On June 4, 2015, tribal guerrillas killed 20 soldiers and injured several others in an ambush when an Indian military convoy was traveling to the state capital, Imphal, from the town of Motul in the eastern province of Manipur.1 This was one of the most serious attacks on Indian security forces in Manipur for some time. India has struggled to contain the unrest there despite granting its security forces sweeping shoot-to-kill powers in so-called “disturbed areas” under the controversial Armed Forces Special Powers Act (AFSPA).

India’s response to these attacks came five days later when—undeterred by borders and underlining India’s resolve to pre-empt terror threats—the Indian army attacked rebel camps inside Myanmar, destroying two of them and killing up to fifteen rebels. The Army’s message was terse: “while ensuring peace and tranquility along the border and in border states, any threat to our security, safety and national integrity will meet a firm response.”2 The Indian Army said it had “credible and specific intelligence” upon which to carry out the attacks. The director of the office of Myanmar President Thein Sein, Zaw Htay, confirmed a day later that Indian troops had entered his country’s borders. He said that there was “coordination and cooperation” between authorities, but no Myanmar soldiers were directly involved.3

Responding to a query as to whether India could conduct such an operation inside Pakistan, Indian Minister of State for Information and Broadcasting Rajyavardhan Singh Rathore said: “This should be a message to all countries and organizations who foster terrorism against India, including Pakistan.”4 This set off alarm bells in Pakistan, where sections of the media and defense officials suggested that

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the incident could set a precedent for more cross-border raids. Pakistan’s interior minister, Chaudhry Nisar Ali Khan, warned India that “Pakistan is not Myanmar”—a fact all too obvious to most Indians.5

By all accounts, the raid was well planned and competently executed. The operation was important to lift the sagging morale of the armed forces, especially after attacks by insurgents in Manipur. All sections of the government—the intelligence agencies, the armed forces, and the Ministry of External Affairs—worked as an organic whole under the leadership of the prime minister and the national security advisor, a rarity in itself in Indian policymaking. Though the Indian Army had conducted a number of cross-border raids in the past in collaboration with partner countries, including in Myanmar, the speed with which this attack was carried out after the initial terror attacks was not only unprecedented but also demonstrated a new level of confidence among India’s political authorities in wielding hard power.

This raid also seems to suggest the emergence of a multi-layered border policy which includes defensive as well offensive measures to safeguard security at the nation’s troubled frontiers. The government of Prime Minister Nerandra Modi has, from the very beginning, followed a policy of ‘disproportionate response’ to border provocations. It has given Indian troops greater operational autonomy to act aggressively in responding to ceasefire violations by Pakistan,6 which gives Indian troops the much-needed operational space to carve out responses that are swift, sharp, and effective. This underlines the costs of Pakistan’s dangerous escalatory tactics, since India has now authorized massive targeted attacks on Pakistani Ranger posts along the border.

What has worked on the border with Myanmar will clearly not work on India’s western borders against jihadi groups in Pakistan. Cooperation with like-minded states such as Myanmar and Bangladesh will be crucial to deny terror groups safe havens across their borders. The government of Myanmar reportedly approved the Indian plan to send in special forces to attack insurgent camps on its territory. To justify its attack, New Delhi invoked the May 2014 border agreement with Myanmar, which provides a framework for security cooperation and intelligence exchange between the two states.

Despite this, a narrative emerged in India that while the operation was well planned, the political communication was unnecessary and immature. Sections of the media, former diplomats, and armchair strategists converged in suggesting
that the Modi government messed up a fine operation by talking about it—and covert operations, by their very definition, should not be discussed.

But those critics are wrong. Clearly, restraint should be the norm while discussing security operations, but it was important to publicize the Indian Army’s operation in Myanmar. It was imperative for the Modi government to send out a message in unambiguous terms that India retains the ability to hit back at insurgents.

