

# BACKGROUND

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## After the Election: Opportunity for Revitalizing U.S.–India Relations

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### Abstract

*The 2014 election of India's Bharatiya Janata Party presents an opportunity for reinvigorating U.S.–Indian ties, which have suffered from a recent state of malaise. The previous government, led by the Congress Party under Manmohan Singh, had been weakened by a series of corruption scandals and showed little initiative in regard to building ties with the U.S. during its second term. Fresh leadership in New Delhi under Prime Minister Narendra Modi will provide opportunities to expand cooperation on defense and security, as well as on economic, counterterrorism, nuclear, and other issues. But the U.S. must first signal its willingness and commitment to collaborating with the new government—and that it will not dwell on the controversy of the 2002 Gujarat riots, which led the U.S. to revoke Modi's tourist visa in 2005.*

India's recent election of a new Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government presents an opportunity for reinvigorating U.S.–Indian ties, and ending the malaise that has taken over the relationship in the past few years. The previous government, led by the Congress Party under Manmohan Singh, had been weakened by a series of corruption scandals and showed little initiative in regard to building ties with the U.S. during its second term. Fresh leadership at the helm in New Delhi will open opportunities to expand cooperation on defense and security, as well as on economic, counterterrorism, nuclear, and other issues.

In order to take advantage of this opportunity to invigorate ties, leadership in both countries must be clear on the importance of the relationship to each country's fundamental foreign policy objec-

### KEY POINTS

- India's election of a new Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) government presents an opportunity for reinvigorating U.S.–Indian ties.
- It is essential that the U.S. demonstrate its willingness to do business with new BJP Prime Minister Narendra Modi.
- The new Indian government is expected to focus on reviving the Indian economy and encouraging private-sector growth, which should help raise confidence among U.S. investors and improve overall U.S.–Indian economic ties.
- The BJP also will likely pursue a more assertive foreign policy than its Congress Party predecessor, which presents opportunities as well as challenges for the U.S. A more decisive Indian approach to foreign policy could lead to greater cooperation between the U.S. and India in the Asia–Pacific, for instance, but increase tensions between Islamabad and New Delhi.
- It is in the national interest of both India and the U.S. to move beyond the current plateau in relations and build a durable and strategic partnership.

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tives. For its part, the U.S. must demonstrate that it is ready to do business with new BJP Prime Minister Narendra Modi, and that it will not give him the cold shoulder over the 2002 Gujarat riots, which led to the killing of nearly 1,000 people, mainly Muslims, over a three-day period. In 2005, the U.S. had refused to grant Modi a tourist visa due to concerns that, as chief minister of the state of Gujarat during the rioting, Modi did not do enough to stop, and may have even encouraged, the rioters. The Indian courts have absolved Modi of criminal behavior during the rioting, and the BJP took steps to reach out to Muslim voters during the recent campaign season.

Because of impressions created by its opposition to the historic U.S.–India civil nuclear deal over the past several years, the BJP will have to demonstrate its support for the development of strategic ties with Washington. The previous BJP-led government under Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee (1998–2004) was instrumental in elevating ties between Washington and New Delhi, and in laying a solid foundation for a partnership built on mutual goodwill. The BJP's opposition to the civil nuclear agreement and its push for nuclear-liability legislation that poses serious obstacles to U.S. investment in India's civil nuclear sector, however, have led to disappointment in the U.S. and raised questions about whether the BJP still prioritizes strong relations with the U.S.

### **Diplomatic Spat Jars U.S.–India Ties**

The Indo–U.S. relationship has been tested over myriad issues during the past several years, but took its hardest hit last December when the U.S. arrested and tried Indian diplomat Devyani Khobragade for underpaying and mistreating her Indian maid while serving at the Indian consulate in New York. The details of Khobragade's arrest, particularly the news that she was handcuffed in front of her children's school and strip-searched<sup>1</sup> while in detention, infuriated the Indian public. The incident seemed to tap into an underlying, yet powerful, sense among Indians of being taken for granted and disrespected by the United States. Washington, for its part, was taken aback by the fierce Indian reaction, which included withdrawing diplomatic privi-

leges for U.S. diplomats and removing security barriers at the U.S. embassy in New Delhi.

U.S.–Indian ties had been foundering long before the Khobragade episode. Washington was disappointed by India's decision in 2011 to buy French (rather than American) aircraft to fill an \$11 billion order for advanced fighter jets, as well as by the Indian parliament's passage of legislation in August 2010 that virtually shut U.S. companies out of India's civil nuclear industry. Moreover, the Singh government's unwillingness to implement needed economic reforms led to disappointment among potential U.S. investors and undermined prospects for India's future economic growth.

