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# Not Promoting, Not Exporting: India's Democracy Assistance

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India is commonly – and rightly – considered a reluctant democracy promoter. But while sceptical about the motives behind Western attempts to promote democracy and about the effects of their democracy promotion efforts, India has since the mid-2000s moved warily to involve itself in “democracy assistance”. This article argues that New Delhi has engaged in these activities in the context of a wider shift in strategy, in parallel with the forging of a strategic partnership with the United States and with growing concern about managing China's influence in South Asia. It observes that India's foreign policy elite still has considerable doubts about democracy promotion, both in terms of its inconsistency with basic international norms, especially state sovereignty, non-interference, and non-intervention, and in terms of its patchy recent record of success. It argues that India's approach to democracy assistance, which involves a blend of multilateral and bilateral initiatives, most aimed at South Asia, and most in parallel with better-funded economic development projects, reflects these various pressures and concerns.

**Keywords**

India, Indian Foreign Policy, Democracy Promotion, Democracy Assistance

**Introduction**

India is wary of “democracy promotion”, despite its extraordinary – if not unblemished<sup>1</sup> – record in maintaining its democratic institutions since independence in 1947 (Mazumdar & Statz 2015, pp. 77-78; cf. Cartright 2009; Choedon 2015; Kugiel 2012; Mallavarapu 2010; Mishra 2012; Mohan 2007; Muni 2009).

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<sup>1</sup> India's democratic processes were suspended during the “Emergency” called by Prime Minister Indira Gandhi between June 1975 and March 1977. In addition, successive governments have postponed elections and curbed constitutional rights in certain Indian States by the imposition of President's Rule, notably in Jammu and Kashmir between 1990 and 1996 and in Punjab State in the mid-1980s and again between 1987 and 1992.

To some, this is a concern. India's apparent unwillingness to promote democratic norms and institutions generates worries, especially among Western observers, about the extent to which it will defend and extend the so-called "liberal international order" (see *inter alia* Faust and Wagner 2010; Piccone 2016, pp. 75-81). For a number of analysts, it suggests that despite India's growing economic, political and military power, New Delhi is reluctant to take on greater responsibility for upholding that order and for providing global public goods (Destradi 2012; Destradi 2014; Destradi 2017; Dormandy 2007; Mehta 2011). For others, it highlights a lack of appropriate capacity to deliver policies like democracy promotion in India's notoriously over-stretched and under-staffed foreign policy bureaucracy (Mazumdar & Statz 2015, p. 81; cf. Chatterjee Miller 2013).

This article takes a step back from these wider debates about what India's lack of enthusiasm for democracy promotion, as practiced by Western states and institutions, might mean for the liberal order. It notes, as a number of analyses have shown (e.g. Choedon 2015; Mazumdar & Statz 2015), that India's reluctance to endorse those Western practices does not imply that it is wholly disinterested in supporting democratic transitions or helping to strengthen existing democracies. Like those studies, this article observes that even though India remains wary of democracy promotion, it does engage in "democracy assistance", and its approach in this area is growing and evolving. It argues that India's approach to democracy assistance has been shaped by the coalescence of the view in New Delhi that working in this area may help to further both its partnership with the United States and its efforts to manage some of the challenges generated by China's rise. India's policymakers now perceive that the spread and consolidation of democracy, including in South Asia, may align with what they see as the country's economic and security interests. But it also argues that India's approach to democracy assistance has been shaped by long-standing commitments to non-intervention and non-interference that date back to the postcolonial period and newer doubts arising from critical assessments of the mixed consequences of Western democracy promotion in the post-Cold War period.

