

Reclaiming Strategic Subjectivity: Theorising India's Grand Strategic Doctrine under the Modi Order.

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Abstract

The role India plays in international politics in the twenty-first century calls for an assessment of the theoretical premises underpinning the country's emerging strategic posture. This research attempts precisely this – theorising about India's strategic doctrine under Prime Minister Narendra Modi (2014 to present), a tenure defined by unparalleled assertiveness, the revision of India's civilizational self-perception, and the strategic use of multi-alignment as a tool of statecraft. Using a three-dimensional theoretical framework including structural realism, constructivism, and postcolonial IR, the article concludes that none of the theories satisfactorily explains the epistemological complexity of the 'Modi Order' in Indian foreign and strategic policy. Rather, what is seen here is a unique doctrine that draws on both material considerations and civilizational aspirations, born of India's Hindu nationalist Weltanschauung and a desire to reclaim its place in the world within a liberal international order dominated by the West. The paper critically examines four core tenets of this new doctrine as follows: (i) the shift from Non-Alignment to strategic autonomy and multi-alignment; (ii) the recalibration of nuclear deterrence strategy and its effects on strategic stability in South Asia; (iii) the intensification of India's focus on the Indo-Pacific via Quad and maritime strategies; and (iv) the inclusion of civilisational identity, which is achieved through cultural diplomacy and the Jaishankar Doctrine, into the very fabric of India's grand strategic thinking. The article argues that the Modi Order is not a radical break from the legacy of Nehru, but neither a direct continuation nor a complex and conflictual compromise between the two that mirrors the inherent tensions of a state trying to become both a great power and a revisionist state within the frameworks of multilateral institutions. The inference has important theoretical implications for the discussion about rising states, regional hegemons, and the sustainability of the liberal international order in an age of pronounced multipolarity.....

Keywords: strategic autonomy, multi-alignment, Indo-Pacific, Strategic thinking..

Introduction

Few instances in modern international politics carry such analytical weight as to equally fascinate the structural realist, frustrate the liberal institutionalist, and energise the postcolonial theorist as the emergence of the so-called '*Modi Order*' within India's strategic doctrine does. With the BJP's acquisition of a historic parliamentary majority in May 2014, marking the end of the UPA era in the country, India's strategic approach has clearly undergone a noticeable transformation, one that has sparked considerable academic debate regarding both its uniqueness and theoretical understandability. This is not just an academic discussion. As the world's fifth-largest economy by nominal GDP, the world's largest state by population, a de facto nuclear power, and a would-be permanent member of the UN Security Council, India's strategic direction has implications far beyond South Asia.

However, existing research on Indian foreign policy has swung between two competing paradigms of analysis. The first paradigm, as presented by Basrur (2017: 7) and Chatterjee Miller and Sullivan de Estrada (2017: 27-28), is that the structural compulsions underlying Indian diplomacy, including the compulsions to achieve economic growth, regional dominance, and great power status, remain fundamentally unchanged in Modi's era, and that the grandiosity of the rhetoric of BJP foreign policy pronouncements is greater than any real policy change. The second paradigm, championed by researchers like Hall (2019: 17-18), Jaffrelot (2021:5-6), and Huju (2022: 123-24), argues that the influence of *Hindu nationalism* on the practitioner community of Indian diplomats, as well as

a more aggressive bilateral position towards Pakistan and a more antagonistic posture towards China post-Galwan (2020), represents a departure from India's historically pragmatic approach to international politics.

This research walks a line between the two extremes by arguing that the gap in theory found in both papers stems from the fact that they use the same restrictive one-paradigm models of either realism, liberalism, or constructivism to explain Indian strategic behaviour under the Modi government, which are too narrow to account for the layers of complexity involved. Not only is a pluralist approach more methodologically sound, but it is also, according to this paper, epistemologically imperative if the analyst wishes to derive intersubjectively validated knowledge of India's grand strategy. The paper further significantly highlights the theoretical discussion within the existing IR literature on rising powers and strategic culture. It also examines the concept of strategic autonomy and its transition to multi-alignment. It also scrutinises the nuclear aspect and considers the Indo-Pacific shift, exploring the ideational basis of the *Jaishankar Doctrine*.

