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**A Regional Power Promoting Democracy?
India's Involvement in Nepal (2005–2008)**

Sandra Destradi

No 138

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A Regional Power Promoting Democracy? India's Involvement in Nepal (2005–2008)

Abstract

According to the theory of “democratic peace,” India, as the largest democracy in the world and as South Asia’s predominant regional power, should be expected to promote democracy in neighboring countries. However, New Delhi lacks any official democracy-promotion policy, and its past record on democracy in the region is mixed at best. Against this background, the paper analyzes the substantial role India came to play in the peace and democratization process in Nepal in the years 2005–2008, asking whether this constitutes a departure from New Delhi’s traditional policy of noninterference in its neighbors’ internal affairs and a move towards a more assertive approach to democracy promotion. The analysis shows that India’s involvement in Nepal was the product of short-term stability concerns rather than being an indicator of a long-term change in strategy with the intention of becoming an active player in international democracy promotion.

Keywords: democracy promotion, India, Nepal, regional power, peace process, democratization

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Zusammenfassung

Eine Regionalmacht als Demokratieförderer? – Indiens Engagement in Nepal (2005-2008)

Als größte Demokratie der Welt und gleichzeitig als dominierende Regionalmacht in Süd-asien, könnte man erwarten, dass Indien in seinen Nachbarstaaten Demokratieförderung betreibt. Die Theorie des demokratischen Friedens geht davon aus, dass es im Interesse einer Demokratie wie Indien liegt, von Demokratien umgeben zu sein, da somit die Wahrscheinlichkeit von Kriegen sinkt. Dies ist jedoch bei Indien nicht der Fall: Neu-Delhi geht pragmatisch mit autoritären Staaten um und hat keine offizielle Politik der Demokratieförderung. Das Papier geht der Frage nach, inwieweit Indiens substanzielles Engagement im Friedens- und Demokratisierungsprozess in Nepal in den Jahren 2005-2008 eine Abkehr von Neu-Delhis traditioneller Ablehnung von Demokratieförderung darstellt. Die Untersuchung ideeller und zielorientierter Grundlagen in Indiens Außenpolitik und die Analyse des indischen Engagements in Nepal führen zu dem Schluss, dass wir es mit keinem radikalen Wandel zu tun haben. Indiens Bemühungen in Nepal sind nicht als langfristiger Strategiewandel, sondern als reaktiver, kurzfristiger Politikwechsel zu verstehen, der primär auf die Stabilisierung des Nachbarstaats abzielte.

A Regional Power Promoting Democracy? India's Involvement in Nepal (2005–2008)

Sandra Destradi

Article Outline

- 1 Introduction
- 2 Explaining India's Limited Propensity to Promote Democracy
- 3 India's Role in Nepal's Return to Democracy
- 4 Conclusion

1 Introduction

With a population of approximately 1.1 billion and a functioning democratic system that has been in operation since 1947, India is the largest democracy in the world.¹ At the same time, given its size in terms of territory and population, its geographic location, and its economic and military power, India can unequivocally be identified as the “regional power” in South Asia (Nayar/Paul 2004: 46-47).² In this context, the theory of “democratic peace” (e.g., Doyle

¹ An earlier version of this paper was presented at the 5th ECPR General Conference, Potsdam, September 12, 2009. I would like to thank Dr. Gero Erdmann, PD Dr. Patrick Köllner, Dr. Bert Hoffmann, Prof. Dr. Joachim Betz, and Dr. Jörn Grävingholt for their very useful comments.

² If we consider South Asia to be made up of India, Pakistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bhutan, and the Maldives, then—to take into consideration just some rough measures of power capabilities—India's share of the surface area amounts to 74 percent, its share of the total population amounted to 75 percent in 2008, its share of the total GDP (nominal current prices, 2008) and its share of military expenditure (constant, 2007) both amounted to 79 percent, and its share of total armed forces amounted to 56 percent (2005). Sources: World Bank Data & Statistics, available at www.worldbank.org (20 August 2009); International Monetary Fund, World Economic Outlook Database, October 2009, <http://www.imf.org/external/pubs/ft/weo/2009/02/weodata/index.aspx> (8 October 2009); Stockholm International Peace Research Institute (SIPRI), Military Expenditure Database, <http://milexdata.sipri.org/> (20 August 2009); U.S. Department of State, World Military Expenditures and Arms Transfers 2005, <http://www.state.gov/documents/organization/121776.pdf> (23 September 2009).