Throughout, this article takes an interpretivist approach, one that holds that social actions are better explained by reference to the meanings that they have for the actors who perform them than to theories of power-maximisation or rational choice (Lynch 2014). Interpretivists explain political behaviour by analysing what policies mean for those carrying them out, referring to traditions of thought inherited by political actors and the beliefs they hold, insofar as the critical assessment of the texts they produce – speeches, statements, memoirs, and so on – provides sufficient and compelling evidence for them (Hall 2014, pp. 308-309). This interpretivist approach is well suited to analysis of Indian foreign policy because of the small size and relative intellectual cohesion of the relevant political

and bureaucratic elite in New Delhi, its clear past preferences for policies that diverge from those predicted by realism or rational choice, and its long-recognised relative insulation from the influence of a range of societal actors that can affect decision-making in democracies, such as parliamentary scrutiny, public opinion, institutional structure, coalition politics, and business interests.<sup>2</sup>

### **The Rise of Democracy Promotion**

Democracy promotion covers a wide range of practices in contemporary international relations that aim to extend the institutions and norms of democratic government to hitherto non-democratic states. They include regime change by military intervention or political subversion, diplomatic engagement with elites, the manipulation of economic incentives, the use of public diplomacy or propaganda, and the setting of conditions in international agreements. Although not unknown before the end of the Cold War,<sup>3</sup> these practices have been used far more extensively, and in more determined and strategic ways, since that conflict ended, with the twin objectives of extending democracy to societies hitherto ruled by authoritarian regimes and extending the “democratic peace” (see Russett 1994). Democracy promotion became a major part of the European Union’s external policy after the conclusion of the Treaty on European Union in 1991, which committed the organization to the international promotion of democracy and human rights (Manners 2002, p. 241). It became a key feature of American foreign policy under President Bill Clinton (1993-2001) (Carothers 1995) and was pursued assertively by the George W. Bush administration (Carothers 2003). During the 1990s and 2000s, democracy promotion was merged into the broader “good governance” agendas of international institutions, with conditionality used as an instrument for encouraging and consolidating political reform in transitioning states (Kapur & Naim 2005).

For a decade or so, democracy promotion through traditional and public diplomacy, aid and education programs, and the wielding of economic sticks and carrots mostly paid off. Between the collapse of the Berlin Wall and the 9/11 terrorist attacks, it helped consolidate the “third wave” of democratization that saw political transitions from authoritarian rule to nascent democracy in Eastern Europe and significant parts of Africa and Asia, including in major states like South Korea and Indonesia (Huntington 1991).

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<sup>2</sup> The prevailing consensus is that in India, the core executive – concentrated in the Prime Minister’s Office and the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), including politicians with relevant portfolios (principally the Prime Minister and the External Affairs, Defence, Home, and Finance Ministers) and key officials (the Foreign Secretary and National Security Advisor, above all), as well as political advisors and officials who provide advice or deliver action – makes foreign policy. See Schaffer and Schaffer 2016. For challenges to the consensus, see Hansel, Khan and Levallant 2017.

<sup>3</sup> For a history of US democracy promotion, see Cox, Lynch & Bouchet 2013.

In the early 2000s, however, the ideological consensus underpinning democracy promotion began to fragment, as the George W. Bush administration integrated it into its post-9/11 national security agenda and the United States (US) pushed harder for “regime change”, especially in the Muslim world. The set of instruments used for democracy promotion was broadened to include the use of military force or political subversion. President Bush’s 2002 National Security Strategy took an uncompromising line, declaring “freedom, democracy, and free enterprise” the “single sustainable model for national success”, and making their promotion core to American foreign policy (Department of State 2002, p. iii-iv). The construction of a post-Taliban government in Afghanistan was framed in these terms, as was the toppling of Saddam Hussein in Iraq, especially after the failure to locate the Weapons of Mass Destruction that had been the original *casus bellum* (Dalacoura 2005). Later efforts to encourage democratic transitions in the Middle East during and after the so-called “Arab Spring” in 2011 were also understood in these terms, notwithstanding the more ambivalent stance taken on democracy promotion by Barack Obama’s administration (Hanau Santini & Hassan 2012).