A new government in New Delhi provides an opportunity for both sides to move beyond the current plateau in relations. Prime Minister Modi is expected to focus on reviving the Indian economy and taking steps to encourage private-sector growth, which should help raise confidence among U.S. investors and improve the overall atmospherics of U.S.–Indian economic ties. Modi recognizes that his party was voted into power on promises to improve the economy and clean up corruption. With gross domestic product (GDP) growth projected to dip below 5 percent in 2014, Modi is under pressure to take immediate steps that will help put the economy back on track.

### **A More Assertive Foreign Policy**

The BJP is likely to adopt a more robust foreign policy than the Congress Party did, in order to meet the challenges of a rising China and an unsteady Pakistan. The BJP's election manifesto, which was released to the public on April 7, states:

[The] BJP believes a resurgent India must get its rightful place in the comity of nations and international institutions. The vision is to fundamentally reboot and reorient the foreign policy goals, content and process, in a manner that locates India's global strategic engagement in a new paradigm and on a wider canvas...so that it leads to an economically stronger India, and its voice is heard in the international fora.<sup>2</sup>

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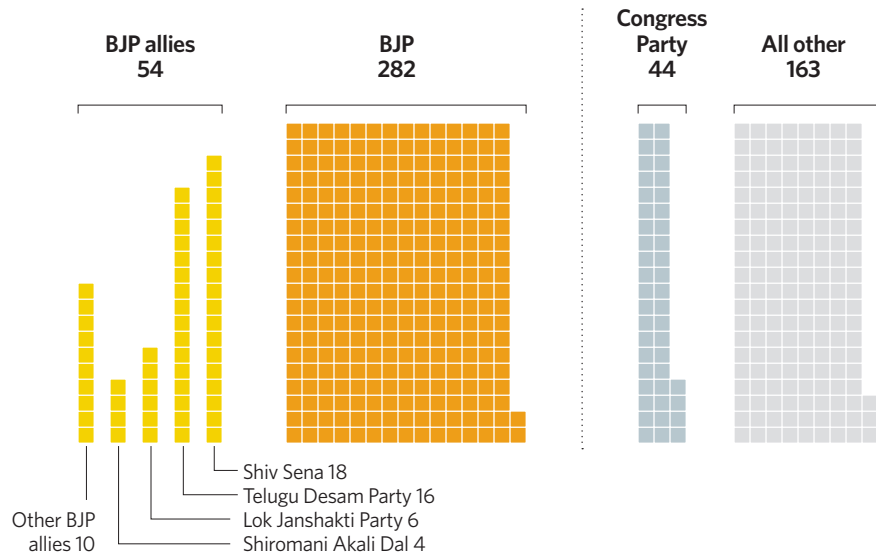
1. Annie Gowan and Anne Gearan, "U.S. Attorney Says Indian Diplomat Arrested 'in the Most Discreet Way Possible,'" *The Washington Post*, December 18, 2013, [http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/more-fallout-from-diplomats-strip-search-arrest/2013/12/18/51c0c11c-67eb-11e3-a0b9-249bbb34602c\\_story.html](http://www.washingtonpost.com/world/more-fallout-from-diplomats-strip-search-arrest/2013/12/18/51c0c11c-67eb-11e3-a0b9-249bbb34602c_story.html) (accessed May 21, 2014).

2. BJP, *Election Manifesto 2014*, <http://bjpelectionmanifesto.com/pdf/manifesto2014.pdf> (accessed May 21, 2014).

CHART 1

## BJP and Allies Dominate India's Elections

The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and its allies won 336 of 543 parliamentary seats—62 percent—in India's 2014 general elections. The BJP is the first Indian political party in 30 years to win a majority of seats in the parliament. The Congress Party won only 44 seats, down from the 200 it had held after the 2009 elections.



Source: GulfNews, "All India Result Status," [http://gulfnews.com/polopoly\\_fs/1.1334087!image/1038565943.jpg\\_gen/derivatives/landscape\\_422/1038565943.jpg](http://gulfnews.com/polopoly_fs/1.1334087!image/1038565943.jpg_gen/derivatives/landscape_422/1038565943.jpg) (accessed May 21, 2014).

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While a more assertive approach to foreign policy than was pursued under the second Singh administration will pose a few challenges to U.S. policymakers, it also will open opportunities for the U.S. to draw closer to India.

**China.** A BJP government is likely to adopt a more proactive hedging strategy vis-à-vis China, which could entail both greater economic engagement with Beijing and a willingness to stand up to any perceived Chinese aggression along disputed borders. A Chinese strategic analyst recently authored an article in the Chinese state-run *Global Times* newspaper, in which he referred to Modi as a "practical businessman" who opened the state of Gujarat to Chinese investment.<sup>3</sup> Sino-Indian trade dipped slightly in 2013 to \$66 billion (from \$74 billion in 2012), but China remains India's biggest trading partner.

