

DR SAMIR SARAN'S VISIT TO SPAIN: A REFLECTION ON INDIA'S PARTICIPATION IN THE INDO-PACIFIC AND THE WORLD

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A RENEWED INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY APPROACH

Seeking global outreach

The new global geopolitical realities are causing a transition from multilateralism to multipolarity, emphasized in the Indo-Pacific by the Sino-American rivalry. To confront its reluctance of this binary framework, India emerges as a country committed to the Global South without losing its strategic autonomy on major global issues and challenges. Three factors determine India's way of engaging with the world. Firstly, India's foreign policy has **historically been shaped by proximity**, being its close —South Asia— and extended —the Indo-Pacific— neighbourhoods the most important geographic references in India's external action. Moreover, solidarity with **post-colonial countries produced a strong sense of commonality** with African and Asian societies which led India to strengthen relationships with, for instance, the G77 countries. There is today a third element in Indian foreign policy, a modern contemporary layer, whereby India is looking for **greater engagement with the world**. Although proximity and solidarity with post-colonial countries remain paramount in India's foreign policy, it has undergone a significant transition in the last decades. India's own geographic imagination has moved beyond towards the goal of becoming a global player.

Driving new partnerships for Indian's future needs

India would require three crucial types of partnerships to fulfil its aspiration to reach a leading role in world affairs. The technological revolution has undoubtedly influenced India's most important growth period in recent years, which has enabled India to become one of the most prolific innovation hubs in the world. Therefore, India believes that its model of growth and development must be based upon innovation, creativity, and human endeavour. For that purpose, India needs, firstly, **technology partnerships** with strategic partners for their digital transition and in innovation. Another crucial element to India's well-being, growth and prosperity will be **partnerships for peace**. Delhi's ambition is to grow from today's 3.5 trillion dollars to 10 trillion dollars in a decade and that can only take place if stability and peace are guaranteed in key hotspots of the world. India will also need **partnerships that ensure its resource demand** in the future: resource security —beyond energy— is going to be one of the main drivers in India's search of new geographies.

Enlarging India's new geographies and geostrategic networks

India is looking beyond its old partnerships and is starting to explore new geographies to meet its future needs as well as to face the coming challenges of a new world order. The **Middle East is going to remain central in the Indian foreign policy** not only to ensure its energy security, but also in terms of connectivity, trade, and investment. It is particularly noteworthy the **rise of Latin America in the Indian geostrategic calculations**, especially ever since the invasion of Ukraine—for instance, now Argentina has become one of the largest suppliers of sunflower oil—. Countries such as Mexico, Colombia, or Argentina are like-minded actors that share common values and interests with India and play a strategic geopolitical role in India's energy and food security. Latin America has therefore moved from the periphery in India's foreign policy to the mainstream in less than a year. **Africa is also a new focal region** for Delhi's strategic calculations due to their similarities in population, growth rate and aspirations.

MARITIME SECURITY, AT THE CORE OF INDIA'S PARTICIPATION IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

Claiming a leading role in the Indian Ocean

India is the only country that can claim having an ocean named after itself, a condition which has deeply influenced the Indian identity itself. Although India did not historically project power through water nor weaponized that maritime space, the **new power dynamics in the Indo-Pacific** have prompted India to accept that its idyllic relationship with the Indian Ocean has changed. The South Asian giant has realized that it cannot be a spectator to what is evolving and needs to be part of the changes that are unfolding in the Indo Pacific. India has now a sharper geopolitical understanding of the region and has claimed its role as a **provider of security and stability**. Developing blue-water capabilities, securing lanes of communication or defending critical installations in the Indian Ocean have become critical to India's approach to the region. As the Indian economy has grown, it has also become a significant **provider of cooperation and assistance to neighbouring countries**, like Sri Lanka, Maldives or Afghanistan, which have been key beneficiaries of India for many years.

Greater consideration of the maritime sphere

For India, the maritime arena is not detached from its land issues. Land and sea defence capabilities are interconnected and equally important to keep the balance of power vis-à-vis regional rivals. Therefore, **India will need to build up its naval capacities** for land deterrence and consequently, the naval budget is of paramount importance. Despite the modest increase in budget during last fiscal year, it is expected that, as India moves from three and a half to five trillion dollars in GDP, a significant bump up in defence spending will take place, not only in terms of acquisition of new weapon systems and capabilities, but also directed to the **refurbishing and modernization of naval assets**. Although the current decade will be marked by the Sustainable Development Goals (SDG), climate response, and other economic and development questions, India will have to **divert some of its resources to meet up to the challenges posed by the geopolitical and security competition**. In the coming years, a radical change in India's defence architecture and naval capabilities framework is expected.