The mixed success of these efforts, evident as the Taliban revived itself in Afghanistan and began to challenge President Hamid Karzai’s nascent, quasi-democratic government, and as Islamist insurgency grew in Iraq, led many to question the wisdom of democracy promotion as a project (Kopstein 2006). The results of the Arab Spring, which brought a peaceful transition in Tunisia, but instability and bloodshed in Egypt, and civil war in both Libya and Syria, compounded this scepticism in the minds of many in the West and outside it, even among ardent liberal democrats (see, for example, Fukuyama 2015). By the mid-2010s, moreover, the resurgence of Russia under the authoritarian Vladimir Putin, the rise of China, and the backsliding of some hitherto transitioning governments towards increasingly illiberal or undemocratic practices, contributed to a growing sense that Western practices of democracy promotion has been less successful than hoped, and democracy was being and could be rolled back (Diamond 2016).

### **India and Democracy Promotion**

India’s emergence as a putative democracy promoter began only towards the end of 1990s, as Western efforts were starting to come under strain. In the context of a broader dialogue with the US initiated after the 1998 nuclear tests, as Mazumdar and Statz observe, India took some small steps towards a democracy promotion agenda of sorts, consistent with India’s traditional preference for multilateralism and the United Nations (UN) system, and driven by a broader “desire to improve [India’s] relationship with the US” and enhance “its status as an emerging power” (Mazumdar and Statz 2015, p. 87). As Bill Clinton’s administration reached out to India via Strobe Talbott’s back-channel negotiations with Jaswant Singh on the nuclear issue (see Singh 2007; Talbott 2004), India hosted a World Move-

ment for Democracy conference in 1999, an event which had financial backing from the US National Endowment for Democracy; issued a joint “Vision Statement” with the US promising to nurture and strengthen democratic institutions (quoted in Choedon 2015, p. 162); and worked closely with Secretary of State Madeleine Albright on a proposal for a new initiative, the Community of Democracies (CD) forum, launched in mid-2000 (Mazumdar & Statz 2015, p. 83).

This new, limited engagement with aspects of the international democracy promotion effort was notable for several reasons. First, it occurred in the absence of any obvious clamour in its favour from the academic or think tank community in New Delhi. At this time, most Indian intellectuals and analysts interested in foreign policy were broadly sceptical about such practices, especially when used by the US. Indian elite opinion, long critical of the aims and methods of US foreign policy, remained through the 1990s suspicious of Washington’s motives and capacities.<sup>4</sup> Prominent Indian intellectuals and analysts were coruscating, in particular, about American efforts to use the “unipolar moment” to bring about a global democratic peace (see, for example, Kanwal 1999a & 1999b). Leading thinkers were also vocal in their opposition to all forms of interventionism, from the use of force in humanitarian crises to attempts to use economic sanctions to bring about political transitions (see Hall 2013, pp. 90-93).

It is clear, however, that whatever reservations existed outside government, Indian policymakers began to perceive merit in establishing a stronger partnership with the US, and that this helped facilitate official dialogue on democracy promotion. The back-channel talks, combined with high profile visits from Bill Clinton (in 2000), George W. Bush (2006), and their officials, the deliberate effort by Washington to “de-hyphenate” relations with India and Pakistan, the changed context of post 9/11 South Asia, with greater US involvement in fighting terrorism Afghanistan and Pakistan, and the rise of China all helped to shift perceptions in New Delhi (Mohan 2007, pp. 103-107). Although many analysts and policymakers continued to doubt the wisdom of American foreign policy behaviour, notably with regard to the invasion of Iraq in 2003 and the management of the Islamist insurgency that followed, key figures began to see India and the US as “natural allies”, as Vajpayee put it in 2000 (Ollapally 2004, p. 1). This laid the groundwork for the US-India nuclear deal (concluded 2005, in force 2008) and the ten-year Defence Cooperation Framework Agreement (also concluded 2005), but also for multilateral democracy promotion projects like the Global Democracy Initiative (GDI), announced at the same time, at the same Bush-Singh Summit, as the nuclear deal (Hall 2016, pp. 273-274).