While the BJP is likely to pursue closer economic ties with China, Modi has also called on China to "abandon its expansionist attitude." Modi's remark follows the April 2013 border incident between India and China in which Chinese troops camped for three weeks several miles inside Indian territory on the

Depsang Plains in the Ladakh region of the state of Jammu and Kashmir. The incursion—probably the most serious by the Chinese in over two decades—has convinced Indian strategists that it must increasingly factor the potential threat of conflict over its disputed borders with China into its security planning and projections. The BJP manifesto does not mention China specifically, but it commits to a "special emphasis on massive infrastructure development, especially along the Line of Actual Control (the disputed border between India and China) in Arunachal Pradesh and Sikkim." Developing the areas along the disputed border allows India to strengthen its territorial claims and defend against any potential Chinese aggression. Former Foreign Secretary Kanwal Sibal advised in a recent Indian newspaper article that the new Indian government should continue broad engagement with China but also consider ending the Special Representatives talks mechanism, refuse visas to Tibetans on Chinese delegations, and schedule an early visit by the new Indian PM to Tawang, a sensitive region in Arunachal Pradesh on which the Chinese lay claim.<sup>4</sup>

3. "China, India May Come Closer if Modi Becomes PM: Chinese Daily," *Hindustan Times*, May 6, 2014, <http://www.hindustantimes.com/elections2014/the-big-story/china-india-may-come-closer-if-modi-becomes-pm-chinese-daily/article1-1216093.aspx> (accessed May 21, 2014).

4. Kanwal Sibal, "Our Foreign Policy Needs Adjustment," *India Today*, May 6, 2014, <http://indiatoday.intoday.in/story/narendra-modi-india-foreign-policy-siachen-pakistan-china/1/359227.html> (accessed May 21, 2014).

The previous BJP-led government had a rough start with China after it cited the “Chinese threat” as justification for its nuclear tests in May 1998. One year later, however, New Delhi was pleasantly surprised by Beijing’s neutral position on the Indo–Pakistani Kargil crisis, a position that helped spur a thaw in Sino–Indian relations. Former Indian Foreign Minister Jaswant Singh conducted a successful visit to Beijing in June 1999 and laid the groundwork for a security dialogue that held its first round in March 2000. Then-Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee made a historic visit to Beijing in July 2003, during which each side appointed a “special representative” to upgrade and regularize their border discussions.

**Pakistan.** With Modi’s rise to power comes an increased likelihood of greater Indo–Pakistani tensions and potential for military escalation, especially if a major terrorist attack occurs in India. Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s personal commitment to maintaining peaceful ties with Islamabad, despite attacks in India over the past several years that were often traced back to Pakistan-based groups, has kept bilateral ties in check. Aware of the deteriorating security situation inside Pakistan, Singh gave Pakistani leaders the benefit of the doubt, calculating that India’s interests were better served trying to engage with Pakistani civilian leaders rather than allowing hostility to define the relationship.

There are indications that a BJP government would be less patient with Pakistan. The BJP leadership last year condemned the Pakistani parliament for passing a resolution against the hanging of Afzal Guru, a militant from Kashmir who was convicted for his role in the December 2001 shooting attack on the Indian parliament. In response to Pakistan’s action, BJP leaders demanded that New Delhi downgrade relations with Islamabad and suspend confidence-building measures.

Modi has been portrayed by many observers as anti-Muslim due to the communal rioting on his watch in Gujarat in 2002. Aware of his need to repair his reputation, Modi’s recent pledge to continue on the path carved by former Prime Minister Vajpayee in Kashmir could be aimed at reassuring Pakistanis and Kashmiri Muslims that he will take their con-

cerns seriously and seek a peaceful path to resolving disputes. Modi said that Vajpayee’s policies on Kashmir rested on three principles: humanity, democracy, and *kashmiriyat* (ethnic identity and cultural values of Kashmiri-speaking people). Vajpayee made a historic visit to Lahore in 1999 and encouraged back-channel talks on Kashmir that almost achieved a breakthrough until they were derailed by the Pakistani Army’s incursion into Kargil on the Indian side of the Line of Control (LoC).

With his business background, Modi may also see merit in prioritizing improved Indo–Pakistani trade ties and bring fresh thinking on the issue. During the Indo–Pakistani military crisis of 2001–2002, when nearly one million troops mobilized along the shared border, U.S. investors became concerned, especially when the U.S. embassy in India was evacuated because of looming conflict. Given this experience, Modi may recognize it would be in India’s economic interest for him to keep a lid on Indo–Pakistani tensions.