1986, 2005; Russett/Oneal 2001) would argue that it is in the interest of a democratic country like India to have democracies around it since this reduces the likelihood of war. From a different perspective, which combines the logic of domestic politics with foreign policy behavior in a rational choice framework, Bader, Grävingholt, and Kästner (2010) have argued that regional powers have strong incentives to favor similar political systems in neighboring states. Democracies, according to this perspective, favor the democratization of neighboring states because the transboundary public goods generated by democratic neighbors help them maximize the provision of public goods for their own domestic audience.

As a consequence of both these ways of reasoning, we can assume that for a regional power like India the promotion of democracy should constitute an ideal instrument of hegemonic influence for the creation of a more predictable and secure neighborhood. A brief look at India's foreign policy, however, induces us to immediately disconfirm this hypothesis for the Indian case. First, New Delhi's attitude towards democracy in its neighborhood has been mixed: referring to the principle of nonintervention in other countries' internal affairs, India has been overtly supportive of undemocratic regimes, for example, in Myanmar/Burma (Kurlantzick 2007; Mohan 2007: 111-112), and has displayed a high degree of readiness to compromise on issues of human rights and democratic freedoms, for example, in Sri Lanka in 2009 (Destradi 2009b). Moreover, India has played a marginal role, if any, in the recent "wave" of democratization processes in the South Asian region.³ Second, the Indian government has not formulated anything like an official democracy-promotion policy (Wagner 2009: 14). Third, despite India's involvement in US-driven multilateral initiatives in support of democracy as of 2000, New Delhi's activities at this level have also been limited. This has led some authors to interpret India's multilateral engagement for democracy as an instrumental attempt to improve its relations with the United States and its standing as an emerging great power rather than a move driven by the genuine endorsement of democracy promotion as a policy (Cartwright 2009: 421-425; Wagner 2009: 23).

A recent episode, however, might lead us to assume that a change in India's approach to democracy promotion has taken place: India played a substantial role in neighboring Nepal's return to democracy in the years 2005–2008. While officially supporting King Gyanendra's authoritarian regime as long as possible, New Delhi at the same time informally facilitated a dialogue between the democratic parties and Maoist rebels, which, as will be discussed later in more detail, ultimately led to the reinstatement of democracy and the end of the civil war in Nepal.

³ In 2008 the Nepalese monarchy was abolished and replaced by a democratic, secular federal republic; the president of the Maldives was voted out after three decades of autocratic rule; Bhutan became a constitutional monarchy after the introduction of democratic reforms by the king; in Pakistan, a civilian government came back to power; and in Bangladesh free elections took place after two years of rule by a military-backed caretaker government. For an overview of India's influence on these events see Destradi (2009a). In Afghanistan, India has been promoting a huge program of reconstruction and development cooperation which, however, only influences democratic developments in an indirect way (Wagner 2009: 20-21).

This paper therefore aims to assess the extent to which India's involvement in Nepal in the period 2005–2008—the most extensive effort on the part of New Delhi in recent years in terms of support for democracy (Destradi 2009a)—represented a shift in India's approach to democracy promotion from its tradition of nonalignment and noninterference (Mohan 2007: 99; Wagner 2009: 9) towards a more activist policy. In other words, this study explores the extent to which the most populous democracy in the world has shown signs of becoming a new actor in the international democracy-promotion “landscape.”

To this end, the paper proceeds from the general to the particular by providing, first of all, an explanation of India's traditionally limited propensity to promote democracy abroad. Against this background, India's role in Nepal's return to democracy is examined in detail, leading to the conclusion that the democracy-promotion measures employed by India constituted a short-term, ad hoc change in policy that was driven by the desire to stabilize the country rather than an intentional long-term shift in strategy.

2 Explaining India's Limited Propensity to Promote Democracy

India has traditionally been extremely reluctant when it comes to the issue of democracy promotion. To provide a framework for the analysis of India's recent involvement in Nepal's return to democracy, this chapter examines the foundations of India's reluctance to promote democracy by identifying the ideational and goal-oriented premises of Indian foreign policy with regard to democracy promotion. Therefore, firstly, an assessment of the Indian elite's ideational approach to democracy promotion as a foreign policy tool is carried out. Secondly, the main goals in India's regional policy are analyzed with a view to assessing their compatibility with the objective of democracy promotion.

2.1 India's Ideational Approach to Democracy Promotion

The Indian elite is extremely proud of India's achievements as the most populous democracy in the world and as one of the most stable democracies among the post-colonial states.⁴ As Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has put it,

[...] India is proud of its democratic heritage which is rooted in the country's cultural ethos of tolerance, respect for different view points and a ready embrace of diversity. Mahatma Gandhi led us into a non-violent struggle not only to free India from colonial rule but to also ensure to our people the exercise of their democratic rights.⁵

⁴ On the successful implementation and extraordinary resilience of democracy in India, see, for example, Mitra (1991) or the volumes edited by Kohli (2001) and Ganguly/Diamond/Plattner (2007).