Signaling intent and demonstrating capabilities are both key in establishing and strengthening deterrence in interstate relations. There is a reason why all major powers make a big deal when they resort to the use of their military instruments of hard power. In fact, rather than a junior minister, it would have been better for the National Security Advisor or the Prime Minister himself to speak directly to the people of India about the Myanmar raid and its implications. This is the norm in mature democracies. After all, the message is not simply for a domestic audience; it is also necessary to reassure allies and deter adversaries.

With the raid, New Delhi was sending a clear signal to its adversaries—both state and non-state—that hostilities against India would not go without a robust response. The Myanmar operation was a step towards restoring India’s credibility. But the country has a long way to go so far as strategy is concerned, given India’s vulnerabilities and long history of strategic diffidence. Even the Modi government has typically emphasized Indian soft power credentials in garnering global recognition, though compared to the past there is greater synergy in the application of hard and soft power attributes. India is now using its soft power more effectively to enhance its economic and military power, making a case to its potential partners that its values and cultural attributes make it more attractive to garner foreign investment and defense partnerships.

For Once, a Strategy Emerges … with Soft Power

During his travels, Prime Minister Narendra Modi makes a point of promoting India’s soft power—including Bollywood, Sufi music, and yoga as well as shared heritage in art, architecture, cuisine, and democratic values. It is too early to assess if India’s efforts are having any substantive impact in meeting the nation’s foreign policy objectives, but for the first time, a coherent effort is underway to raise India’s brand value abroad. This is likely to have significant implications for the conduct of Indian diplomacy and the broader role of India in global politics in the coming years.
Releasing its global ranking of soft power, the communications and public relations consultancy Portland has suggested that “Modi’s India is definitely a soft power player to watch in the years ahead.”7 While India does not figure in a list of the top 30 countries in terms of soft power, the new effort underlines Modi’s use of social media to engage, inform, and encourage participation on both foreign- and domestic-policy fronts. Today, India is the world’s seventh most-valued ‘nation brand’ and is the only country, among the BRICS, to have witnessed an increase in its brand value in 2015 with all others—Brazil, Russia, China, and South Africa—seeing a dip in theirs.8

Previous Indian governments recognized the value of soft power to further India’s foreign policy goals, but the attempts were largely ad hoc. Under Modi, India is taking a strategic approach towards using its soft-power resources to enhance the nation’s image abroad, even as soft power’s role in global politics is under debate.9 Consider:

- In July 2015, Modi underscored spiritual linkages between India and Central Asia, marking a contrast with growing extremism around the world by suggesting that “the Islamic heritage of both India and Central Asia is defined by the highest ideals of Islam—knowledge, piety, compassion and welfare.”10 By emphasizing India’s multicultural heritage, Modi undercut prevailing criticisms about his ideological leanings as a Hindu nationalist.

- India’s External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj was keynote speaker for a Sanskrit Conference in Bangkok in June 2015. She spoke in Sanskrit to more than 600 experts from 60 nations, describing the language as “modern and universal,” one the gathering should propagate. Underlining the contemporary relevance of the ancient language, Swaraj argued that proficiency in the language could “go a long way in finding solutions to contemporary problems like global warming, unsustainable consumption, civilizational clash, poverty, terrorism.”11 It was the first time an Indian minister of Swaraj’s rank attended the World Sanskrit Conference outside the country since the group was organized in Delhi in 1972. Perhaps taking a cue from China with its burgeoning Confucius Institutes, the Modi government is taking steps to promote the language internationally with a $20,000 International Sanskrit Award to scholars making significant contributions to the language, to institute fellowships for foreign scholars conducting research in India in Sanskrit language or literature, and to create opportunities for new learners to pursue courses or research in India.

- Yoga may be India’s most successful and popular soft-power tool. Modi led thousands in a mass yoga program in New Delhi on June 21, 2015, the first International Yoga Day. He had lobbied the United Nations and managed to win the support of 175 member states at the General Assembly for the resolution
setting an international day of yoga. Yoga events were held in 251 cities across six continents with 192 countries participating. By taking leadership on this issue, the Modi government was signaling a desire to link India’s past with the world’s future.