Second, as Mazumdar and Statz rightly observe, India’s hedged endorsement of

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<sup>4</sup> This is not to say that Indian analysts have not been interested in the topic or its foreign policy implications. See, for example, Sondhi 2000.

democracy promotion was bipartisan (2015, p. 82). Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's Hindu nationalist Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led coalition took India into the CD and helped form the IBSA forum – a self-conscious binding together of developing democracies – with Brazil and South Africa (Chitalkar & Malone 2011, p. 84). But it was Manmohan Singh's Congress-led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) government, which ruled from 2004 to 2014, which in mid-2005 took India into the GDI and began to make generous contributions to the newly created UN Democracy Fund (UNDEF) (Mazumdar and Statz 2015, p. 83). Between 2006 – the UNDEF's first year of operation – and 2013, the UPA government was a major donor, giving some US\$31.5m to the UNDEF, compared to \$47.6m provided by the US over the same period (United Nations Democracy Fund 2017a). In 2004 India also helped form the United Nations Democracy Caucus (UNDC) – the “only body within the United Nations system to convene democratic states based on shared values instead of regional affiliation” (Community of Democracies 2017; cf. Delcourt and Wilen 2009), although it declined an American offer to lead it (Mohan 2007, p. 105). Throughout these years, moreover, prominent Indian politicians from both sides of the political divide made more public and unequivocal statements in favour of democracy as a form of government (Chitalkar & Malone 2011, p. 84; Choedon 2015, p. 163; Mazumdar and Statz 2015, p. 82).

Third, it is evident in retrospect that India's change of position signalled a deeper shift in New Delhi's perceptions of its international interests, which was most clear in its changing attitudes to democracy in South Asia. Whereas India had earlier taken shown itself mostly indifferent to the nature of regional state regimes, in both rhetoric and practice, and tended to prioritise its security interests if they came into conflict with support for a democratic regime (Chitalkar & Malone 2011, p. 83), it began to take seriously the proposition that democratic governments might generally better serve its economic and security interests than non-democratic ones (Muni 2009). True, some of its enthusiasm for defending democracy in South Asia was motivated by a search for instruments with which to pressure Pakistan. India's backing of the Commonwealth of Nations' condemnation of the ouster of Prime minister Nawaz Sharif by General Pervez Musharraf in 1999 can be seen in that light (Mazumdar & Statz 2015, p. 83), as can, in part at least, India's support for post-Taliban governments in Kabul (Destradi 2014; Joshi 2014). True too, New Delhi's new found sympathy for democracy in the region was shaped by concerns about China's growing influence in its neighbourhood, reflecting the view that democratic governments may be more capable of withstanding Beijing's entreaties (Cartright 2009, p. 425; Lahiri 2017, p. 42). It is clear that India's close involvement in the democratic transition in Nepal, and its willing engagement of the US in that process, was moved in part by a desire to see a legitimate government in Kathmandu capable of managing the pressures on

the country generated by China (Mazumdar & Statz 2015, 85-86; 89-90; Mehta 2011, pp. 108-109). But it was also equally clear that where New Delhi perceived that it should distance itself from democratic forces in order to maintain some influence with an authoritarian state, as it did with Burma / Myanmar from the early 1990s until the mid-2010s, it would do so (Egreteau 2011).

Fourth, India's partial engagement with democracy promotion was part of a wider move to try to build India's "soft power" (Nye 1990) – and to reinvigorate its capacity to act as a kind of "normative power" in international relations. In the late 1940s and 50s, India tried to establish itself as a moral leader – a campaigner against colonialism and racism, and for national self-determination and nuclear disarmament – drawing on South Asia's extraordinary cultural and intellectual inheritance (Chacko 2012, pp. 190-106). By the 1970s, however, India's influence had deliquesced. Since then, successive governments have sought to reclaim the idea of India as a normative power, with pushes to improve its public diplomacy to acquire and use soft power (Hall 2012; Hall 2017). Leveraging India's democratic experience as a model for other developing states of how to manage a large, economically, linguistically and religiously diverse polity is increasingly part of that effort. Manmohan Singh's twin observations, made in 2005, that "[l]iberal democracy is the natural order of political organisation in today's world" and that India has "a obligation to history and mankind to show that pluralism works" captures this new mood (quoted in Mohan 2007, p. 99).