Situating the Modi Order: Theoretical Frameworks and Their Discontents

The structural realist perspective, in either Waltz's defensive version (Waltz, 1979: 118) or Mearsheimer's offensive version, offers an immediate yet incomplete explanation for India's foreign policy during the Modi era (2001:29-30). Under the structural realist paradigm, the essential geopolitical feature of today's South Asia and the Indo-Pacific region is the emergence of China as a peer rival contesting US hegemony. As a country sharing borders with China, facing territorial conflicts along a border measuring 3,488 kilometres and with a bitter history of rivalry, India faces, under the conventional balance-of-power logic, a security dilemma, which refers to the need to build power and alliances and increase military influence to counterbalance China (Rajagopalan, 2020: 75-76).

Indeed, the structural realist analysis is empirically well supported by the empirical evidence. The defence budget in India has increased considerably during the Modi era, growing from about 40 billion dollars in 2014 to more than 73 billion dollars in 2023, placing India among the top four military spenders in the world (SIPRI, 2024). The institutionalisation of IBGs, the New Land Warfare Doctrine of 2018, the creation of CDS in January 2020, and the implementation of the theatre commands are all consistent with a state undertaking systematic institutional reforms of its military institutions, which reflects a strategy that aggregates power (Vinodan & Kurian, 2024: 276-77). The surgical strikes against Pakistani soil in September 2016, in the aftermath of the terrorist attack on Uri, and the air strikes conducted at Balakot in February 2019, after the suicide bombing in Pulwama, were indicative of the change in India's approach to cross-border crises. They showed that India was no longer willing to adopt a restrained strategic posture, a fact readily understood through the lens of offensive realism.

However, the structure-based realist model appears to face serious problems of explanation precisely where its explanatory power is most needed. The model cannot explain the clear ideological elements in the *Modi order*, such as the use of *Mahabharata* analogies by the external affairs minister S. Jaishankar, the claim of civilizational identity as a basis for legitimising foreign policy and the domestic political economy of Hindu nationalism, which has endowed the Indian diplomatic apparatus with a clear Hindutva flavour (Huju, 2022 p. 166). For Waltzian structure, it serves as a permissive rather than a determining factor, meaning that while structure provides India with strong reasons to engage in balancing against China, it does not provide any reason to choose this peculiar modality of balancing.

The constructivist paradigm in International Relations theory, developed by authors such as Wendt (1999: 7) and extended to the Indian case by researchers such as Chatterjee Miller (2013: 30) and Hall (2019: 20), focuses attention on the ideational aspects, norms, identities, historical narratives, and discursive practices that form state interests and influence foreign policy behaviour. In this light, the key questions are not just what India can do but who India thinks it is and the role it thinks it must play in the international order. The constructivist framework is a particularly insightful analytical tool when applied to the Modi era because the election of the BJP to government power in 2014, among other things, marked the rise to the leadership of Indian statecraft of a political movement whose core ideology is replete with ideas about civilizational identity, historical grievances, and India as a *vishwaguru* – or civilizational guide for the world.

Jaishankar's own writings empirically validate the constructivist approach. In addition to other books, Jaishankar's popular work, titled *The India Way: Strategies for an Uncertain World* (2020: 10), is an exercise in identity construction, where an effort is made to formulate a distinctively Indian way of handling international politics through conscious borrowing from the Kautilya's tradition of *Arthashastra*, the moral ambiguity of *Mahabharata*, and the legacy of Nehruvian approach which is both selectively appropriated and mostly negated. The argument put forward by Jaishankar that Indian foreign policy has suffered from excessive contamination with what he calls '*political romanticism*', a subtle criticism of the legacy of non-alignment, and the call for a nakedly realpolitik approach in service of national interests, is essentially an act of redefining India's strategic identity, something which Wendt's framework can help explain (Jaffrelot, 2021: 144). The claim that India has a unique strategic culture based on its civilisational legacy, and that this strategic culture should guide the country in international relations, is a classic constructivist approach: the claim that ideas matter and that identities influence policy-making.