India’s soft power has worked its magic before without much government support. This is most notable in the case of Bollywood—the world’s largest film industry in terms of the number of films produced. Indian movies and music are watched and enjoyed in large parts of the world from the Middle East and North Africa to Central Asia. Yet Bollywood trails behind Hollywood in terms of its global reach. Previous governments did create new structures such as a new Ministry of Overseas Indian Affairs in 2004, to tap into the growing influence of Indian expatriates, and a public policy division within the Ministry of External Affairs in 2006 to enhance cultural exchanges in support of official diplomatic engagements.

Yet so far, little evidence exists to suggest that India, for all its many soft-power advantages, has made a dent in global public opinion. According to a 2013 Pew Global Attitudes survey, fewer than half, or 46 percent, of Americans have a favorable impression of India. Compared to the British Council, Alliance Française, and even the Confucius Institutes, the performance of the Indian Council for Cultural Relations, with centers in about 35 countries aimed at promoting Indian culture, has been lackadaisical. India has failed to build its brand value abroad.

Recognizing this, the Modi government seems keener than its predecessors to leverage India’s multifaceted soft-power resources from spiritualism, yoga, and culture to its democratic ethos in the service of Indian interests. In diplomatic engagements around the world, even as economic turmoil in the West is generating apprehensions about the value of democracy, the Modi government consistently highlights India’s democratic credentials and the virtues of a democratic political order. Even when he visited Mongolia, Modi praised the nation as the “new bright light of democracy” in the world, thereby marking a distinction between the democratic values of India as well as Mongolia and those of authoritarian China.

The Modi government’s attempt to leverage soft power is meant to better position New Delhi at a critical juncture. Modi wants to not only revive national pride in the country’s ancient values, but also enhance India’s hard power by using its soft-power advantages. India today is more confident about projecting its past heritage as well as its contemporary values on to the global stage, and this can only be good news for a global order in dire need of positive exemplars. An economically successful, pluralistic democracy is the best antidote.
to authoritarianism and extremism rampant around the world. But for this to happen, India will have to learn to meld its soft power with hard power more effectively, something that has been missing in the past.

**Hard Power’s Evolving Trajectory in India**

To be clear, India’s foreign policy matrix has not lacked the use of hard power altogether. By contributing nearly 100,000 military, police, and civilian personnel as part of more than 45 operations so far, India has played a vital role in UN peacekeeping activities. Along with Bangladesh and Pakistan, India has been one of the top three sources of peacekeeping contributions. Many important UN operations like those in Democratic Republic of Congo, Eritrea–Ethiopia, Kosovo, Liberia, Sierra Leone, and Sudan have had the presence of Indian troops and police personnel. This is despite significant domestic demands on Indian security forces to tackle insurgencies in different parts of the country. Like other contributing states, India has also faced the dilemma of using force when the ground situation warranted without undermining the neutrality of UN blue helmets. While not shying away from undertaking robust measures, India has, as a matter of principle, emphasized the danger of mixing traditional features of peacekeeping—like non-use of force and non-partisanship—with peace enforcement and peacemaking, as tended to happen during the post-Cold War phase.14

While India has been a great votary of the UN globally, until the 1980s New Delhi has tended to resist intervention within South Asia by forces from outside the region. Instead, it has relied more heavily on its own use of force. New Delhi viewed Western intervention in the region as inimical to its interests, though it could not keep great powers out of its periphery. India’s regional security doctrine has been summed up aptly by South Asian expert Devin T. Hagerty: “India strongly opposes outside intervention in the domestic affairs of other South Asian nations, especially by outside powers whose goals are perceived to be inimical to Indian interests. Therefore, no South Asian government should ask for outside assistance, it should seek it from India. A failure to do so will be considered anti-India.”15

The non-intervention principle has always been one of the main official strands of Indian foreign policy. Historically, even as it berated the West for interfering in what it perceived to be internal matters of other sovereign states, New Delhi has never been shy of intervening in what it considered its own ‘sphere of influence.’ In justifying the use of force to evict Portugal from Goa in 1961, India’s first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, underlined that “any attempt by a foreign power to interfere in any way with India is a thing which India cannot tolerate, and which, subject to her strength, she will oppose.”16 It has been suggested that
even though the Indian version of the Monroe Doctrine, involving spheres of influence, has not been fully successful in the past, nevertheless “it has been an article of faith for many in the Indian strategic community.”

