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**UNIDAD DE  
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**RESEARCH  
UNIT ON  
INTERNATIONAL  
SECURITY AND  
COOPERATION**

**ISSN 2386-9453**

## **Special Issue on Indian Strategic and Foreign Policy Making Shantanu Chakrabarti (coordinator)**

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***EDITORIAL NOTE***

**Antonio Marquina<sup>1</sup>**  
*Director of UNISCI*

This monographic issue of the UNISCI Journal is dedicated to the presentation of the foreign and security policy of India. A topic of special interest in the current political, strategic and economic reconfiguration of Asia. With this, the Journal makes another contribution to the studio and knowledge of this regional area that is of increasing importance in the international system.

I am very grateful to Professor Shantanu Chakrabarti, professor at the University of Calcutta and a member of the Scientific Committee of the UNISCI Journal, for his great effort in coordinating this monographic issue.

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## INTRODUCTION TO THE SPECIAL ISSUE ON INDIAN STRATEGIC AND FOREIGN POLICY MAKING

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Post Cold War Indian foreign policy making process has been facing stiff challenges from within and without. This has been in particular context of a growing literature heavily influenced by postmodern theories covering a wide spectrum ranging from debates over the nature of the Indian state to dynamics of indigenous policymaking. One analyst, for instance, traces the evolution of the ‘encountered state’ with its concomitant bureaucratic dominance over policymaking in India since Nehruvian times through a process of “encountering rather than believing in the official imagination of nationhood, through recognizing the sights and sounds of the state rather than ‘buying into’ its mythologies, that the nation state is formed and reproduced”<sup>2</sup> In that sense, India was already being projected by Social Scientists like Linz as a ‘State nation’ rather than a nation state.

Do such interpretations have much impact in the realm of foreign policy making? To an extent, old interpretations related to Indian foreign policy making would tend to highlight personalities (like Nehru, India Gandhi, Manmohan Singh and more recently, Narendra Modi) while pointing out that India has not developed institutions that can effectively mobilize popular support for specific foreign policy positions. Consequently, foreign policy has largely been shaped by the chief executive, who has the added burden of approximating what domestic groups want and balancing his or her perception of domestic political concerns with other foreign policy interests.<sup>3</sup> Too much focus on personalities, however, it has been argued, has led to the ignoring of the imperative of domestic contestation and debates in matters related to foreign policy.<sup>4</sup> Recent researches have revealed that how, even under Jawaharlal Nehru (referred to by one of his political opponents as a Gentle Colossus!), various options were debated and analyzed by people within the government as well as discussed by the civil society. That trend has continued and a de-centralization process in core areas of policymaking is visible despite centrifugal pressures being exerted by the bureaucratic structure of Indian governance model. To quote Amartya Sen, in this context:

Simultaneous flourishing of many different convictions and viewpoints in India has drawn substantially on the acceptance -explicitly or by implication- of heterodoxy and dialogue. The reach of Indian heterodoxy is remarkably extensive and ubiquitous.<sup>5</sup>

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DOI: <http://dx.doi.org/10.31439/UNISCI-30>

<sup>2</sup> Roy, Srirupa (2007): *Beyond Belief: India and the Politics of Postcolonial Nationalism*, (Durham, NC: Duke University Press), p.15

<sup>3</sup> Andersen, Walter K.: “The Domestic Roots of Indian Foreign Policy”, *Asian Affairs*, Vol. 10, No. 3 (Fall, 1983), p. 45

<sup>4</sup> Chaudhuri, Rudra: “The Limits of Executive Power: Domestic Politics and Alliance Behavior in Nehru's India”, *India Review*, vol.11, nº.2, 2012, p.110

<sup>5</sup> Sen, Amartya (2005): *The Argumentative Indian, Writings on Indian History, Culture and identity*, New York: Farrar, Straus and Giroux, p.ix



Like any other policy making process, the foreign policy making process is inherently a dynamic one determined by a number of factors. As some analysts have argued that acting under cross-pressure, India's foreign policy appears to vacillate between appeasement and aggression, rather than converging onto the assertion of national self-interest.<sup>6</sup> Another scholar had gone to the extent of characterising India as a 'proto-imperialist' power, which, because of her pervasive influence in its neighbourhood in South Asia, has acquired the status of 'second tier imperialist' power.<sup>7</sup> Though these are somewhat extreme views, it has to be admitted that while India has been a mildly revisionist state at the level of the international system, its regional agenda for the past several decades has been to buttress the regional status quo for the simple reason that the current configuration of regional capabilities suits it.<sup>8</sup>

Another paradigm shift which has affected research on foreign policy making is the critique of western dominated IR ontology along with concomitant demands for a post western IR paradigm. The common thread is to bring in historical content within the IR in larger quantity in order to build contingency and open-endedness into theoretical assertions.<sup>9</sup>

In other words, the realm of Indian foreign policy analyses now has incorporated various theories and interpretations from different Social Science branches. The sole focus on 'realist' projection of state power in material terms is still considerably important but not enough to complete foreign policy making analysis. Joseph Nye's analyses of soft and smart power capabilities have been turned into more complex and integrated analyses through introduction of concepts like 'nation branding' and 'civilization state' into foreign policy analyses of states. While much work have and are still being generated on the rise of India within the context of a rising Asia phenomenon which have led to significant shifts in old alliances and generation of new trajectories, this special issue of the Journal focuses on certain key areas of Indian foreign and strategic policymaking in recent times. While not being claimed as comprehensive, the chosen articles attempt to bring into focus key aspects of Indian policymaking which seems to be setting the agenda for action within the Indian policymaking circles, currently.

