

# India's New Self-Conception As a World Power

by Helga Zepp-LaRouche, founder of the Schiller Institutes

March 16—India is no longer just the Subcontinent, but clearly is changing its own identity so as to become one of the future major players in the world, since it will soon bypass the population size of China, and already has the highest economic growth rate internationally.

That self-confidence, which clearly has been boosted since Narendra Modi became Prime Minister almost two years ago, was very visible at the inaugural meeting of the Raisina Dialogue, the new flagship conference of the Indian government, which was hosted by India's Ministry of Foreign Affairs in association with the Observer Research Foundation, from March 1 to 3 in New Delhi. Over 100 speakers from 40 countries, including several serving foreign ministers and former presidents from Asia, before an audience of 600 institutional representatives, focussed for three days on issues of stronger Asian integration, as well as better integration of Asia with the rest of the world.

India is extremely important, both as one of the cradles of human civilization with an over 5,000-year old continuous history and culture, as well as for the rich contributions India can make to a future peaceful world

order based on its great historical periods and great minds of the past, such as the Vedic writings, the Gupta period of classical literature, the Indian Renaissance, Rabindranath Tagore, or Mahatma Gandhi, to only touch on highlights. With a very young population, 65% under the age of 35, and an urban middle-class that has grown to about 430 million, with an ambitious hi-tech orientation and a visionary space program, India is set to become a science driver economy for the whole world.

Therefore, one big question will be whether the present Indian leadership will find a way to put primary



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*Helga Zepp-LaRouche spoke March 2, 2016 in New Delhi at the inaugural meeting of the Indian government-sponsored Raisina Dialogue to foster stronger Asian integration. She is shown here second from the left among other speakers.*

emphasis on a new paradigm with the BRICS countries—which Modi has called the first alliance of countries whose importance is not defined by their present capacities, but by their future potential,— or whether the country will be bogged down in a narrower geopolitical view, which makes it susceptible to various hot-button issues, such as those of Pakistan, border conflicts, and religious tensions.

At the Raisina Dialogue both directions were present, conforming to the present view of the Indian Establishment that there should be openness to all sides, as a balance between those who want India to be primarily part of the BRICS, and those who would rather work with the Anglo-American powers as a geopolitical counter to Russia and China.

### Differing Voices

India's Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj emphasized the importance of connectivity, not only for India and the entire south Asian region, but also for all of the Asian continent, in her keynote address at the opening of the conference. She promised that India would win over “vested interests” to this perspective.

Earlier, the first speaker, Ms. Chandrika Bandaranaike Kumaratunga, former President of Sri Lanka, was emphatic in stressing the need to build trust and confidence among the countries of the region, and the need to establish a new paradigm in the policies of the governments whereby the new generations that were born after the Partition leave conflict behind, and look forward to the future development of the region.

She stressed that the conflict between India and Pakistan had hindered the development of the region badly, holding regional cooperation hostage for 70 years. She underlined the importance of India and China joining hands for regional development, which is now possible through China's “One Belt, One Road” policy. China's



*Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has called the organization the first alliance of countries whose importance is determined by their future potential. Here, Modi (center) handing over homes at a project site in the nation of Sri Lanka last March.*

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economic power should be seen as an opportunity, rather as a threat. Ms. Kumaratunga said that Sri Lanka could be a bridge for all south Asian nations, since it has good relations with all of them.

The former President of Afghanistan, Hamid Karzai, argued exactly in the same direction. He called India Afghanistan's best friend, but also said that his country's relationship with China is comprehensive, and that Kabul has an important role to play as a transit hub for regional economic integration. “Afghanistan wants the best possible relations between India and China,—there is a need for positive symmetry,” Karzai stressed, and expressed hope that the China-Iran rail line would be extended to other countries.

Afghanistan wants to be a bridge between south Asia, central Asia, India, and China, he continued. “Afghanistan represents the shortest route between China and Iran, India and central Asia, and Russia and central Asia. Afghanistan fully supports India's policy on central Asia and China's “One Belt One Road” policy. Karzai praised the revival of the ancient silk road by China as the way to make all of south Asia prosperous.

But also relations with India's neighbors in the East and North are undergoing important transformations. Bangladeshi Foreign Minister Abul Hassan Mahmood Ali, said that the newly formed Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) sub-regional cooperative architecture will be a game-changer for the entire south Asian

region. He said that Bangladesh's vision was to become a middle-income country by 2021. "Water resources management and the blue economy provide tremendous opportunity for the growth of regional economy," and it is connectivity that will help the south Asian nations realize their dreams of prosperity.

The keynote speech by Seychelles founding President Sir James Mancham was also very well received. He emphasized that for the Republic of Seychelles, whose 110 islands cover a maritime space as large as the Federal Republic of Germany with a population of less than 100,000 people, the emphasis the Indian Government gives to the Indian Ocean is obviously of the greatest importance.

He recalled the importance of the Nonaligned Movement during the 1960s, when he first became involved in politics, and throughout the Cold War period. During that period, India's foreign policy was based on the peaceful teachings of such men of wisdom as Rabindranath Tagore, Mahatma Gandhi, and Buddha.

He recalled that India, in its capacity as a leader of the Nonaligned Movement, opposed the effort by the United States to build up a U.S. naval base in Diego Garcia to replace the British, after the British had decided to pull out of "East of Suez." This was a timely reminder in light of the recent British announcement that they intended to renew their East of Suez ambitions.