When it comes to the subcontinent, Indian policymakers have often suggested that New Delhi retains a special role in maintaining peace and order. This, not surprisingly, has shaped the perception of India’s immediate neighbors in South Asia about India’s often hypocritical commitment to the principle of non-intervention, as most of them have found themselves at the receiving end of Indian interventions. In consonance with this worldview, India has used coercive policies in its own vicinity to assert its regional supremacy. New Delhi’s failed counterinsurgency campaign in Sri Lanka from 1983–1990, its 1988 deployment of special forces to prevent an attempted coup by mercenaries in the Maldives, and the 1989–90 trade blockade of Nepal after Kathmandu’s decision to buy weapons from China underscore this tendency. Despite its historical rhetoric globally, India had used coercion in dealing with its neighbors quite frequently, though after the Sri Lanka debacle, it has been averse to the use of hard power even in its own neighborhood for the last 25 years.

With over 1.3 million men and women in uniform, and an additional one million in reserve, the Indian armed forces constitute the third-largest volunteer war-fighting force in the world. Sustained rates of high economic growth over the last decade have given India greater resources to devote to its defense requirements. India has emerged as one of the largest arms buyers in the global market in the last few years, accounting for 15 percent of the global arms imports from 2010–2014. It has spent over $120 billion on arms acquisitions over the last fifteen years, and will spend another estimated $120 billion in the coming decade. In the initial years after independence in 1947, India’s defense expenditure as a percentage of the GDP hovered around 1.8 percent. This changed with the 1962 war with China, in which India suffered a humiliating defeat due to its lack of defense preparedness. Over the next 25 years, Indian defense expenditure eventually stabilized around 3 percent of GDP.

Over the past two decades, the military expenditure of India has been around 2.75 percent, but since India has been experiencing significantly higher rates of economic growth over the last decade compared to any other time in its history, the overall resources that it has been able to allocate to its defense needs have grown significantly. As a result, India has asserted its military profile in the past decade, setting up military facilities abroad and patrolling the Indian Ocean to counter piracy and protect lines of communication. As its strategic horizons become broader, military acquisition is shifting from land-based systems to airborne refueling systems, long-range missiles, and other means of power.
projection with all three services articulating the need to be able to operate beyond India’s borders.

Yet, fundamental vulnerabilities continue to ail Indian defense policy. All three services regularly complain of resource shortages. During the 1999 Kargil conflict, a lack of adequate equipment hampered operations. Only because the conflict remained largely confined to the 150-kilometer front in the Kargil sector did India manage to obtain the upper hand, ejecting Pakistani forces from its side of the Line-of-Control (LoC). India lacked the ability to impose significant military costs on Pakistan not only during the 2001–02 Operation Parakram—the military mobilization against Pakistan after the December 2001 terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament—but even after the Mumbai terror attacks of November 2008 due to an unavailability of suitable weaponry and night-vision equipment needed to carry out swift surgical strikes.19

As India’s weight has grown in the international system in recent years, so has a perception that India is on the cusp of achieving “great power” status. It is repeated ad nauseum in the Indian and often global media, and India is already being asked to behave like one by assuming global responsibilities in consonance with its growing material capabilities. Yet, Indian policymakers themselves do not seem clear as to what this status of a great power entails. A significant constraint that India faces is its discomfort with the very notion of power, and in particular its wariness of the use of “hard power.”