Modi is attempting to strike a balance between sounding a tough message on terrorism, while also leaving the door open for improved Indo–Pakistani economic relations. In an interview with *The Times of India* in early May, Modi said that both countries faced the common enemy of widespread poverty and that he would be ready to “write a new chapter” in relations if Pakistan demonstrates that it is committed to stopping terrorist attacks from being launched from its territory.<sup>5</sup> Modi demonstrated his interest in setting a positive tone with Pakistan by inviting Pakistani Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif to his swearing-in ceremony, an unprecedented move by an Indian leader. During the meeting with Sharif, Modi raised India’s concern over terrorism emanating from Pakistani soil, and the slow pace of the trials of Pakistanis allegedly involved in the 2008 Mumbai attacks. Having criticized Prime Minister Singh and the Congress Party–led government for being too soft on Pakistan, Modi and other BJP leaders would be under pressure to react strongly in the face of a terrorist provocation.

Recent arrests in India of terrorists trained in Pakistan likely reconfirmed for the BJP leadership the need to take a tough stand on Pakistani support

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5. Dean Nelson, “India Election 2014: Narendra Modi Says India and Pakistan Should Be Allies in War on Poverty,” *The Telegraph*, May 6, 2014, <http://www.telegraph.co.uk/news/worldnews/asia/india/10810421/India-election-2014-Narendra-Modi-says-India-and-Pakistan-should-be-allies-in-war-on-poverty.html> (accessed May 21, 2014).

for anti-India militants. Indian authorities in March arrested a Pakistani bomb expert who is a member of the Indian Mujahideen and who was allegedly involved in several attacks in India over the past four years. A week later, another terrorist from the same group, who allegedly helped plan the bombing of a Modi campaign rally last October in the state of Bihar, was arrested.<sup>6</sup>

There also is growing concern about the impact on Indo-Pakistani relations of the international troop drawdown in Afghanistan and whether the Kashmir conflict could reignite. A key Kashmiri militant leader, Masood Azhar of the Jaish-e-Mohammed terrorist group, recently resurfaced in Pakistan to address a large public rally, where he called on suicide attackers to resume jihad against India. According to Indian officials, the year 2013 also saw an increase in militant infiltration from Pakistani territory into Indian-held Kashmir.

Last August Indo-Pakistani military tensions escalated for a brief period when a series of incidents along the LoC that divides Kashmir led to the killing of five Indian soldiers and a Pakistani civilian. The incidents led to charged rhetoric on both sides and dashed hopes for an early resumption of peace talks under the then-new Pakistani civilian government led by Nawaz Sharif.<sup>7</sup>

**Japan.** In the past few years, India has focused increasingly on buttressing security ties with Japan, South Korea, and Vietnam to meet the challenges of a rapidly rising China. Indo-Japanese ties, in particular, are expected to get a major boost under Modi's administration since Modi and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe are both increasingly concerned about China and are prepared to take new policy directions to deal with it. They have also developed a close personal rapport. As chief minister, Modi traveled to Japan in 2007, marking the first time an Indian chief minister had travelled to the

country. Gujarat also is a major destination for Japanese investment, including an \$88 million car factory expected to open in 2017. Modi was one of the first foreign dignitaries to congratulate Abe when he was re-elected in 2012.<sup>8</sup>

For his part, Abe has been a longtime supporter of stronger ties between India and Japan, and initiated the idea of the Quad (the U.S.–Australia–Japan–India security grouping) during his previous tenure in 2006. Abe was also one of the first leaders to acknowledge that the Pacific and Indian Oceans should be linked strategically on the basis of the need to preserve free and open seaways, thus helping to coin the term “Indo-Pacific.”<sup>9</sup>

While their economic ties pale in comparison to those between China and India, Indo-Japanese diplomatic engagement has intensified in recent years. Japanese Emperor Akihito paid a rare visit to New Delhi in late 2013. Indian Prime Minister Singh made a historic four-day visit to Tokyo in May 2013 in which the two sides signed a joint statement pledging nuclear cooperation and expanded joint naval exercises. Japan also endorsed India for membership in the multilateral export control regimes, signaling Tokyo's acceptance of India's nuclear status. In a recent op-ed, former Indian ambassador and renowned strategic commentator K. Shankar Bajpai notes that a strong Japan–India relationship will impact the global power structure in a positive way, and that India should not “fight shy of readying itself for unpleasant eventualities.”<sup>10</sup>

**Russia.** India and Russia are likely to maintain their historically close partnership under the new Indian government. Russia remains India's top defense supplier, providing about 70 percent of India's defense requirements. The two countries have cooperated in the development of cruise missile systems, strike fighters, and transport aircraft, and Russia holds an annual ministerial-level