Finally – and crucially – as India's calibrated involvement with democracy promotion progressed, it became increasingly clear that its approach was carefully hedged to manage elite concerns in New Delhi and the possibility that it might generate negative perceptions of India in South Asia or further afield. Many in the policy-making elite continue to argue that India can do more to promote democracy by making it work at home, and serving as an example to others. As Mehta puts it, "India's own success will do far more for democracy promotion than any overtly ideological push in that direction could ever hope to accomplish" (2011, p. 112; cf. Khilnani et al. 2012). Powerful voices remain straightforwardly opposed to extending democracy by regime change or by transgressing the norms of non-interference and non-intervention (see, for example, Puri 2016). The consensus view is that when support to others is provided, it ought to take place with the consent of the target state, only after an invitation is issued by a state (Muni 2009, p. 16). When it is provided, moreover, it should be delivered under multilateral auspices or under formal state-to-state agreements (Mazumdar & Statz 2015, pp. 86-87). For these reasons, authoritative analysts argue that India's approach is better understood as "democracy assistance" or "democratic support" (Cheodon 2015, p. 164). The next section analyses this approach in detail.

## **India's Democracy Assistance**

India's support for spreading and consolidating democracy internationally and in South Asia has a distinctive style best assessed in comparison with the better known US and EU models. The first – the US model – blends a “bottom-up” approach of nurturing pro-democratic civil society groups with “top-down” diplomatic, economic, or even military pressure, involving the use of coercive instruments wielded against anti-democratic elements in target states (McFaul 2004; cf. Kopstein 2006). This approach includes a range of activities – funding pro-democracy NGOs directly or through privately-funded foundations, providing education and training programs, organizing visits and study tours for parliamentarians to Washington or other democratic state national capitals, providing legal advice on constitutions and legislation, targeting aid and assistance packages, and running pro-democracy public diplomacy campaigns – and a range of actors, mostly coordinated by the State Department and US Agency for International Development (USAID) (Epstein, Serafino & Miko 2007). On occasion, sanctions may be applied on states seen to be backsliding from democratic norms and human rights protections, like those used on Venezuela from 2014 (Department of State 2017), or force may be used to restore democratic governments, as in Haiti in 1994-95 or depose authoritarian one, as in Iraq in 2003.

The second – the EU model – is different, involving a “top-down” approach in which attempts are made to diffuse democratic values and norms through a target state by educating and socialising its political elite, by conditionality written into cooperation or accession agreements, by using trade, investment, aid, and assistance as instruments of influence, and by conventional diplomatic persuasion (Manners 2002). These efforts are intertwined with broader human rights and “good governance” programs, which in the first area can involve specific sanctions where rights abuses occur and in the second can involve a range of technical assistance and training initiatives (Young 2009, p. 898). The EU also funds NGOs, but tends to focus on those engaged in rights promotion and protection (Youngs 2001, pp. 361-367). With the exception of the specific cases of states seeking EU membership, the EU does not generally sanction states that fall short of democratic standards or experience anti-democratic coups (Youngs 2001, pp. 356-357).

India's approach is distinct from these two models. The most obvious difference is the emphasis that it places on acting under UN auspices. Like both the US and EU, India funds NGOs working on democratic issues, but unlike them, it does not do so directly through the MEA or its in-house aid agency, the Development Partnership Administration. Instead, Indian funds are pooled with others' and distributed through the UNDEF after the consideration of proposals by a UN consultative group and an advisory board made up of representatives of major donors, with final approval given by the Secretary-General (United Nations De-



mocracy Fund 2017b). This arrangement obviates the need for India to use its own agencies for acquitting this task, which are arguably not yet adequate for the task (Mazumdar & Statz 2015, 81), but also allows India to make the argument that such funding of NGOs does not constitute interference in the domestic affairs of target states – an issue about which India is highly sensitive (Jeffery 2015).