The first group of four articles could be categorized as focussing on certain key theoretical perspectives related to India's foreign policymaking and strategic outlook and India's evolving economic engagement with the global order. The first article by Shibashis Chatterjee and Sreya Maitra makes an attempt to contextualise Indian foreign policymaking with the 'structure-agency' theoretical debate. The chief argument of this article is that India serves as a test case for the foreign policy of a state being compulsorily structured by the complex interaction of systemic forces on one hand, and agential actions on the other. A theoretical, structure-agency reading of foreign policy however reveals a complex interplay of factors behind India's rise; evolving material capabilities and power, and normative and ideational forces.

The second essay of Pradeep Gautam traces the roots of morals in ancient Indian traditions of statecraft and its global potential. The paper further argues that peace and security can be realised by incorporating the concept of dharma in statecraft. Indian traditions in the concepts and ethos in just war tradition to show how dharma is to be understood in case of

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<sup>6</sup> Mitra, Subrata K. and Schöttli, Jivanta: "The New Dynamics of Indian Foreign Policy and Its Ambiguities", *Irish Studies in International Affairs*, vol. 18, 2007, p.21

<sup>7</sup> Dutt, Srikant (1984): *India and the Third World: Altruism or Hegemony?* London: Zed Books, p.13

<sup>8</sup> Sahni, Varun: "The Protean Polis and Strategic Surprises: ¿Do Changes within India affect South Asian Strategic Stability?", *Contemporary South Asia*, vol.14, nº 2, 2005, p.219

<sup>9</sup> Vivekanandan, Jayashree (2011): *Interrogating International Relations: India's Strategic Practice and the return of History*, Routledge, London



political use of force with an emerging polycentric world order, the moral aspect of statecraft as in the concept of dharma from the Indian tradition needs to be given due importance.

The third essay by John Doyle analyzes India's traditional approach to conflict resolution continuing to affect Indian policymaking in the contemporary era. The author argues that while there have been missed opportunities to de-escalate, the positive conflict resolution experiences in other domestic cases were crowded out by a narrative driven by a narrow interpretation of the "Punjab strategy" and an exclusive focus on Pakistan's interventions in Kashmir to the exclusion of treating the views of Kashmiri citizens more seriously. Perhaps this could be interpreted as a 'follow up' to the 'encountered state narrative as discussed earlier.

The fourth and last article in this group by Sanjana Joshi and Samridhi Bimal analyzes how the process of economic liberalization and internationalization initiated since the 1990s has steadily gained traction leading India to move from being a marginal participant to a deeply engaged partner in the global economic order with an active and visible presence and how India's "increasing weight in the global economy" is also dramatically transforming its political and strategic importance in the evolving post-Cold War world order.

The second group of essays interpret the nature of India's bilateral engagements with crucial global and regional players. Stephen F. Burgess focuses on the evolution of India-US relations and India's grand strategy over the past two decades is a result of changing power balances and an affirmation of structural realism. In relation to the US, the author argues, India wants to maintain its strategic autonomy and does not feel compelled to move from a partnership towards an alliance. Only sustained aggression by China, according to Burgess, would perhaps compel India to enter into an alliance with the US and move from the current state of "soft balancing" towards China towards "hard balancing" by forming alliances.

Hari Vasudevan's article introduces the concept of 'proto-regimes' and analyses the evolving relations between India and Russia in recent decades in terms of greater multilateral involvement. 'Proto-regimes', according to the author, have emerged as the post-1991 scenario in international affairs has witnessed activities where regional and trans-regional organizations, focused on cooperation between actors, have taken shape, and seek to impinge on sovereignty of states through common commitments but in a strongly qualified manner. At issue are values initiatives of the Putin presidency that privilege engagements within a sharply delimited cultural range – values that endow Russian policy with a degree of introversion or nationalism. The continuous centering of the Russian economy as much around high tech military, atomic and space industries as the energy sector, in the last quarter century, and the close connection that India has had with these industries has ensured a "hard" core to the relationship.

The next essay in this group is by Jayanta Kumar Ray which focuses upon India's lack of realist approach and naiveté about emerging global politics that helped China in gaining an upper hand over India in achieving regional dominance particularly displayed through the bilateral disputes over the border determination. While the defeat of 1962 is a distant past, it has continued to wield great influence over India's overall approach towards China. This article thus goes for a reappraisal of the Indo-China border issues which have and still continue to influence Indo-China relations. Overall, the author is highly critical of the Indian approach in failing to address perceived Chinese aggressive policies which has resulted in India yielding much of the regional initiatives to China in Asian affairs.

