

Why Bharat Matters

BJP'S VISION OF INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY



Analysis

09/2024

www.csm.org.pl



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During India's presidency of the G-20 in 2023, Prime Minister Narendra Modi emphasized that India was offering an alternative to the status quo, shifting from GDP-centric to human-centric progress. This approach aims to remind the world of what unites us rather than what divides us. This is the core of India's soft power policy under the ruling BJP party. Indian leaders, intellectuals, and thinkers are convinced that cultural values in general have great potential in building a "better world."

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Ramayana: The Key?

In January 2024, Dr. Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, India's Foreign Minister, published a book titled "Why Bharat Matters?" He argues that Indian leaders, if they want India to play a significant role in global politics, must broaden their visions and understanding of the world. This is precisely the direction the third BJP government under Prime Minister Modi aims to lead India.

The originality of Dr. Jaishankar's book lies in the fact that the author uses the Ramayana epics to explain the strategy and goals of the current Indian policy. "The legend of Hanuman could well be the story of India in the last decade," writes Jaishankar. "The more we do, the more we believe we can do. It is this self-discovery that has made India so different in recent years and set it on a course that has major implications for the global order."

Jaishankar relates the adventures of Sri Krishna, Hanuman, Rama, Lakshmana, Sita, Ravana, and many other mythological characters to contemporary global events in which India participates. The author reinforces his narrative with subtitles such as "QUAD: A Grouping Foretold – When Common Good Requires Fresh Thinking" or "Dealing with China: An Appreciation of the Importance of Realism." Commonly known characters from the epics reacted to specific situations they chose either to form alliances or to initiate conflicts, whether to bring peace or war.

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Jaishankar's book, published a few months before the parliamentary elections, served in part as a manifesto and contributed to increasing the number of votes for the BJP. The fact that Jaishankar justified and compared the actions of a modern politician to those of legendary heroes from popular epics is not surprising, as electoral campaigns often resemble quasi-religious events. Crowds view party leaders as living characters from epic poems. Currently, even the INC uses similar social engineering tactics, with Rahul Gandhi, the leader of the Indian National Congress, and other party members participating in religious ceremonies and yatras – multi-week marches across India.

Indian Dynamism in the Indo-Pacific

Jaishankar underlines several areas where the Prime Minister's activities have been of special importance, such as organizing the G-20 summit in New Delhi, participating in the BRICS summit in Johannesburg, engaging in QUAD, and other regional initiatives like SAGAR, while continuing relations with ASEAN. It is clear that India has abandoned the Congress policy of non-engagement and joined global activities. All these initiatives aim to enhance the security of the vast Indian subcontinent.

Jaishankar emphasizes that Modi employs a wide range of means to strengthen the country's image. For example, he recognizes that activating state relations with the Indian diaspora

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(NRIs), especially in the USA, Canada, Great Britain, and many other countries, would bolster the economic and political position of compatriots living abroad.

Modi consistently emphasizes that Indians, even in the most remote places, contribute to promoting India's good image and its achievements in their countries of residence and to building economic and cultural ties. They serve as a practical and emotional extension of their home country, which, in Modi's words, is obliged to provide them with all necessary support and facilitate communication with their homeland. Indian media have highlighted the Prime Minister's involvement in crisis situations, such as the sudden evacuation of thousands of Indian students from countries affected by conflict.

Jaishankar also underscores Modi's ability to cultivate friendships and strengthen cooperation with neighbors; Modi refers to this as the "Neighborhood First" policy. He notes the successful establishment of the border line with Bangladesh and the signing of a pertinent agreement in 2023.

The Neighborhood First policy has a much broader meaning, as it is a continuation and spatial extension of the previously articulated Act East Policy. It draws attention to the region conventionally called the Indo-Pacific, where India has influenced nations for centuries. The Indian cultural heritage, still visible in many countries, is an integral part of India's soft power diplomacy.

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Values in Indian Politics

Minister Jaishankar and BJP chief Amit Shah are active co-creators of the political line pursued by the Prime Minister. The ideological framework for governing the state is grounded in Hindu values, despite India being a secular state. Indian politicians normatively adopt the Hindu values that Indian people have upheld for centuries.

These ancient Hindu values are fundamental in expressing national interest and in building a sense of community within the multicultural social fabric of the country. The ruling circles have agreed on the overarching goals of foreign relations, emphasizing India's civilizational greatness and the pivotal role India could play in today's conflicted world.

The slogans aimed at building India as a significant power in the world, frequently used by the BJP and Sangh Parivar, echo the ethical and moral ideals forged in the 19th century by leaders of the Indian independence movement in resistance to British rule. These emancipation movements emerged across various regions of the Indian subcontinent as a result of Western education. Figures such as Sri Aurobindo, Vivekananda, Savarkar, Dayananda, Golwalkar, Tagore, Subhas Chandra Bose, Gandhi, and many others sought to rediscover native cultural values, mobilizing the Indian populace to resist colonization.

