (non-alignment) as the key to Indian policy. Those who argue for change see these as vestiges and point to a more 'normal' foreign policy in practice since the end of the Cold War, typified by greater diplomatic assertiveness and an increasing willingness to forge partnerships with other countries, including the United States, against China.

Modi's Pakistan and China policies seem to bear out the view of those who regard Indian foreign policy as having changed substantially from cautious prudence and non-alignment. New Delhi has certainly toughened its public posture towards Islamabad and Beijing in both substance and style. With Pakistan, New Delhi has made anti-terrorism its central focus. It is not greatly interested in a composite dialogue, and it has ignored the Kashmir dispute. With China, it has made quicker progress on the border negotiations a priority, and it wants to reverse the view that diplomatic and economic normalization between the two powers will eventually lead to a border settlement. With both Pakistan and China, New Delhi is now relatively quick to anger and is prepared to talk tough. In the case of Pakistan, it has repeatedly cancelled talks. In addition, to an unprecedented degree, India is openly embarking on coalition-building against both countries as a way of strengthening its bargaining position. Lining up a coalition against China is, indeed, perhaps the central objective of Modi's foreign policy. While New Delhi formally retains its non-aligned stance, it is a stance that seems to be eroding. Cautious prudence and non-alignment may be tenets of the past. Whether or not the new approach will make India more secure remains unclear, but the developments of 2016 suggest that New Delhi's relations with Islamabad and Beijing are under considerable strain. Peace and stability in southern Asia are at risk.

¹¹⁵ Elizabeth Roche, 'Need to respect each other's aspirations, Narendra Modi tells Xi Jinping', *Livemint*, 5 Sept. 2016, <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/ji2OfZeBqr5vebaryr4kFN/PM-Modi-raises-Indias-concern-over-CPEC-with-Chinas-Xi-Jin.html>.

¹¹⁶ The G20 meeting was held in China a few weeks after the South China Sea ruling by the Permanent Court of Arbitration. See Elizabeth Roche, 'India's NSG bid: despite Wang Yi visit, experts sceptical of compromise with China', *Livemint*, 8 Aug. 2016, <http://www.livemint.com/Politics/AZ6YFcvGHBr8TRnoFJ32TO/Indias-NSG-bid-Despite-Wang-Yi-visit-experts-sceptical-of.html>.