Despite its heuristic worth, the constructivist interpretation has problems of its own. It might overstate the coherence of the ideational framework that supports the *Modi Order*, presenting a coherent and deliberate combination of ideas where there is, in reality, an eclectic and sometimes even contradictory combination of impulses, which stem from a mixture of philosophical belief, electoral expediency, and sheer inertia of a diplomatic machinery that preceded and may survive the current political regime. Furthermore, the emphasis in constructivism on identity and discourse might overlook the enduring materialist foundations, such as power imbalances, geographic constraints, and economic realities, that still constrain the strategic choices of India's political leaders, regardless of their ideological beliefs.

Third, a theoretical approach to the *Modi Order*, postcolonial IR theory, building on the seminal works of Acharya (2014: 14), Shilliam (2011:10), and Seth (2013:14-15), offers another, perhaps even more incisive, means by which to comprehend the unique nature of the Modi Order. The central tenet of postcolonial IR is the extent to which IR theories embody a distinctly Western epistemology that excludes, silences, or distorts the strategic agency of non-Western actors. Seen from this vantage point, the Modi Order's commitment to strategic independence, its refusal to allow its foreign policy decisions to be determined by any patron, American or Russian, is both an operational necessity and a deeper affirmation of the right to define one's interests and write one's history outside the norms and structures that have long been the monopoly of the Western liberal order.

The postcolonial perspective highlights certain dimensions of the *Modi Order*, which are invisible to structural realism and constructivism. This perspective, for example, explains India's ambiguous attitude towards the liberal world order. On the one hand, India wants to be part of it to gain certain advantages from the association. On the other hand, India does not accept all the conditionalities imposed by Western countries, particularly regarding democracy, human rights, and the rule of law. The postcolonial perspective explains the importance of the narrative of civilizational pride that resonates within the ideology of the BJP party: India's traditions of strategy, formed by the *Arthashastra* and *Mahabharata* texts, are no less sophisticated and deserve international respect than Westphalian sovereignty and the concept of the democratic peace. Postcolonialism can explain why it is interesting for the Hindu nationalist regime to seek the role of Global South leadership, combining, on the one hand, the desire to reform Western-dominated multilateral institutions and, on the other hand, rivalry with China.

From Non-Alignment to Multi-Alignment: The Doctrine of Strategic Autonomy

What can be asserted with absolute academic certainty is that the Modi Doctrine has greatly increased the assertiveness and the international profile of India's strategic doctrine. The policy of *Neighbourhood First*, the *Act East* policy, which is the successor to the former policy of *Look East*, and the *Security and Growth for All in the Region* (SAGAR) doctrine, all together, conveyed the message of India's desire to play a leading, rather than a reactive, role in shaping the regional order in the Indian Ocean and beyond. The hosting by India of the G20 Presidency in 2023 under the slogan of *Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam* (One Earth, One Family, One Future) and the organizing by India of three consecutive summits of the Voice of the Global South from 2023 to 2024, gathering representatives from 125 countries, demonstrated both the ambition and the idea of India's strategic doctrine, which made India the emerging great power and, at the same time, the legitimate voice of developing world.

The Nuclear Dimension: Doctrinal Ambiguity and Strategic Stability

India's nuclear doctrine is arguably the most analytically complex aspect of the overall strategic framework referred to as the Modi Order. The parameters of the doctrine, *Credible Minimum Deterrence* (CMD), a policy of *No First Use* (NFU), and the promise of massive retaliation in response to a nuclear strike either on India or on its armed forces wherever they may be, are clearly laid out in the *National Security Advisory Board* (NSAB) draft report, written in August 1999 and officially formulated without major changes in January 2003. They remain largely unaltered under the Modi administration. However, there exists an extensive academic literature that suggests that India's nuclear posture has experienced significant evolution in the Modi era, despite remaining unchanged in formal terms, an evolution that has far-reaching implications for strategic stability in the nuclear dyad of South Asia, arguably one of the most unstable and proliferated regions on the globe.