The importance of the Quad in India's coalition system

The Quad has become central to India as it channels its foreign policy vision and approach to the Indo-Pacific. Firstly, it **represents a consensus amongst different actors** with divergent interests in the region who have agreed to partner to maintain the regional balance of power. Secondly, it has a crowding-in effect, bringing other countries from different parts of the world to participate in decisions and actions. The Quad has also become the **catalyst for the emergence of new groupings** that will spur regional governance mechanisms. In third place, it is a flexible geopolitical mechanism with the potential to become the **building block of a future security political architecture in the Indo-Pacific**. The emergence of the AUKUS alliance is, in fact, a great example of the power and influence of the Quad. Due to its existence, this Anglo-Saxon deal could be implemented and legitimised. Without it, AUKUS would have been perceived by countries in the Indo-Pacific as part of the American power politics in the region and as an attempt of weaponization from that part of the world.

INDIA'S PRESIDENCY OF THE G20: A REFLECTION OF INDIA'S GLOBAL VISION AND VALUES

Driving global governance reform

The point of departure of India's presidency of the G20 is marked by their belief that the latest global trends and issues have shown a lack of effectiveness by global institutions. Firstly, the **severe and unequal effects of the COVID pandemic** around the world have proven that health and welfare were not adequately ensured. Moreover, multilateralism also failed to prevent a war in Europe leading to **the collapse of the peace and security pillar**, which was a post-WWII core pillar. In turn, global issues such as climate change or the promotion of SDGs have been downgraded—responding first to the pandemic, and then to the invasion of Ukraine—. From an Indian perspective, all of these factors have **questioned the capacity of current global institutions** to ensure peace, to respond to human security concerns, or to create a joint response to the climate challenge. India is under the belief that global institutions should be revitalized and recalibrated to improve people's lives in the new international scenario. Therefore, the main overarching ambitions that India means to initiate in its G20 presidency is to draw global attention to the need for reform, to begin the process of institutional reform, and to put forward creative solutions for global prosperity.

Promoting an inclusive international system

"One Earth, One Family, One Future" is the tagline of India's G20 presidency, which **encourages the promotion of greater dialogue and bringing people with diverse thoughts and ideas onto the same table** for the sake of global security and prosperity. In line with its main foreign policy priorities, one of the most important aspirations of India is involving the countries who do not belong to the G20. **The Indian Presidency seeks to give a voice to the non-G20 countries** by collecting and transmitting concerns of the rest of the world and drawing global attention to the 6 billion people who have not been involved in many of the global conversations till now in issues like food security, fertilizers or blue economy. The Indian Presidency also **aims to share its experiences and proposals in its rise as a leader of the Global South**, a global offering to those countries that wish to innovate, get inspired by or learn from India's development path in relation to its responses to the technological revolution and to climate challenges, or SDGs implementation.

Leading SDGs ambitions

In addition to the reform of global governance and the promotion of global political inclusion, India aims at leading three great specific ambitions during its Presidency. An important debate on the **creation of a digital public infrastructure** will be initiated, which will revolutionize global payment and banking infrastructure by promoting financial inclusion, allowing countries to foster innovation while addressing the specific needs of their citizens. Secondly, since India will be the frontline state for responding to the climate crisis —one-third of all future emissions will be caused by India in a business-as-usual scenario—, India will seek to **unlock finance for SDGs and climate response**. The third ambition is to lead the beginning of lifestyle changes. For the first time a major economy presiding the G20 is claiming that modern lifestyle must change to become **more sustainable and more aware of conservation**, diversity, circular economy, and climate action.

TAKING EU-INDIA COOPERATION TO THE NEXT LEVEL

A promising security partnership

India regards the EU with increasing consideration defence-wise while acknowledging its **centrality when it comes to building partnerships for peace**. Driven by the shared values and vision of the EU and India, the latter has acquired critical defence systems and capabilities for submarines, aircraft carriers, or surveillance and monitoring systems from European countries like France, Germany, UK or Spain. In fact, the **EU defence industries will remain the most important contributor to India's defence and security** in the future. India and the EU have already partnered in the past on counterpiracy as well as in humanitarian relief operations. Nevertheless, since the **bilateral approach remains as the preferred scheme** when it comes to cooperation with the EU in the defence field, India has established deeper defence and security ties with countries like France, prompting discussions for defence-oriented trilaterals, like India-France-Australia or India-France-UAE.

Collaboration for resilience in supply chains

The supply chains of the future, from semiconductors to rare earth, to materials that matter for the Fourth Industrial Revolution, will be a **key joint challenge between India and the EU**. To build resilient supply chains, the EU's partnership with the Quad would be an option that India would appreciate, as the coalition has that goal as one of their agenda priority

items. Moreover, India has gathered **political commitment and resources to create alternative supply chains**, from its incentive schemes for manufacturing to efforts to improve the ease of doing business in India. Some big corporations like Apple have moved a sizable part of its manufacturing from China to India, which not only produce, but also export the products. In fact, India has now an **export surplus in some technological products**, like electronics and mobile communication. Thus, the EU could contribute to India's leadership in leading alternative supply chains.