All major powers throughout history have demonstrated an ability to skillfully use the military as an effective instrument of national policy. But in India’s case, it has been unclear under what conditions it would be willing to use force to defend its interests. Even the decision by the Indian Navy to patrol the Gulf of Aden in 2008 was not an easy one, with the civilian leadership dragging its feet in granting its naval forces permission to tackle piracy. New Delhi remained hesitant to expand its military presence in Afghanistan, withholding sending weapons to the Afghan government despite its repeated requests, even when it was evident that India’s soft power was not yielding any dividends for Indian diplomacy.20 The Indian armed forces remain obsessed with China and Pakistan while the civilian leadership lacks a substantive understanding of the role of force in foreign policy. India’s reluctance to evolve a more sophisticated understanding of power, and of military power in particular, will continue to underline the strategic diffidence that has come to be associated with Indian foreign and security policy.
India’s Lack of Instinct for Power

A fundamental quandary that has long dogged India in the realm of foreign affairs—and that has become even more acute with India’s ascent in the international order—is what has been referred to as India’s lack of an “instinct for power.”

Power lies at the heart of international politics; it affects the influence that states exert over one another, thereby shaping political outcomes. The success and failure of a nation’s foreign policy is largely a function of its power, and the manner in which it wields that power. The exercise of power can be shocking and at times corrupting, but power is absolutely necessary to fight the battles that must be fought. India faces a unique conundrum: its political elites desperately want global recognition for India as a major power and all the prestige and authority associated with it. Yet, they continue to be reticent about the acquisition and use of power in foreign affairs.

This Indian ambivalence about the use of power in international relations—where “any prestige or authority eventually [relies] upon traditional measures of power, whether military or economic”—is curious. Indian political elites have rarely shied away from maximizing power in the realm of domestic politics, often corroding the institutional fabric of liberal democracy in the country. In what has been diagnosed as a “mini-state syndrome,” states that do not have the material capabilities to make a difference to international outcomes often denounce the concept of power in foreign policymaking. India had long been one such state, viewing itself as an object of the foreign policies of more powerful nations.

As a consequence, the Indian political and strategic elite developed a suspicion of power politics, with the word ‘power’ itself acquiring a pejorative connotation. The relationship between power and foreign policy was never fully understood, leading to a progressive loss in India’s ability to wield power effectively in the international realm. India’s ambivalence about power and its use has resulted in a situation where, even as India’s economic and military capabilities have gradually expanded, it has failed to evolve a commensurate strategic agenda and requisite institutions so as to be able to mobilize and use its resources most optimally. This has most significantly affected the role that the Indian military has come to play in the nation’s strategic decision-making.

Marginalization of the Military

Indian politicians after independence in 1947 viewed the Indian Army with suspicion, as the last supporters of the British Raj did their best to isolate the military from policy and influence. This attitude was further reinforced by the views of two giants of the Indian nationalist movement, Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru. Gandhi’s ardent belief in non-violence left little room for accepting the
role of the use of force in an independent India. Although he was assassinated in 1948, his belief also shaped the views on military and defense of the first generation of post-independence political leaders in India.

More important has been the legacy of Nehru, India’s first Prime Minister (1947–1964), who laid the institutional foundations for civil–military relations in India. His obsession with economic development was only matched by his disdain and distrust of the military, subsequently sidelining defense planning in India.24 He also ensured that the experiences in neighboring Pakistan, where the military had become the dominant political force soon after independence, would not be repeated in India by institutionalizing civilian supremacy over the country’s military apparatus. The civilian elite also did not want the emergence of a rival elite with direct access to political leadership.

Stephen Rosen, in his study of the impact of societal structures on the military effectiveness of a state, argues that the separation of the Indian military from Indian society, while preserving the coherence of the Indian army, has led to a reduction in the effective military power of the Indian state.25 While India, unlike its immediate neighbors, has been successful in evolving a sustained tradition of strict civilian control over the military since its independence, India has been unable to evolve institutions and procedures that would allow the military to substantially participate in the national security decision-making processes. This has significantly reduced the effectiveness with which India can wield its military as an instrument of national power.

