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## New Delhi's Pragmatism

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Iranian President Mahmoud Ahmadinejad's April 29 visit (IANS) to the Indian capital sparked a verbal spat (NYT) earlier this month between New Delhi and Washington. After the Bush administration urged New Delhi to call upon Ahmadinejad to comply with international requirements on Iran's nuclear program, India's foreign affairs office responded (PTI): It did not need "any guidance on the future conduct of bilateral relations." The exchange brings into sharp focus the challenges facing India as it asserts itself on the global stage.

During the Cold War, India refused to align itself with any of the major world powers. After the collapse of the Soviet Union, however, India shed its nonaligned policy and globalization led New Delhi to embrace better relations with the United States. The civilian nuclear cooperation deal with the United States proposed in 2005 typifies this new tack. But India's foreign policy pragmatism cuts both ways. As this article in TIME magazine notes, "New Delhi remains deeply wary over being seen to be doing Washington's bidding when it comes to dealing with other countries."

The Indian government hopes to maintain its strong economic growth rate over the next twenty-five years. Meeting such a goal means the country will have to at least triple its primary energy supply. "Because of Iran's strategic importance and its own goal of ensuring a stable energy supply, it is difficult for New Delhi to abandon its relationship with Tehran," write Xenia Dormandy and Ronak D. Desai of Harvard's Belfer Center. India seeks energy cooperation with Tehran, including an ambitious \$7 billion pipeline through Pakistan. India's growing energy needs have also led it to pursue relations with the repressive governments of Myanmar and Sudan, raising questions about its responsibilities as a global player. Indian companies have invested more than \$2.5 billion in Sudan, while India's public oil company, ONGC Videsh, recently built a 450-mile pipeline project in the country. India, competing with China for Myanmar's oil and natural gas resources, shares extensive bilateral relations with its ruling junta that include supplying arms and conducting joint security operations.

According to India expert C. Raja Mohan, India's foreign policy priorities are as follows: "to reshape its immediate neighborhood, find a modus vivendi with China and Pakistan (its two regional rivals), and reclaim its standing in the 'near abroad': parts of Africa, the Persian Gulf, Central and Southeast Asia, and the Indian Ocean region." At the same time, he writes in Foreign Affairs, India has expanded relations with the existing great powers—especially the United States, which has emerged as a major supplier of arms (VOA) to the Indian military.

While making concerted efforts to better relations with China and Pakistan, India has also sought to counter their influence with a robust relationship with Iran and investment in Afghanistan. India's 'Look East' policy gives it access to markets in Southeast Asia, offsetting China's influence. India's new ally, the United States, also seeks to counter China's growing military power, encouraging New Delhi to strengthen its military relationship with Israel. India is now Israel's largest arms client in Asia.

As India plays for higher stakes on the global stage, its foreign policy has drawn greater scrutiny. India is home to the largest number of Tibetans outside Tibet, including the Tibetan spiritual leader, the Dalai Lama. The Indian government's tepid response to the Chinese crackdown on Tibetan demonstrators has prompted much criticism. But the Indian government is eager not to upset the small gains (LAT) it has made in recent years in improving ties with China. "The nation is not yet willing to forgo immediate domestic interests for longer-term international objectives," writes Harvard's Dormandy in the Washington Quarterly. "Until it shows an ability to do so more regularly and on more vital issues, India's reputation as a responsible stakeholder will be tenuous."

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