6. “Police Arrest Indian Mujahideen Leader Involved in Attack on Modi Rally,” Reuters, March 25, 2014, <http://in.reuters.com/article/2014/03/25/indian-mujahideen-tehseen-akhtar-modi-idINDEEA2OOCN20140325> (accessed May 21, 2014).
7. Lisa Curtis, “Indo-Pakistani Ceasefire No More,” The Heritage Foundation, The Foundry, August 16, 2013, <http://blog.heritage.org/2013/08/16/indo-pakistani-cease-fire-no-more/>.
8. Palash Ghosh, “India 2014 Elections: BJP Leader Narendra Modi's Bromance with Japan's Shinzo Abe,” *International Business Times*, March 10, 2014, <http://www.ibtimes.com/india-2014-elections-bjp-leader-narendra-modis-bromance-japans-shinzo-abe-1560414> (accessed May 21, 2014).
9. Ambassador Karl F. Inderfurth and Ted Osius, “India's ‘Look East’ and America's ‘Asia Pivot’: Converging Interests,” *U.S.–India Insight*, Vol. 3, No. 3 (March 2013), <http://csis.org/publication/indias-look-east-and-americas-asia-pivot-converging-interests> (accessed May 21, 2014).
10. K. Shankar Bajpai, “Japan, India and the Balance of Power,” *The Hindu*, January 27, 2014, <http://www.thehindu.com/todays-paper/tp-opinion/japan-india-and-the-balance-of-power/article5621803.ece> (accessed May 21, 2014).



defense review with India.<sup>11</sup> The uncertainty surrounding the withdrawal of U.S. and NATO forces from Afghanistan has brought New Delhi and Moscow even closer in their shared goal to prevent a Pakistan-supported Taliban from regaining power in Kabul. India recently agreed to pay Russia to deliver small arms, such as light artillery and mortars, to Afghanistan.<sup>12</sup>

Differences in policies toward Russia could become a major irritant in India–U.S. relations, particularly if Russian President Vladimir Putin further extends Russian claims on Ukraine, and New Delhi continues to provide unqualified support for Putin. India tacitly supported President Putin’s annexation of Crimea on March 18, 2014, by acknowledging Russia’s “legitimate interests” there and deciding not to back U.S. and EU sanctions against Russia. President Putin thanked India for its “reserve and objectivity” toward Moscow. New Delhi’s position on Crimea has raised questions among U.S. policymakers about India’s reliability as a partner when it comes to significant geopolitical challenges, particularly the U.S. Asia rebalance strategy.

**Nuclear Issues.** The previous BJP-led government, under Atal Bihari Vajpayee, surprised the world and invoked sanctions when it tested nuclear weapons shortly after assuming office in May 1998. The bold action says something about the BJP’s willingness to assert India’s national security interests, but the decision must also be viewed in context. Former Congress Party Prime Minister Narasima Rao was close to conducting nuclear tests in 1995, until the U.S. government pre-empted the test by delivering a stern demarche to the Rao government based on intelligence it had collected on Indian test preparations. The 1998 decision to test also was related to negotiations surrounding the Comprehensive Test

Ban Treaty (CTBT) and India’s interest in ensuring that it tested before the CTBT came into force.<sup>13</sup>

A statement in the BJP’s Election Manifesto on nuclear weapons hinting that the BJP might reconsider India’s commitment to a “no first use” policy was met with strong criticism both inside and outside India. The manifesto discussed the possibility of changing India’s nuclear doctrine “to make it relevant to challenges of current times.” The pronouncement seemed to contradict Modi’s earlier praise for the “no first use” position, which he enunciated in a foreign policy speech in Chennai last October.<sup>14</sup> In a 2010 speech, former Indian National Security Advisor Shivshankar Menon said India was committed to “no first use against non-nuclear weapon states,” appearing to announce a caveat to India’s position to considering first strikes against nuclear-weapons states.<sup>15</sup> There is increasing concern about a nuclear arms race in South Asia as Pakistan has the fastest growing nuclear weapons arsenal in the world today and is developing war plans that include the use of tactical nuclear weapons in the event of conflict with India. Any hint that India is backing away from its long-held “no first use” policy raises nuclear tensions in the region.

**Maritime Issues.** In its manifesto, the BJP made special mention of the need to refurbish India’s navy. A series of mishaps on Indian submarines and ships over the past year have raised questions about India’s ability to achieve its naval ambitions. The most serious problems have occurred with its Russian Kilo-class submarines. There was an explosion on the INS (Indian Naval Submarine) *Sindhurakshak* in August of 2013 that killed 18 officers and sailors, and a fire on the INS *Sindhuratna* in February, which led to the resignation of the naval chief.<sup>16</sup>