New transformative models for civil society

Although the EU is a natural partner for India, **a transformative partnership will be needed** for a fruitful and prosper future between both actors. To achieve this transformative bilateral relationship, the EU and India should produce relevant outcomes to the societies in the Indo-Pacific that can affect their daily lives. India and the EU are in a position to **put forward a different growth model on the table** and offer vulnerable countries in the region an alternative to choose from. Moreover, the European Global Gateway and India's economic and development diplomacy could partner and create solutions for rim nations both in the Pacific and Indian Oceans that are **facing the challenge of climate crisis**. A joint global climate fund or a global climate response framework could help these countries in coping with these pressing threats. Offering a new growth model and assisting small nations in the response to the climate challenge could be a first step in the transformative cooperation between India and the EU in the region. EU-India-Latin America trilateral cooperation could be presented as a new model of collaboration for specific sectors and projects in which India is showing renewed interest.

ANNEX 1: INTERVIEW TO DR. SAMIN SARAN BY ANDREA RIZZI. EL PAÍS. PUBLISHED ON THE 9TH OF APRIL OF 2023. TRANSLATION FROM THE ORIGINAL IN SPANISH.

Analyst Samir Saran: “India will not be on anyone’s side”

President of the most influential ‘think tank’ in the Asian country, the expert offers his point of view on the geopolitical and democratic situation in India.

India is experiencing a phase of growing international prominence. It is undergoing a strong economic boom and enjoys an interesting geopolitical position where it is courted by the United States as a partner in the face of the rising influence of China, which concerns both countries. At the same time, India benefits from cheap hydrocarbons from Russia and strengthens ties with non-aligned countries that do not want to be involved in the East-West power struggle. In parallel, there has been an intensification of vibrant criticisms that observe a significant deterioration in the country's democratic quality. The recent investigations at the local BBC headquarters and the conviction of opposition leader Rahul Gandhi symbolize these concerns. The Democracy Quality Index compiled by The Economist Intelligence Unit shows a clear deterioration between 2014 —the year Narendra Modi came to power— and 2022, as does the press freedom index compiled by Reporters Without Borders, where India ranks 150 out of 180.

Samir Saran, President of the Observer Research Foundation (ORF), an independent Indian think tank, offers his point of view on these matters in an interview conducted at the headquarters of IE University in Madrid. He travelled there to attend a meeting organized by the School of Politics, Economics, and Global Affairs of that educational institution, which brought together diplomatic representatives, academics, and experts in international politics. In terms of geopolitics, Saran warns that despite the many convergences with Western democracies, New Delhi will not accept alignment in a bipolar dynamic. He states, "India will not be on anyone's side." Regarding internal affairs, he disagrees with the concerns about the democratic deterioration of the country. ORF, the think tank he presides over, is considered the most influential in the country and ranks 20th worldwide in the ranking compiled by the University of Pennsylvania.

Question. The world is going through a phase of profound changes in international relations. The rise of China, with significant growth over decades and increasingly assertive political leadership in recent years, is a key factor on a global scale and for India's perspective. How does he see it?

Response: The rise of China isn't inherently bad. Their ascent has benefited many, not just within China. The issue lies in what accompanies its economic growth: the Chinese political system, the lack of transparency in decision-making processes, and limited access to

Chinese institutions for those engaging with China. This is problematic. The lack of accountability for decisions that have significant implications for a large portion of the global population is concerning. China is a superpower that does not provide accountability. Dealing with China can feel like dealing with a black box. Additionally, China's military ambitions and its determination to settle historical scores and reshape political boundaries in the Himalayas or the East and South China Seas further complicate matters. Thus, we have an unaccountable superpower seeking to revise the status quo.

Q: ¿How do we respond to this?

R: For the majority of the rational actors with manoeuvrability who desire a fairer and more inclusive world, the response should involve working together to find ways to ensure that China's rise is beneficial rather than malicious. China's assertive policies should be met with an equal dose of strength. We must establish red lines, and, within them, find a framework for economic engagement.

Q: India has historically had a close relationship with Russia, which has clearly aligned itself with Beijing and is involved in an illegal invasion in Ukraine.

R: The past has its legacy and its rhythm. For India, there were two compelling realities. The first reality is that a significant portion of the Western World decided to align itself with Pakistan and effectively denied India access to many necessary combat systems. Thus, the defence relationship with the USSR/Russia was the result of that concrete reality. The second reality was that, for the West, it was more important to associate with a communist China than with a democratic India. There were actions at the United Nations against our interests, sovereignty, and territorial interests. It was the Soviet Union who intervened and vetoed many tough decisions that were being promoted by certain sectors to the detriment of India. There was no one from the free world that showed empathy. Now, if we look towards the future, the scenario is different.