Priya Singh's essay on Indo-Israel relations attempts to comprehend the significantly altered nature of relations between India and Israel. The essay provides a short historical framework before delving into contemporary times, focusing on the "real" character of the



rapidly evolving relationship. The objective of the essay is to critically understand the internal dynamics of the Israeli state uncovering the various fault lines that remain despite its having acquired international legitimacy and acceptance and in the process attempt to both comprehend and question India's changed stance.

The next article by Smruti Pattanaik focuses on the key issue of Indo-Pakistan bilateralism as one of the key areas within Indian foreign, as well as security related, policymaking. This article delves into the history of dialoguing to highlight that how the respective national narratives have shaped bilateral ties and have defined the expectation from each other. While there are several other security, political, economic and civil society stakeholders, the dominant factor is that the relationship has been deeply securitised therefore any forward movement in the bilateral relations is seen from the prism of security which makes any attempts to forward the dialogue process, so very difficult.

Nasreen Akhtar's article focussing on India's current involvement in Afghanistan makes an analysis of how India is pursuing 'power politics' in Afghanistan to secure its regional strategic interests through Afghanistan. India's two traditional rivals, Pakistan and China have strengthened their strategic partnership which would undermine India's role and influence in region but India's gigantic investment in Afghanistan has strengthened India's endeavours to protect its 'regional strategic outlook.' Changing strategic focus and partnerships also makes the situation particularly volatile as the US seems to be on a drive towards strategic convergence with India, at least on the issue of stability in Afghanistan and the 're-emerging' Russia trying to stage a regional comeback through linking up with certain Chinese and Pakistani projects.

The next essay by Sreeradha Datta analyses Indo-Bangladesh relations in the context of regional and global changes with particular focus on the upswing in the relationship at present times. While she believes that overall momentum would be sustained, nonetheless, expresses some caution whether it can be said in all certainty that India and Bangladesh will continue to work together irrespective of any change of regime in Dhaka which could further activate the 'grey areas' related to security and migration which might act as dampeners to the overall engagement.

The final group of three essays focus on India's extended neighbourhood within Asia and India's multilateral and regional engagements beyond South Asia. Anita Sengupta's article focuses on India's engagements with the Central Asian region. Although Central Asia is a significant part of the Belt and Road Plan, India faces connectivity challenges regarding land routes to Afghanistan and Central Asia and is a relatively low-key power even after becoming a formal member of the SCO. The author contends that it is in the backdrop of these complexities, both in terms of the emergence of transcontinental logistic spaces and numerous 'Silk Road' strategies that India would have to negotiate its own logistical space in Central Asia.

Kingshuk Chatterjee's article on India's West Asia policy investigates the reasons behind India's failure to develop a comprehensive regional policy in that region. Due to several factors, nearly three decades after the onset of liberalisation of Indian economy, and much vaunted revamping of Indian foreign policy, towards the crucial region of the Middle East, Indian foreign policy remains parochially bilateral – not only in terms of the actual diplomatic engagements, but also in terms of conceptualisation of the fundamentals that influence foreign policy thinking. Indeed, there are occasional shifts (such as the increasing warmth in relations with Saudi Arabia and Israel), but the narrow line of thinking on India's interests systematically discourages any pro-active engagement with the region – the government led by PM Modi is no different in this regard. Lack of a regional focus severely limits the Indian engagement with



the region. The author, in this connection, is also highly critical of the position taken by certain Indian policymakers that the reason for not having a regional policy often cited by Indian diplomats is that, it is very difficult for a regional coherence to be imposed upon a group of countries that do not themselves *behave* like a region. He is of the opinion that that framing policy does not involve in any kind of one-size-fits-all set of measures and developing a overall regional policy is crucial if one were to take the two benchmarks of Indian interests in the region, i.e. energy security and safety of Indian expatriates.

The last and final essay by Subhadeep Bhattacharya analyses another crucial aspect of India's meso regional engagement in Southeast Asia. India's engagement with the region, officially described as India's 'Look East' and subsequently, 'Act East' policies, have entered into a new phase with the US categorization of the region as 'Indo-Pacific.' Both India and ASEAN are main pillars of the Indo-Pacific regional dynamics. The term Indo-Pacific carries different significance for its participants. For USA, the term signifies the extension of Pentagon's strategic focus from the Asia-Pacific to the Indian Ocean region amidst the 'rise of China' in this vast maritime domain. While for both India and ASEAN Indo-Pacific 'geo-strategy' is an opportunity to establish their centrality in the geopolitics of the region. Given the convergence and divergence in geo-strategic and economic interests between the US on the one hand and the ASEAN and India, on the other, the shaping of the regional arrangements is likely to be subject to diverse interpretations and pressures in the coming years.

**THE FULL ISSUE WILL BE AVAILABLE IN JANUARY 2020**