**Historical Aversion to Use Force**

A nation’s vital interests, in the ultimate analysis, can only be preserved and enhanced if a nation has sufficient power capabilities at its disposal. But a nation must not only possess such capabilities, it must also have a willingness to employ the required forms of power to pursue those interests. Nehru envisioned making India a global leader without any help from the nation’s armed forces, arguing “the right approach to defense is to avoid having unfriendly relations with other countries—to put it differently, war today is, and ought to be, out of question.”26 War has been systematically factored out of the Indian foreign policy and national security matrix, resulting in ambiguity about India’s ability to withstand major wars of the future.
Few nations face the kind of security challenges that confront India. Yet since its independence, India never saw the military as a central instrument to achieve its national priorities, meaning that Indian political elites tended to downplay the importance of military power. India ignored the defense sector after independence, and paid inadequate attention to its defense needs. While policymakers themselves had little knowledge of critical defense issues, defense forces had little or no role in formulating defense policy until the war with China in 1962. Divorcing foreign policy from military power was a recipe for disaster, as India realized in that year when even Nehru was forced to concede that “military weakness has been a temptation, and a little military strength may be a deterrent.” But even after the catastrophic defeat in 1962, while Indian policymakers gave greater operational autonomy to the nation’s armed forces, they failed to envision any strategic role for the nation’s military. So from one crisis to another, the Indian military was used in an ad hoc manner in India’s vicinity, which also came to an abrupt end with the fiasco in Sri Lanka in 1990. India’s unsuccessful counterinsurgency campaign made New Delhi even more risk-averse in thinking about the utility of the military as an instrument of foreign policy.

**Strategic Cultural and Institutional Deficit**

India’s ability to think strategically on issues of national security remains at best questionable. A state can pursue strategy once it has not only achieved a legitimate monopoly on violence, but also when it is free of the coercive violence of other states. This has not been the case with India—not only do its neighboring adversaries question the Indian state’s monopoly on violence, so do an array of internal groups from terrorists to Maoists. In 2014, India was ranked 6th out of 162 nations most affected by terrorism.

In his classic study on Indian strategic thought, George Tanham underscored some other reasons why Indian elites have shown little evidence of having thought coherently and systematically about national strategy. He argued that this lack of long-term planning and strategy owes largely to India’s historical and cultural developmental patterns. These include the Hindu view of life as largely unknowable—thereby being outside man’s control—and the Hindu concept of time as eternal—thereby discouraging planning. As a consequence, Tanham argued that India has been on the strategic defensive throughout its history, reluctant to assert itself except within the subcontinent. While Tanham’s viewpoint remains controversial, it manages to raise some important issues about India’s strategic culture, or lack thereof, and its implications.

A major consequence of the lack of any Indian strategic culture is a perceptible lack of institutionalization of foreign policymaking in India. At its very foundation, Indian democracy is sustained by a range of institutions from the more
formal ones of the executive, legislative, and the judiciary to the less formal ones of the broader civil society. It is these institutions that, in large measure, have allowed Indian democracy to thrive and flourish for more than fifty years, despite a number of constraints that have led to the failure of democracy in many other societies. In the realm of foreign policy, however, it is the lack of institutionalization that has allowed long-term drift to set in.

Some have laid the blame on Nehru for his unwillingness to construct strategic planning architecture because he single-handedly shaped Indian foreign policy during his tenure. But even his successors have failed to pursue institutionalization in a consistent manner. A state infrastructure able to coordinate and integrate national resources toward the ends of policy specified by the civilian leadership is a necessary requirement for successful grand strategy. Contemporary debate on Indian power projection implicitly admits this lack of capability and seeks to redress this problem. India will need to make requisite institutional changes and bring the diplomatic and military instruments together as a unified whole in order to effectively wield the military as an instrument of state policy.