Q: How do you see it?

R: If one wonders where India's growth will come from, the answer lies in our green transitions, the technological revolution, the great push for infrastructure, and our knowledge-based economy supported by a young population. In each of these areas, who are India's natural partners? Tell me any sector where you can see that Russia is the dominant provider of technology or investments, knowledge, or capabilities. The future of India will always depend on our partnerships with the United States, Europe, and East Asian countries such as Japan and South Korea. Russia will continue to be a supplier of fossil fuels and certain raw materials, as well as some defence equipment. However, in the next decade, when India has an annual defence budget of \$200 billion [about 182.000 billion euros] and an investment budget of \$100 billion, the Russian economy will not have the capacity to meet that annual demand. India's growth excludes Russia from any significant partnership unless Russia completely changes its economic architecture.

Q: Will India turn to more Western weaponry?

R: We have already begun acquiring and investing in domestic defence capabilities, and we have incorporated Western security platforms and systems. The era of defence apartheid has ended. However, it needs to be understood that this change will be slower than desired simply because we are engaged on two active fronts. India is fighting in two ongoing conflicts. We cannot afford the luxury of drastic transitions. So, the pace may be slower, but the direction is clear.

Q: India, like China, abstained from voting on the invasion of Ukraine in the UN General Assembly. How should we interpret this abstention?

R: I believe that considering the mentioned past, India's abstention is an important clue, an expression that we do not support what Russia is doing. Along with the abstention, if we look at the statements that have emerged, they are truly condemning this invasion. So, I think India has taken a very balanced and fair approach that says we will not support this, the violation of Ukraine's territorial integrity, even though we refuse to become followers of others with different experiences and political agendas. If we look back at recent history for a moment, we will see that many in the West hated the US invasion of Iraq. But how many voted against the United States at the United Nations? Many supported a false war due to their alliance or friendship and a sense of loyalty and allegiance towards those who had supported them. Why should one expect this from their own and a different set of responses from others? Consistency is a good word for these days.

Q: There is a significant part of the world that does not want to be forced to align in the growing East-West confrontation. Does India want to position itself as the leader of this broad group of countries?

R: I believe the era of naive globalization and naive global politics has come to an end. Now people will make sensible decisions, and those decisions will not be ideologically engraved in their hearts. They will be based on the reality of the moment and what works for their interests, values, and people. The entire global ideological framework of the past century, where you had the Western alliance and the Eastern alliance, is over. India wants to work with all countries that do not want to be pushed into making binary choices. Our economic and technological future lies with certain nations, most of them in Western Europe and the United States, as well as the Middle East and Africa. But our political partnerships will have to serve our policy. We must support certain principles. We must support certain values. We must support certain interests, our interests. Since its independence, India has always stayed away from political factions, and that won't change. A country that represents one-sixth of humanity will not align itself with any side. It will always defend and serve the 16% of the world's population.

Q: There are raising concerns about the state of democracy in India. Recently, opposition leader Rahul Gandhi has been convicted and stripped of his position in Parliament. There

are also reports of raids at the BBC headquarters following the release of a critical documentary about Modi. Is democracy eroding in India?

R: I believe that democracy is much more vibrant now than at any other time in the history of India. Today, there are more people in India who have an opinion and the ability to express it on every decision, every event that takes place and affects their daily lives. They hold their government accountable. People demand transparency and levels of effectiveness. However, it should be noted that we are 1.4 billion people, which basically means that sporadic incidents and events will occur, which in terms of numbers may seem alarming. However, if we consider our size, the per capita incidents will be much lower than in most other parts of the world. Aggregate figures are deceptive for a country of continental size, but English-language media feeds on them and promotes a certain narrative that stems from their own divisions.

Q: What is your opinion on the Gandhi case?

R: It is the outcome of an old case, a verdict from our independent judiciary. He has been declared guilty. There is a legal process, and I'm sure he, his party, and others will challenge the decision. Thus, the process will continue. Currently, we are witnessing police actions and brutality on the streets of France. That same incident in India would have been labelled by Western media as the action of a fascist state. We should refrain from such labelling, and sister democracies should refrain from passing judgment. We are all going through a time where digitalization, mobilization, and individual passions are challenging old institutions, which need to become more modern, agile, and responsive to people in this digital world. In India, we are strengthening our democracy through technology, training, transparency, and accountability. And most importantly, we continue to express our faith in doing so through the ballot box: nationally, once every five years, but every few months, a major region in India undergoes elections. And we have a judicial system that regularly disagrees with the government and overturns its decisions. If you read the recent judgments of the Supreme Court, you will see that the judiciary and other institutions continue to ensure the strength of the checks and balances system in India.