The first source of doctrinal ambiguity is the NFU pledge itself. Ehtisham (2022: 30), in a recent study, identifies six constitutive debates in the Indian strategic community on the doctrine of nuclear weapons, NFU, credible minimum deterrence, response to chemical and biological warfare attacks, command and control, massive retaliation, and the development of tactical nuclear weapons by Pakistan that have only become more intense than ever during the Modi period. In August 2019, at the time when Defence Minister Rajnath Singh marked the 20th anniversary of the Pokhran II tests, he stated that India's NFU policy is one of circumstances rather than an unconditional one, causing international worry over the stability of the declaratory commitment that was previously regarded as non-negotiable (Ehtisham, 2022: 25). Although the Indian government sought to clarify that there has been no official change in the nuclear doctrine, the episode revealed a gap between the declaratory and signalling approaches to nuclear strategy under the Modi Order.

A second source of strategic instability emerges from India's strategic doctrine as a response to Pakistan's development of *tactical nuclear weapons* (TNWs) and full-spectrum deterrence (FSD). The introduction of battlefield TNWs such as Pakistan's Nasr system was intended to challenge the viability of India's *Cold Start Doctrine* (CSD), the strategic doctrine whereby India can rapidly mobilise Battle Groups for limited-objective offensive military operations against Pakistan below the nuclear threshold. India's declared strategy of massive retaliation against the use of any weapon of mass destruction by Pakistan, even tactical, has been questioned by many scholars, such as Basrur (2017: 24), for being strategically incredible: a strategy of city-busting exchanges in reaction to a battlefield nuclear explosion cannot be rationally executed. It thus may encourage risk-taking behaviour on the part of the adversary. An alternative strategic doctrine, known as the bifurcated doctrine, under which India would maintain its strategy of massive retaliation towards China, the peer nuclear competitor, and a more tailored retaliation policy vis-à-vis the use of Pakistan's TNWs, has been proposed by analysts at Observer Research Foundation (ORF) but has not been officially embraced by the Modi Government.

In terms of structural realism, the ambiguity above would be understood as the expected result of a state attempting to maximise its deterrence credibility in an exceedingly challenging two-front deterrence situation, in which it must deter both a nuclear-armed Pakistan and a nuclear-armed China simultaneously, using a single doctrine. From the constructivist perspective, it is the domestic political economy of nuclear signalling that is highlighted, specifically the importance of Indian assertiveness to its nationalist constituency and its desire to defy the established deterrence rules imposed by Western powers on the country. From a postcolonial theory perspective, it should be recalled that the strong feelings of discrimination against the NPT regime, of which India is not a signatory, exist. This helps to understand the doctrinal ambiguity of India as a reaction to international normative structures that it did not participate in formulating.

The Indo-Pacific Turn: QUAD, Maritime Power, and the Management of China's Rise

The recasting of India's geostrategic orientation from a mainly continental, subcontinent-focused one to an expansive Indo-Pacific one is among the most important theoretical and practical elements of the Modi Order. The idea of Indo-Pacific as a geographical concept did not originate within the BJP-led government. However, it came into prominence even earlier when it was first articulated by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007. Further, it was popularised in US strategic discourses through the '*Pivot to Asia*' policy of the Obama administration. However, the Modi-led government has consistently institutionalised this geostrategic reorientation through an extensive array of bilateral and minilateral engagements, fundamentally changing India's approach to its maritime environment.

Quad, comprising India, the US, Japan, and Australia, is one of the most institutionally significant incarnations of this Indo-Pacific turn. Having been resurrected in 2017 after it was dormant for a decade because of the pressure from China, which led Australia to abandon the forum in 2008, the Quad has been steadily strengthened during the tenure of the Modi government until March 2021, when the forum rose to the leaders' level and started having regular summits thereafter. It is noteworthy that the official description of the Quad as the forum for the promotion of a 'free, open, and rules-based Indo-Pacific,' rather than the alliance against China, is important since it stems from India's intention to maintain the ambiguity of its ideational character to preserve its multi-alignment policy and not to provoke the kind of reaction from China, which would have followed from the membership in the alliance. As Estrada (2023: 23) has noted in *The Pacific Review*, India has consistently resisted joining the Quad as a security community. It has sought to reap the benefits of such cooperation without bearing the institutional constraints inherent to it.