Over the ten years (2006-2015) for which there are data, India's financial contributions to the UNDEF, totalling almost US\$31.5m, have helped to fund 66 NGO-led projects across South Asia (including Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Burma / Myanmar, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, as well as India) out of a total of 155 projects funded in the Asia-Pacific region and 678 funded worldwide. Over that period, US\$16.29m, divided into grants ranging from US\$110,000 to US\$375,000, was committed to South Asian projects by the UNDEF. The majority are aimed at improving grass-roots participation or processes, targeting women, youth, or the marginalised, in particular, and intended to educate or raise awareness about political rights and institutions. Indian NGOs were the beneficiary of 10 grants, amounting to a little over US\$3m, but the remainder of the monies spent in South Asia (over US\$13m) went to 56 projects in other regional states, including 9 in Afghanistan, 8 in Nepal, 7 in Bangladesh, and 5 in Burma / Myanmar, or cross-border regional initiatives (United Nations Democracy Fund 2017c).

Where India provides direct aid, it also focuses less on the diffusion of democratic norms to target elites and more on education and technical assistance, sometimes under UN auspices and sometimes bilaterally, within the bounds of Memoranda of Understanding (MoUs) spelling out the nature of the service to be provided. The work of the India International Institute of Democracy and Election Management (IIDEM), founded in 2011 with support from the UN and the Commonwealth of Nations, illustrates this approach, providing training to electoral officials on administering voter education and registration, particular voting technologies, and different electoral systems. So far, the IIDEM has helped train officials from about fifty countries, mostly in sub-Saharan Africa. Multiple agreements struck between the Electoral Commission of India (ECI) and foreign counterparts fall into the second, involving the provision of particular forms of assistance, from advice on election organization and monitoring to the delivery of electronic voting machines, again mostly working with African partners (Cheodon 2015, pp. 169-170).

In South Asia, India commonly blends this kind of support with bigger packages of aid or loans intended to boost economic development. In Afghanistan, for example, India is estimated to have funded US\$2bn-worth of aid since the fall of the Taliban, with the overwhelming majority spent on efforts to strengthen the Afghan economy and restore basic services (Embassy of India, Kabul 2017).

This includes some US\$750m spent between 2001 and 2010 on rebuilding hospitals and roads (Faust and Wagner 2010, p. 3; see also Pant 2010, pp. 136-138). Democracy assistance forms only a small part of this wider effort, mostly limited to financing and organising the construction of a new parliament building in Kabul, providing electronic voting machines for elections, including for the 2003 Loya Jirga that considered a new constitution for Afghanistan, and the training of electoral officials. Overall, indeed, India's financial support for democracy-related projects across South Asia, through the UNDEF or bilateral arrangements, is far out-weighted by its spending on socio-economic development initiatives – its donations of \$31.5m to the UNDEF over a decade are eclipsed by its aid budget of US\$1.15bn for the single financial year 2015-16 (Bhokal 2016).

In general too, India delivers its democracy assistance only after a transition to democracy has begun. The one possible exception to this rule is Nepal. In that case India did apply sanctions, in the form of an arms embargo and a public withdrawal of diplomatic support from King Gyanendra after his 2005 coup, which helped pressure to negotiate with the Maoist insurgents at war with his regime (Destradi 2012, p. 295). But thereafter India's role was more ambiguous, and despite its long-running and close involvement in Nepal's politics, New Delhi allowed the US to play a significant role in helping deliver an agreement between the warring parties, after apparently persuading Washington that it needed to engage the Maoists (Mazumdar & Statz 2015, p. 89; Mohan 2007, pp. 110-111).<sup>5</sup> India returned to the fore only after the peace agreement was concluded, when it helped organise a general election in 2008, providing the requisite technical assistance, including voting machines and training for electoral officials (Destradi 2012, p. 300).