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Hindu cultural revivalism, or Hindutva, is not a modern invention. Contemporary Indian leaders refer to these values to build national pride, stemming from traditions passed down through generations. The BJP aligns itself with this value system, although the Sangh Parivar may not possess the same means to achieve these goals.

References to native values as a means to persuade supporters were largely absent from the INC's policy, which, while promoting a secular India, seemed to overlook cultural roots. The specific social engineering practiced by Nehru and other Congress politicians failed, largely due to the shortcomings of the adopted socialist economic model and its iterations in subsequent governments. It was with the slogan of Hinduism emblazoned on saffron banners that the BJP won elections in 2014, 2019, and 2024, diminishing the INC to a level no other political grouping in India has experienced thus far.

The policy emanating from the ideas of Hindu cultural nationalism, due to its clarity, unambiguity, and determination, has ignited significant controversy both in India and globally, particularly due to recent legislation that has stigmatized those groups who, despite residing on the Indian subcontinent for centuries, do not identify with dominant Hinduism.

This has resulted in dramatic tensions and acts of violence directed toward religious and ethnic minorities. Thus, the consecration of the newly constructed temple of God Rama in Ayodhya, a key element of Modi's campaign, was met with protests, though the solemnity and enthusiasm of the crowds prevailed.

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The construction of the Rama Mandir at the birthplace of Lord Rama was made possible following the destruction of the Babri Masjid mosque in 1992, which was built during the Muslim invasion over 400 years ago. For years, the BJP campaigned for the revival of Hindu temples destroyed by invaders.

In the 2024 election campaign, BJP leaders referenced a similar event that occurred in Warsaw, Poland in 1923, where residents demolished an Orthodox church built by the Russians in the center of the city, symbolic of their domination over Poland. Amit Shah and K. Annamalai, BJP president in Tamil Nadu, quoted this Polish example during the 2024 campaign. However, Advani first used this comparison when speaking to his compatriots in Los Angeles in the 1990s. This event garnered widespread attention from Polish NRIs living in the USA. The BJP leaders explained that both events shared a commonality: the removal of symbols of foreign invasion and a retreat from a humiliating past.

But one might question whether this exceptionally strong reliance on traditional Hindu values is excessively promoted, leading BJP leaders to an idealization detached from the realities of today's world. Especially when today's world is a battleground for influence where great powers use military force to impose their will, ideas, and political systems on others. Jaishankar assures us that Prime Minister Modi possesses an important trait: the ability to transform the idealizations embedded in Hindutva into strategic thinking, grounded in the national interest, particularly concerning potentially significant powers.

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What Does India Want?

Jaishankar's book contains many intriguing and practical insights for politicians and diplomats. His remarks on the role of values in international relations deserve emphasis. He persuades his readers that the colonial world is long past, and India does not wish to fall into new dependencies that arise from a vision of the world imposed by globalists. Ram Madhav, author of the book "The Hindutva Paradigm," also supports Jaishankar's arguments regarding the role of values in international relations. Hindutva is viewed not only as a tool for confronting Western ideas but also as a platform for exchanging thoughts and views on equal terms.

Jaishankar effectively counters Western criticism, especially regarding India's neutral stance on current conflicts in Europe and the Middle East. He points out that India has refrained from siding with any party, prioritizing India's interests above all.

Prime Minister Nehru expressed a nearly prophetic intuition during the UN conference in Paris in 1949, asserting that the problems of the world extended beyond Europe and that Europe would not resolve them, as they were not solely European problems. Although Indians value Europe for its culture and contributions to progress, they recognize that Asia is now significant on the global stage and will matter much more than before. Nehru's speech

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serves as evidence that universality and exceptionalism are deeply embedded in the Indian psyche and continue to be promoted.

Mr. Modi's policy reflects India's aspiration for decision-making autonomy and preemptively rejects foreign interference in India's internal affairs. Throughout Jaishankar's book, echoes of Vivekananda's speech during the 1893 Congress of Religions in Chicago resonate, emphasizing India's considerable cultural and civilizational potential to benefit humanity.

Mr. Jaishankar, like Vivekananda and other activists from India's revival movement, does not aim to impose their values on others but instead believes that such values are so beneficial for humanity that the world could be inspired by them or at least that they could help mitigate existing conflicts and prevent new ones from arising. India stands against the creation of uniformity in the world, as Ram Madhav argues, refusing to disregard its cultural and civilizational complexities. Globalists seek uniformity to control societies and build a vast consumer market.

Centre for International Relations (CIR) is an independent, non-government analytical centre established in 1996 which deals with Polish foreign policy and the most important issues of international politics. CIR is active in research, education and publishing, organises conferences and meetings, and participates in international projects in collaboration with similar institutions in many countries. CIR creates a forum for debate and exchange of ideas in matters of international politics, relations between states and challenges in the global world. CIR's activities are addressed above all to local-government officials and to entrepreneurs, as well as to officials of the central administration, politicians, diplomats, political scientists and the media. In 2014, CIR was again recognised as one of the best think-tanks in East-Central Europe in the study "The Leading Public Policy Research Organisations in the World" conducted by the University of Pennsylvania.

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