Indian maritime strategic vision does not stop at the Quad either. The *Security and Growth for All in the Region* (SAGAR) strategy, enunciated by Modi in his speech in the Mauritian Parliament in March 2015, is premised on India's position as the net security provider in the *Indian Ocean Region* (IOR). This has been the case till now, without being enunciated in any doctrine regarding India's naval supremacy and bilateral defence partnership, but India now sees it through a doctrinal articulation. The *Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative* (IPOI) of India, launched in 2019 at the *East Asia Summit*, establishes a multilateral institutional framework for maritime security, involving regional partners in areas such as maritime ecology, maritime resources, capacity building, and disaster risk reduction. The operationalisation of the Indian Navy through the construction of India's second indigenous aircraft carrier, *INS Vikrant*, in 2022 forms the material basis for this maritime vision.

In terms of structural realism, the Indo-Pacific turn in India's foreign policy is readily understandable: it involves a classic balancing effort against China's growing naval power projection, organised through institutional mechanisms for strategic depth and burden-sharing without compromising India's formal independence. In terms of constructivism, however, the focus will have to be on the ideational innovation involved in this Indo-Pacific turn, which has entailed the formulation of a particular Indian conception of the Indo-Pacific region as 'inclusive' and 'ASEAN-centric'. It will, in other words, involve an Indian ideological perspective on regional order that is very different from the American version implicit in AUKUS and the American Indo-Pacific strategy. The postcolonial interpretation will point out, in all fairness, how ironic it is that a postcolonial state that subscribes to

principles of sovereignty and non-interference embodied in the Bandung spirit should participate in a strategic architecture designed to preserve an American-dominated rules-based world order, which is seen as the manifestation of Western hegemony by many in the developing world.

The Jaishankar Doctrine: Civilisational Identity as Strategic Capital

No discussion of the strategic doctrine that has come to shape India's strategic policy can be considered comprehensive without consideration of the ideational framework laid out by *External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar*. Jaishankar, in the second decade of the Modi Order, has become the most intellectually astute and prominent articulator of a coherent philosophy of foreign policy, referred to herein as the *Jaishankar Doctrine*, which combines power-politics realism, civilizational pride, post-colonial bitterness, and pragmatism.

The significance of Jaishankar's doctrine is reflected in his experience as a diplomat, where he also served as India's foreign secretary and as India's Ambassador to the United States and China, as well as in an explicitly philosophical attempt to present a distinctly Indian philosophy of international relations. The central thesis of the book is that India has failed to pursue its own national interest in international politics because of the romantic approach of its foreign policy, defined by Jaishankar as adherence to abstract and principled norms of non-alignment, non-interference and multilateralism. The cure for this problem lies in greater realism and the pursuit of interests, using 'the art of disruption' made possible by the erosion of American unipolarity, the rise of multipolarity, and the resulting freedom of action for India.

The key differentiator in Jaishankar's Doctrine, on the other hand, lies in its grounding of strategic arguments in civilisational identity. The use of the Mahabharata as a 'prism' to understand current geopolitics, especially the episode titled '*Krishna's Choice*,' which utilizes the strategic considerations of ethics in morally questionable situations as reflected in the epic, is a clear constructionist approach: the idea that India's strategic culture has an independent philosophical dimension that is not only analytically separate from western IR theories but also normatively better than the universalized framework of Westphalian sovereignty practiced by western nations. The view by Jaishankar (2020: 47), that western IR theories ignore the significance of the *Mahabharata* in the context of strategy formulation even though it is deeply entrenched in the mind of the 'average Indian,' reflects the postcolonial criticism of epistemic imperialism that is seen in the literature as developed by Acharya (2014) et al., but moves beyond the seminar to the foreign office.