India's delivery of democracy assistance to Burma / Myanmar, by contrast, follows a similar pattern to its work in Afghanistan. After the failed pro-democracy protests of 1988, New Delhi gave support and provided safe haven for the democracy movement in its struggle against the ruling military government. In 1992-93, however, as it launched the so-called "Look East" policy, India began to engage the junta, address security concerns along their shared border, concerned to improve transport links into South East Asia and access to energy resources, and indeed to counter growing Chinese influence in the country (Mohan 2007, p. 112; cf. Bhatia 2015). The BJP-led government that came to power in 1998 deepened this approach, as security cooperation and trade and investment links grew. This alienating pro-democracy elements (Routray 2011, p. 307-308), with New Delhi arguing back that supporting development would help facilitate, over time, a return to democracy (Egretreau 2011). Only after that occurred, with elections held in 2015, did India extend a formal assistance package to help build capacity

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<sup>5</sup> On the 2006 peace agreement, see Jeffery 2017.

and upgrade systems in the public service and to provide training for electoral officials, as well as a promise of US\$1bn in aid and development programs (Ichihara, Sahoo and Erewan 2016). Narendra Modi's official visit in early September 2017 also saw the agreement of an MoU between the Election Commission and the Union Election Commission of Myanmar to provide technical assistance and media exchanges (Prime Minister's Office 2017a).

## **Conclusion**

India came relatively late to democracy promotion, ten years after the EU and US, together with a number of significant international institutions, began to invest more heavily in seeking democratic reform and aiding democratic transitions. It did so in a context in which critical voices were growing louder, democracy promotion became associated with military intervention to bring about regime change, and authoritarianism was recovering some of its strength in key states, notably in Russia, or extending its power and influence, as with China. Moreover, India did so without a strong domestic consensus, within the foreign policy making elite, in its favour; indeed, many intellectuals, analysts, diplomats and politicians remain highly sceptical about democracy promotion as a set of practices, thinking it inconsistent with the principles of non-interference and non-intervention, and with prudent diplomacy (see especially Puri 2016). The prevailing view, expressed by one senior diplomat in an address to a think tank dialogue in mid-2015, is that while the "promotion of democratic ideals may be in alignment with India's belief in these principles," New Delhi is not "in the business of exporting democracy" (Wadhwa 2015).

India has nevertheless chosen to engage in a version of democracy promotion – in democracy assistance – because it has helped smooth the process of closer alignment with the US and because it perceives that further democratization in its own region, and further afield, will likely help its wider effort to manage China's growing influence. To those ends, India has chosen to take a dual-track approach, supporting multilateral efforts through mechanisms like the UNDEF, and providing mainly technical assistance when requested to existing and transitioning democracies in highly formal frameworks, drawing on the extensive expertise of the ECI, in particular. Whether this approach has paid expected dividends is a moot point: India has clearly not convinced many Western observers that it is anything more than a reluctant democracy promoter; at the same time, the new democracies in which India has been involved in South Asia, notably in Afghanistan, Burma / Myanmar, and Nepal, remain fragile, at best.

There may also be signs that India's approach is shifting once more under Modi's government. Praise of democracy as a form of government is prominent in the Prime Minister political rhetoric (see, for example, Prime Minister's Office 2017b;

cf. Hall 2017, p. 128), but the funding of democracy assistance has changed under his leadership. Most notably of all, support for some multilateral initiatives has waned – India’s financial support to the UNDEF has declined significantly, with only US\$200,000 given in 2014, US\$100,000 in 2015, \$50,000 in 2016, and nothing yet reported for 2017 (United Nations Democracy Fund 2017a). In parallel, of course, the Overseas Development Aid is estimated to have grown from about US\$1.2bn in 2014–15 to about US\$1.4bn in 2016–17, with funds overwhelmingly dedicated to projects in South Asia (Mullen and Arora 2016, p. 2). Set alongside each other these figures are a reminder that, despite more engagement in this area and despite the talk of politicians, Indian investment in development still far outstrips its investment in democratic norms and institutions.

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### **Bio**

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