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11. Andrew J. Stravers and Peter Harris, “Indian Foreign Policy: The Cold War Lingers,” *The Diplomat*, March 24, 2014, <http://thediplomat.com/2014/03/indian-foreign-policy-the-cold-war-lingers/> (accessed May 21, 2014).
  12. Richard Weitz, “Russia–India Afghan Arms Deal Comes with Regional Implications,” *World Politics Review*, May 6, 2014, <http://www.worldpoliticsreview.com/articles/13759/russia-india-afghan-arms-deal-comes-with-regional-implications> (accessed May 21, 2014).
  13. T. P. Sreenivasan, “More Continuity, Less Change,” *The Indian Express*, May 11, 2014, <http://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/more-continuity-less-change/> (accessed May 21, 2014).
  14. Teresita C. Schaffer and Howard Schaffer, “India: Modi’s International Profile,” The Brookings Institution, December 12, 2013, <http://www.brookings.edu/research/opinions/2013/12/12-modi-foreign-policy-schaffer> (accessed May 21, 2014).
  15. Praveen Swami, “Dancing with the Nuclear Djinn,” *The Hindu*, April 12, 2014, <http://www.thehindu.com/opinion/lead/dancing-with-the-nuclear-djinn/article5901938.ece> (accessed May 21, 2014).
  16. “Indian Navy: 11 Accidents, 22 Deaths in Seven Months,” *Dnaindia.com*, March 7, 2014, <http://www.dnaindia.com/india/report-indian-navy-11-accidents-22-deaths-in-seven-months-1967635> (accessed May 21, 2014).

## Potential Stumbling Block: Religious Freedom

The U.S. government revoked Narendra Modi's visa in 2005 under the terms of the International Religious Freedom Act stipulation that any foreign government official responsible for particularly egregious violations of religious freedom is ineligible for a tourist visa. The Gujarat riots followed an incident in which a group of Muslims allegedly set fire to a train carrying Hindu pilgrims destined for Ahmedabad and passing through the town of Godhra. Modi declared a day of mourning the next day and allowed funeral processions in the streets of Ahmedabad. The state government failed to control Hindu mobs that went on a systematic rampage murdering Muslims.

During the election campaign, Modi sought to change perceptions that he is anti-Muslim and to emphasize good governance and the economy, rather than *hindutva* (Hindu religious and cultural nationalism). Although the Supreme Court of India absolved him of any criminal wrongdoing during the 2002 Gujarat riots, most Indian Muslims and members of other religious minority groups view him as a divisive leader and worry that a government led by him could threaten their interests and even chip away at their legal rights. They also note his failure to issue an apology to the Muslim community for the Gujarat violence.

Modi was quick to distance himself from controversial statements made during the campaign by other leaders from the BJP and affiliated organizations. For instance, when a hard-line leader from the Bihar wing of the BJP stated that those opposed to Modi would have to leave India and go to Pakistan after the BJP won the election, Modi immediately criticized the statement on Twitter. Modi also distanced himself from Praveen Togadia, a member of the *Vishwa Hindu Parishad* (VHP), a sister organization of the BJP, after Indian television channels aired a video of him offering advice on how to prevent Muslims from buying property in Hindu-dominated areas. Modi's Gujarat state government filed charges against Togadia within hours of his alleged explosive comments.

The BJP's election manifesto includes a commitment to rebuild the Ram Temple at Ayodhya, where a mosque was destroyed by Hindu zealots in 1992. But the party also emphasizes the need for a constitutional approach to rebuilding the temple.<sup>17</sup> Hindus would like access to Ayodhya, as they believe it to be the birthplace of the Hindu God Rama, where a prominent Hindu temple (the Ram Temple) once existed. In 1992, BJP leader L. K. Advani led a protest march to the Babri Mosque at Ayodhya that resulted in its destruction by Hindu zealots and ensuing communal riots that killed nearly 2,000. In September 2010, a high court in India ruled that the land at Ayodhya be divided into three segments: one-third for the reconstruction of the Ram Temple; one-third for the Islamic Sunni Waqf Board; and one-third for another Hindu group.

Other religious minorities are also concerned about BJP policies. Christians, numbering about 25 million in India, have faced harassment and violent attacks by *hindutva* organizations. Christians feel especially vulnerable in states that have adopted anti-conversion laws. The anti-conversion laws are aimed at preventing "forced conversion" but they also have been misused by Hindu zealots to harass Christians and disrupt church services. According to the United States Commission on International Religious Freedom (USCIRF), the anti-conversion laws are one-sided in that they place hurdles and penalties for converting from Hinduism that are not applied to other religions.<sup>18</sup> Seven Indian states have anti-conversion laws.

In December 2007, communal violence between Christians and Hindus led to 40 deaths and displaced thousands in the state of Orissa. The killing of a Hindu spiritual leader eight months later in Orissa resulted in retaliatory violence against the Christian community, even though a Maoist extremist claimed responsibility for the murder.