At that earlier time, Sir James Mancham underlined, India and the Soviet Union had proclaimed the Indian Ocean a zone of peace, and condemned the arrival of the United States in Diego Garcia. He expressed his regret that today India is aligned with the United States to counterbalance the Chinese presence in the area. He also articulated his shock that, at a recent Berlin conference, a high NATO official admitted that the world defense budget is three or four times



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*Adm. Harry B. Harris, Commander, United States Pacific Command, introduced the opposing view, asserting that India will be the defining partner for America's pivot to Asia. He emphasized joint future military maneuvers involving India, Japan, Australia, and the United States. Here Indian and foreign naval ships in an exercise in the Bay of Bengal on Feb. 9, 2016.*

higher than what the world is spending on human resources development.

Military strength is too often accompanied by the conviction that "Might makes right." The ugly sight of the destroyed cities in Syria should make us mindful of the power of destruction, even without the use of nuclear weapons.

Notably, an opposing view was brought into the conference by another keynote speaker, Navy Adm. Harry B. Harris, the commander of the U.S. Pacific Command, who asserted that India will be the defining partner for America's rebalance to Asia, and that this will even be the "defining partnership for America in the Twenty-first Century." "Let's be ambitious together," Harris demanded, especially emphasizing past and future joint military maneuvers between India, Japan, Australia, and the United States. It was somewhat unclear who he meant,— or if he meant it ironically,— when he said that some countries "seek to bully" smaller nations through intimidation and coercion, and which countries he referred to as "building castles on sand."

## Indian Concerns

The most delicate concern for India for historical, political, and military reasons is obviously the relation with Pakistan, and it was only three months ago that Prime Minister Modi paid a surprise visit to this country on his birthday, in an obvious effort to improve the situation. Equally obvious also was the effort by some panelists at the conference to put salt into Indian wounds by blasting Pakistan as a country that should be charged with state terrorism.

“Let’s punish Pakistan together,” an American speaker agitated, rubbing an obvious raw nerve of many in the audience. Given the fact that both countries have nuclear arsenals, one can only wonder about the motives behind such suggestions. The discussion of terrorism was solely focussed on Pakistan, leaving out completely the role of Saudi financing of various terrorist organizations and the concerns which former DIA head General Michael Flynn has expressed repeatedly about geopolitical considerations of the United States itself in this matter.

Under present circumstances there is both concern among some in India about the China-Pakistan economic corridor linking China’s Xinjiang Province to Pakistan’s Gwadar Port, and about the decision of the Obama Administration to sell eight F-16 fighter planes to Pakistan, an action for which U.S. Ambassador Richard Verma was summoned to the Ministry of External Affairs to listen for 45 minutes to the expression of “displeasure” by Foreign Secretary Subrahmanyam Jaishankar.

In its totality, the Raisina Dialogue conference brought together a vibrant multitude of subjects and speakers, expressing an overall tendency of integrating India and south Asia more deeply with Asia at large and with the world. Whether for diplomatic or other reasons, what was completely absent however, was any discussion about the horrendous condition of the trans-Atlantic financial system, and how the Asian nations can protect themselves against the consequences of the pending blowout.

The potential to resolve all remaining geopolitical issues and potential flare-up points on a higher level of reason assuredly exists. What do you do, when one seems to have a seemingly insurmountable conflict with another person or state? It is important to find the higher level of reason, so that the antagonisms of the existing paradigm can be superseded. How can the unresolved tensions between China and India, often ma-

nipulated by outside forces based on maps and conflicts stemming from a geopolitical past, be overcome? If Russia, China, and India work together, as it has been concretely proposed already, to pacify and economically develop southwest Asia, that higher level of common interest can be established.

The concrete potential for such an intervention has been created through President Putin’s brilliant defusing of the Syrian war, first by the Russian military intervention starting September of last year, which created the preconditions for a political solution, and just now, the sudden troop withdrawal of Russian forces, after the mission was successfully accomplished. As the Chinese representative, Vice Foreign Minister Li Baodong, had emphasized at the Vienna Syria peace conference, the rebuilding of Syria must start immediately, so that the population can see the peace dividend of hope and of life becoming normal again.

In his recent journey to Saudi Arabia, Egypt, and Iran, Chinese President Xi Jinping explicitly offered to extend the New Silk Road, “One Belt, One Road” policy to southwest Asia. Shortly thereafter, the first Silk Road train arrived in Tehran from Yiwu, thus creating the potential to extend that line to Baghdad, Damascus, and all the way to Cairo. Both China, offering a “win-win” approach for all nations participating in this policy, and India, with its very good relations with all the countries of southwest Asia, can add the necessary economic dimension to the peace perspective which Russia has now made possible.

This moment represents a precious opportunity to use the rebuilding of the war-torn nation of Syria as a game-changer to bring the perspective of a real economic development plan onto the table for the whole region from Afghanistan to the Mediterranean, from the Caucasus to the Persian Gulf. If the strong neighbors work together it is possible—because then, and only then, will their client states be brought under control. The collaboration of foreign ministers Kerry and Lavrov has opened the way, and European nations such as Germany, Italy, France, and others can be brought on board, since this is the only way that the refugee crisis can be solved.

India, as the up-and-coming world power—based on a beautiful philosophical tradition which maintains that the cosmic order must inform life and conduct on earth, and based on the inspiration of its founder Mahatma Gandhi for a peaceful world—can shape the future with a new paradigm for all of mankind.