Does Modi Have an Instinct for Power?

There are signs, however, that the Modi government is beginning to build a new approach to India’s power conundrum. India’s National Security Advisor, Ajit Doval, has suggested that “India has a mentality to punch below its weight” and argued that “we [India] should not punch below our weight or above our weight, but improve our weight and punch proportionately.” Underlining that a “nation will have to take recourse to all means to protect itself,” Doval has argued that “if you are not able to exercise power, it is as good as not having it.” With this, Doval is challenging India’s traditional wariness in the use of power in pursuit of national objectives and its failure to harness power effectively.

India’s friends and enemies have long stopped taking India seriously as a military power. A nation’s vital interests, in the ultimate analysis, can only be preserved and enhanced if the nation has sufficient power capabilities at its disposal. But India must also have a willingness to employ the required forms of power in pursuit of those interests.

India’s lack of an instinct for power is most palpable in the realm of the military where, unlike other major global powers of the past and the present, India has failed to master the creation, deployment, and use of its military instruments in support of its national objectives. A state’s legitimacy is tied to its ability to monopolize the use of force and operate effectively in an international strategic environment, and India has lacked clarity on this relationship between the use of force and its strategic priorities.
The Modi government has indicated that it is willing to take some serious steps toward rectifying some of the problems identified above and to rethink the role of the military as an instrument of foreign and security policy. From giving greater operational autonomy to the military in border areas to re-envisioning India’s defense policy as an integral part of diplomacy, Indian strategic evolution has entered uncharted waters. India is now undertaking military exercises with like-minded states in Asia and beyond—including the United States, Japan, Australia, and Vietnam—something that was thought of as controversial in light of China’s past reservations. New Delhi has decided to move ahead and deliver Indian Air Force attack helicopter gunships to Kabul to buttress Indo-Afghan security ties. India is wading into the South China Sea dispute between China and its neighbors by not only calling for “freedom of navigation in international waters, the right of passage and over-flight, unimpeded commerce and access to resources in accordance with recognized principles of international law including the 1982 UN Convention on the Law of the Sea,” but also agreeing to cooperate with the United States in “safeguarding maritime security and ensuring freedom of navigation and over flight throughout the region, especially in the South China Sea.” Defense and security cooperation is now integral to India’s outreach to its partners from Europe to Africa. There is a newfound focus on making India less reliant on foreign sources for military hardware. But these are early days.

India’s rise as a major global player will depend on the ability of the nation’s policymakers to leverage their hard power more effectively than before. For a long time, the use of hard power by New Delhi had lacked a clear sense of purpose. The armed forces seemed to be operating in a strategic void under a civilian leadership unable to fully comprehend the changing strategic and operational milieu. At a time when Indian interests are becoming global in nature, India has been forced to update its approach, even if in fits and starts. It is up to the civilian leadership to come up with a credible policy on the use of armed forces and it is up to the military leadership to provide them with sound guidance.

India has always been a nation of great ambition. It has not been clear, however, if the Indian elites understand the implications of their nation’s rise. India can no longer afford to sit on the sidelines of unfolding global events which impinge directly on its vital interests. What is the point of building muscle, if India continues to shy away from a fight? The Modi government seems to be more aware of this than its predecessors. But it is too early to assess if the initial steps taken by the Modi government will be enough to alter India’s strategic evolution.
Notes


3. Ibid.


9. For a detailed discussion on soft power and its changing role in global politics, see Inderjeet Parmar and Michael Cox (eds), Soft Power and US Foreign Policy, (London, Routledge, 2010).


32. Ibid., p. 34.


34. Srinath Rao, “NSA Ajit Doval underlines use of power: India should stop punching below its weight,” Indian Express, August 5, 2015.

35. For an overview of the challenges facing contemporary Indian defence policy, see Harsh V. Pant, Handbook of Indian Defence Policy: Themes, Structures and Doctrines (London: Routledge, 2015).