However, academia's response to the Jaishankar Doctrine has been mixed. Jaffrelot (2021), in a critical article published at the Atlantic Council, has contended that while Jaishankar speaks about civilizational confidence, the reality of India's diplomatic history belies that assertion, whereby the civilizational confidence and rhetoric of Jaishankar regarding Indian autonomy have not been backed by a corresponding strategy and achievements, especially concerning India's troubled relationship with China and Pakistan. According to the International Affairs article by Hall (2022:15), the Jaishankar Doctrine can be regarded as a rather intellectual but inconsistent attempt to reconcile India's Hindu nationalism ideology with the practical realities of great power politics, which have resulted in inconsistencies in India's stance on a range of issues, such as its relations with Israel, the Russia-Ukraine war, and democratic regression in India. The interpretivism approach to the Jaishankar Doctrine implies that the importance of the Jaishankar Doctrine may lie not in its ability to contribute to the strategic success of India, but rather in its ability to recreate the identity of the Indian diplomatic corps through providing it with a new narrative of legitimacy within Hindu nationalist governance (Huju, 2022: 34).

Jaishankar, in his other work, *Why Bharat Matters* (2024), pushes the civilizational rhetoric further, as it renames India using the traditional Sanskrit name 'Bharat' in order to stress that the government considers it crucial that the national identity is defined through the prism of India's Indic civilisation, not through its colonial name. In light of postcolonial theory, this is an important move at the level of state identity, as it reflects the idea of epistemic sovereignty, the right of self-definition, discussed by Acharya (2014:24).

Towards a Composite Theory of the Modi Order

A review of the analytical journey through the constituting pillars of the Modi Order, multi-alignment, nuclear doctrine, shift towards the Indo-Pacific, and the Jaishankar doctrine indicates that any single theoretical paradigm cannot explain the behaviour associated with it. This research also offers a composite approach to analysing the Modi Order, in which it will be broken down into its constituent parts and their theoretical significance.

The first layer of structure in the composite constructivist structure is materialistic and realist in nature. The *Modi Order* cannot but be a reaction to the structural imperatives arising from a fast-changing balance of power in Asia and the wider international system. The rise of China as a near-peer rival, the weakening of America's hegemonic influence, the development of a multipolar balance of power, along with the increasing strategic choices available to India, constitute the structural realities within which the Modi regime operates. The structural realist framework appropriately captures these structural imperatives. It correctly anticipates that India, as a security-seeking state in the anarchic international order, would strive to accumulate power, forge strategic partnerships and maximise manoeuvrability. The defence modernisation program, the trajectory of defence spending, and the

operationalisation of Cold Start as a deterrent measure all exemplify a state reacting rationally to structural imperatives.

The second layer is ideational or constructivist: the specific modalities of how India has been pursuing its material interests in the *Modi Order*, the specific discourse, the civilizational justification narrative, the ideology embedded in the *Jaishankar Doctrine*, are not determined by structural necessities but are shaped by an ideational framework based on Hindu nationalist politics, the specific nature of the leading personalities and their philosophies, and the reinvention of India's national identity in a way that specifically deviates from the Nehruvian legacy. Constructivism rightly explains why India pursues strategic autonomy through such specific forms of discourse and institutions – why *Mahabharata* and *Arthashastra*, and not Kant and Locke, are the philosophical pillars of India's grand strategy, and why civilizational confidence, and not liberal democratic fraternity, are the main forms of justification for its international identity.

The third layer is the postcolonial and critical lens, since an understanding of the *Modi Order* cannot be complete without a look at the structural elements of colonialism and its current legacies, shaping India's position towards the international order in terms of its inherent ambivalence towards liberal multilateralism, its commitment to the principles of sovereign autonomy, its desire to change rather than enter into the order created by the West, and its exploitation of the Global South both as a diplomatic ally and an identity marker. As such, postcolonial IR is correct in pointing out that the *Modi Order* can be seen as another stage in a long-term project of Indian autonomous strategic subjectivity in reaction to a world order built without India's involvement and still guided by norms and institutions that inherently favour their Western creators.