USCIRF currently places India on a "Tier 2" watch list along with Russia, Cuba, Indonesia, Afghanistan, and a few other countries. From 2002 to 2004, shortly after the Gujarat riots, USCIRF recommended that India be named a "Country of Par-

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17. Vaishnavi Chandrashekar, "India Elections: Muslim Voters Warily Eye Frontrunner Narendra Modi," *The Christian Science Monitor*, May 7, 2014, <http://www.csmonitor.com/World/Asia-South-Central/2014/0507/India-elections-Muslim-voters-warily-eye-frontrunner-Narendra-Modi> (accessed May 21, 2014).

18. U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, *2013 Annual Report on India*, "India," <http://www.uscifr.gov/sites/default/files/resources/India%20%20Pager%20%202013%20final.pdf> (accessed May 21, 2014).

## The BJP and Hindu Nationalism

The BJP is a Hindu nationalist party that is part of a network of Hindu organizations that form the umbrella organization called the *Sangh Parivar* (Family of Organizations). The goal of the Hindu nationalist movement, *hindutva*, is to shape India's national identity along Hindu lines. The BJP is considered the political arm of the *Sangh Parivar*, while the *Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh* (RSS, National Volunteer Organization), established in 1925, is responsible for reforming the society into a Hindu society. The RSS is a grassroots movement that helps get out the vote for the BJP at election time. Several top BJP leaders, such as new Prime Minister Narendra Modi and former Prime Minister Vajpayee, made their start in politics volunteering for the RSS.

The *Vishva Hindu Parishad* (VHP, World Hindu Council) is a cultural organization focused on preserving and consolidating a Hindu culture. It is involved with construction and renovation of Hindu temples and focuses on issues such

as preventing slaughter of cattle (in keeping with Hindu religious belief) and prohibiting conversions from Hinduism to other religions. The VHP has received criticism for forcibly converting Christians in tribal regions to Hinduism. The youth wing of the VHP, the *Bajrang Dal*, usually plays a role in communal violence.

In the past, the BJP has supported policy positions considered divisive by the Muslim minority community. These include support for the construction of a Hindu temple at Ayodhya, where a mosque was destroyed by Hindus in 1992; the establishment of a uniform civil code, rather than allowing Muslims to maintain certain personal laws based on religious custom; and repeal of Article 370 of the Indian Constitution, which provides the state of Jammu and Kashmir special autonomous status. The BJP did not, however, pursue these issues when it held power previously, mainly because it lacked support from coalition partners.

ticular Concern" for "systematic, ongoing and egregious violations of religious freedom," but the State Department did not do so.<sup>19</sup>

### Implications for U.S. Policy

The primary focus of the BJP government's foreign policy will be to support its economic goals in an effort to boost trade, investment, and growth. Although unlikely to make drastic changes, the new Indian administration is expected to pursue a somewhat more assertive and decisive foreign policy than its Congress Party predecessor. This more assertive foreign policy outlook could reap dividends for the U.S.–Indian relationship. New Delhi and Washington share similar strategic objectives, whether they involve countering terrorism, hedging against China's rise, or pushing back on China's extralegal maritime claims. A greater Indian willingness to acknowledge external threats and take initiatives to

mitigate those threats could result in increased U.S.–Indian cooperation on a variety of defense, security, nuclear, and maritime issues.

Yet many obstacles to furthering Indo–U.S. ties remain. Fundamental differences between the two countries regarding their geostrategic interests have remained largely consistent over the past 40 years: The U.S. is concerned over India's close relationship with Russia, and India believes that U.S. policy in South Asia tilts toward Pakistan. India's tacit acceptance of Russia's annexation of Crimea highlights the priority that India attaches to relations with Russia, and the limits of Washington's influence with New Delhi, amidst shifting geopolitical currents. The U.S. withdrawal from Afghanistan also fuels Indian concern about future terrorism trends in the region and whether the U.S. will abandon the war-torn country. The U.S. must focus on overcoming these obstacles and find ways to cooperate with India in the interest

19. Katrina Lantos Swett, Vice Chair, U.S. Commission on International Religious Freedom, "The Plight of Religious Minorities in India," testimony before the Tom Lantos Human Rights Commission, April 4, 2014, <http://uscirf.newtarget.net/sites/default/files/India%20testimony%20TLHRC%20%20April%202014%20FINAL.pdf> (accessed May 21, 2014).



of defeating global terrorism and maintaining equilibrium in the Asian power balance. More specifically, the U.S. should:

■ **Reach out to Modi and make clear he will be welcomed by the U.S. Administration.**

Washington was late in engaging with Modi. As far back as October 2012, Britain's high commissioner in New Delhi called on Modi, while he was serving as Gujarat's chief minister. U.S. Ambassador Nancy Powell, on the other hand, did not meet with Modi until February of this year, shortly before voting started. There are indications that Modi and his fellow BJP leaders have moved away from communal politics and will focus instead on good governance and building the economy. President Obama should signal his willingness to meet with Modi in Washington on the heels of the September 2014 United Nations General Assembly. This would help set the foundation for improved ties and mend fences over the revoked visa issue.