These conflicts are what make the *Modi Order* an ideological construct. The realist need for power balancing vis-à-vis China produces the imperative to strengthen relations with the US and Quad allies, while the constructivist desire for civilizational independence and multi-alignment works in the exact opposite direction. The postcolonial opposition to the conditionality attached to the Western liberal-values-based order creates conflict with the very order that India needs to remain stable and secure its own development and global status. The imperative of Hindu nationalism as a domestic political agenda creates complications in India's foreign affairs with Muslim-dominated neighbouring countries and trading partners. These conflicts are not incidental but structural; they are integral to the endeavour of trying, at once, to become a great power, assert one's civilizational identity, and lead the Global South. It remains to be seen whether the *Modi Order* will prove able to cope with these conflicts effectively, or whether their combined weight will result in doctrinal incoherence and overstretching in strategy. Basrur (2017:10-11), for instance, has stressed continuity in India's strategic trajectory; Hall & Ganguly (2022: 34), the lack of scholarly agreement on the level of transformation; and Vinodan & Kurian (2024:23-24), the theoretical intricacies of India's hedging in the Indo-Pacific region. The commonality among these disparate interpretations is the realisation that *Modi-era* India is the paradigmatic example of the strategic conduct of a rising power that resists easy forecasting by any one IR theory. This power is both status quo and revisionist, multilateralist and unilateralist, realist and idealist, all depending on the particular context.

Sum up

Thus, in this research, it has been contended that India's new strategic doctrine within the *Modi Order* is neither a radical break with the basic principles of India's foreign policy nor merely a restatement of the same strategy with new rhetoric. Instead, it is a completely new strategic doctrine, eclectic, contradictory, and fraught with internal tensions, that has emerged at the intersection of structural necessities, ideational changes, and postcolonial inheritance, rendering its analysis theoretically impossible within any single paradigm. This combined methodology, which uses structural realism, constructivism, and postcolonial IR in a layered analysis of the doctrine, is the epistemologically soundest method for analysing such a complex doctrine.

Beyond the South Asian regional setting, this research has further implications. In terms of IR theory, the *Modi Order* provides a powerful example in favour of analytical eclecticism, the approach of Sil & Katzenstein (2010:15), who argue that the complexity of the real world does not fit mono-paradigmatic approaches and calls for productive dialogue among several theoretical schools. From the perspective of regional security studies, the article's findings imply that India's management of its nuclear doctrine, Indo-Pacific strategy, and multi-alignment poses a challenge to regional stability, especially amid the tense nuclear relationships between India and Pakistan and India and China. Finally, from the standpoint of global order studies, the article advances the literature on rising powers and their attitude to the liberal international order. The findings imply that India neither supports nor opposes the order but participates in shaping new global governance norms.

The research agenda that follows from this analysis is both broad and challenging. Scholars should place greater emphasis on the domestic politics of Indian foreign policy decision-making within the *Modi Order*, on how exactly Hindu nationalist ideology is being internalised within the institutional environments of the Ministry of External Affairs and the military, and on how much this process is leading to real policy changes rather than only new rhetoric. The nuclear aspect of this issue calls for urgent academic research, especially the implications of doctrinal ambiguity for crisis stability in South Asia. The Indo-Pacific strategy demands an academic focus from the

perspective of regional order theory, questioning the extent to which India's unique approach to Indo-Pacific multilateralism is actually creating a distinct normative framework or merely a disguise for the classic great-power balancing game. Finally, the implications of the Jaishankar doctrine for India's position in the liberal international order, especially regarding its attitudes toward democracy and human rights, and toward the reform of the Bretton Woods institutions, warrant urgent academic attention.

Most fundamentally, the Modi Order poses an enduring challenge to IR theory itself. It demands that scholars take seriously the proposition that a rising non-Western power can articulate a coherent, philosophically distinctive, and politically consequential foreign policy doctrine that is irreducible to either imitation of Western great-power behaviour or simple opposition to Western norms. India under Modi is doing precisely that, imperfectly, contradictorily, and with consequences that remain deeply uncertain. The measure of IR scholarship's adequacy to this moment will be its willingness to engage that complexity on its own terms, bringing the full arsenal of theoretical sophistication to bear upon a strategic story whose grammar has not yet been written.

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