■ **Seek to work with the new BJP government to enhance India's role in demonstrating America's commitment to the Asia-Pacific.**

Given the BJP's apparent interest in adopting a more assertive hedging strategy vis-à-vis China, the U.S. will likely find more opportunities to engage with Indian officials on the U.S. strategy in the Asia-Pacific. A BJP government will not be constrained or influenced by leftist-leaning politicians who have a knee-jerk aversion to strategic cooperation with the U.S., as was the Congress Party-led government. BJP leaders will continue to resist any policy construed as "containment" of China, however. Modi's strong equation with Japanese Prime Minister Abe also could open opportunities for greater trilateral cooperation among the U.S., India, and Japan. The sixth trilateral U.S.-India-Japan meeting, scheduled to take place in New Delhi in early June, presents an early opportunity for the new Indian government to demonstrate it prioritizes the dialogue.

■ **Reinvigorate the Defense Trade and Technology Initiative (DTTI) between the Office of the Secretary of Defense and the Indian National Security Advisor.** Launched in 2012, the DTTI is aimed at breaking down barriers

between the two countries' defense bureaucracies and enhancing defense trade and technology exchange. Former Deputy Secretary of Defense Ash Carter made progress with the initiative, especially during a visit to India last fall in which he discussed offers by U.S. companies for co-development and co-production of major weapons systems. The U.S. has signed nearly \$10 billion in defense contracts with India over the past few years, but still lags behind Russia as a defense supplier to India. The U.S. should position itself to help fulfill India's defense modernization requirements and enable American companies to pursue partnerships that support India's interest in developing its domestic defense production sector. Indian willingness to adhere to U.S. technology protection agreements will be critical to moving the Indo-U.S. defense relationship forward.

■ **Make a fresh push to clear hurdles for U.S. companies to invest in India's civil nuclear sector.**

While in opposition, the BJP opposed the nuclear deal and did what it could to stifle it, including pushing for nuclear liability legislation that complicated U.S. companies' ability to invest in civil nuclear projects in India. Now that the BJP is in power, the party leaders may be willing to soften their position and build a political consensus around a resolution to the liability issue that would allow U.S. firms to invest in the civil nuclear sector. It was the BJP, during its previous tenure, which, with the January 2004 launch of the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership (NSSP) dialogue, laid the groundwork for the historic 2008 civil nuclear deal. The NSSP was aimed at bolstering cooperation in civilian space and nuclear programs, high-technology trade, and on missile defense issues.

■ **Expand and deepen the U.S.-Indian counterterrorism dialogue and cooperation.**

The U.S. should focus on building a more robust counterterrorism dialogue with the new Indian leadership. To kick-start the effort, the U.S. should send a high-level multi-agency delegation (from the CIA, the Department of Homeland Security, and the National Counterterrorism Center) to India to exchange views on regional terrorist threats.

- **Make coordination on Afghanistan’s future a central part of the Indo–U.S. counterterrorism dialogue.** The U.S. should encourage India’s economic and political involvement in Afghanistan, which helps bolster the Afghan government’s efforts to fight terrorism. Conventional thinking holds that the U.S. can mitigate regional tensions by adopting a neutral or “balanced” position toward the sources of Indo–Pakistani conflict and the tools each side employs to try to prevail in the conflict. But this approach has not served U.S. interests when it comes to fighting terrorism. In fact, prioritizing a policy of balance over principles in dealing with Indo–Pakistani tensions has contributed to the growth of international terrorist threats emanating from South Asia.

The U.S. has squandered valuable opportunities in the past—including in the aftermath of 9/11 and the 2001–2002 Indo–Pakistani military crisis, and after the 2008 Mumbai terror attacks—to encourage change in the Pakistani military’s fundamental calculations on the use of terrorism to achieve foreign policy objectives. Pakistan successfully argued that it was too weak to meet U.S. counterterrorism demands. This led U.S. officials to soften their tone and accept continued ambiguous Pakistani relationships with known terror-

ist groups. The U.S. will never fully get a handle on the international terrorist threat emanating from Pakistan if it allows Islamabad to continually link the activities of these groups to its dispute with India. The U.S. should no longer sacrifice its anti-terrorism principles in the region for the sake of pursuing an “even-handed” South Asia policy.

## Conclusion

With the election of a new government in India, there is an opportunity to move past recent irritants in the U.S.–Indian relationship and reinvigorate the ties between the two countries. For this to happen, the Obama Administration must signal that it is ready to do business with newly elected Prime Minister Modi. If the U.S. demonstrates its willingness to establish close ties with the new Indian government, it is likely that the BJP will reciprocate, and the two sides can refocus on achieving the vision of a durable and strategic partnership—which is in the national interest of both countries.

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