⁵ Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), India, Remarks by Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh at the Launching of UN Democracy Fund, 14 July 2005. All MEA documents cited in this study are available at <http://meaindia.nic.in/>.

In line with the reference to the anti-colonial struggle, India is often implicitly presented as a role model for developing countries since its achievements as a stable democracy are considered to have constituted the basis for economic development and inclusive growth: “most of all, democracy alone gives the assurance that the developmental aspirations of the poorest citizens of our society will be taken into consideration. This above all, is the unique strength of a democratic system.”⁶

Moreover, the Indian elite often contrasts the India's achievements as a democratic and secular state with the failure of Pakistan to keep the military and fundamentalist religious forces under control. In this discourse, India is represented as a bulwark of democracy and “civilization” against its “backward” rival. More generally, the spread of Islamism in neighboring South Asian countries reinforces the feeling among the Indian elite that India's democracy is “special” and should constitute a role model for other multireligious and multiethnic countries.⁷

The extremely high value attached to democracy by the Indian elite is underpinned by widespread support for democratic values among the broader population, as some surveys have revealed.⁸ This would induce us to assume that India has a strong propensity to promote democracy abroad. But this is not the case: the Indian policy-making elite is, in fact, extremely cautious when it comes to the issue of democracy promotion—so cautious that we can talk about a tabooization of this topic. Asked if New Delhi has created anything like a “democracy promotion” policy, one of the Indian government officials interviewed replied with an indignant “No, India will never do that!”⁹ Beyond the Ministry of External Affairs, this tabooization also reaches to the academic field. The unwillingness to talk about Indian involvement in democratization across borders has its roots in India's tradition of nonalignment and its emphasis on sovereignty and on noninvolvement in other countries' internal affairs. This tendency has been reinforced by India's more cooperative approach towards neighboring countries in South Asia since the 1990s. While former prime minister Indira Gandhi did not shy away from following a proactive policy of “military activism” (Cohen 2002: 145) and intervention in the neighborhood in the 1980s, the adoption of the Gujral Doctrine in the 1990s made nonreciprocity and noninterference the leading principles of India's regional policy.¹⁰ Over the past few years, India's policy makers have been trying to promote

⁶ Ibid.

⁷ Interview with expert E19, New Delhi, 05 April 2009. In addition to other primary sources, the present study draws on 26 semistructured expert interviews carried out in New Delhi in October/December 2008 and April 2009. Five officials at the MEA, three journalists, and 18 experts, scholars, and retired diplomats (some of whom were actively involved in the facilitation efforts with Nepal and several of whom serve as consultants of the Indian government) were interviewed. The interviewees have been made anonymous.

⁸ See World Values Survey 2006, Online data analysis, <http://www.worldvaluessurvey.org/> (8 August 2009) and deSouza/Palshikar/Yadav (2008).

⁹ Interview with government official O3, New Delhi, 20 November 2008.

¹⁰ See Embassy of India, Washington D.C., “Defence and Security in the post-Cold War Scenario,” Address by I. K. Gujral, Minister of External Affairs, Government of India at the United Service Institution of India, 23 January 1997, [http://www.indianembassy.org/policy/Foreign_Policy/coldwar\(gujral\).htm](http://www.indianembassy.org/policy/Foreign_Policy/coldwar(gujral).htm) (9 October 2009).

the vision of South Asia as an integrated region on the basis of the assumption that a prosperous and interconnected neighborhood can only contribute to predictability and stability in relations:

Politically, our neighbourhood policy is now based on the recognition that what can best secure India's interests in the region would be building a web of "dense interdependencies" with our neighbours. We must give our neighbours a stake in our own economic prosperity. This would impart a certain stability in our relations.¹¹

In the context of a policy of nonreciprocal concessions to neighboring states,¹² India has tried to convey the image of a benevolent hegemon that respects the sovereign decisions of neighboring states and refrains from intervening in their internal affairs. Knowing the fears of its smaller neighbors, India is well aware that South Asian countries would interpret an offensive policy of democracy promotion as a limitation of their sovereignty and an aggressive intrusion into their domestic affairs. The following reassuring statement by Indian foreign minister Mukherjee, with its explicit rejection of democracy promotion as a policy, has to be seen in this context: "We do not believe in territorial expansion and neither do we believe in exporting ideology."¹³ Or, as Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran put it in more nuanced terms, "[a]s a flourishing democracy, India would certainly welcome more democracy in our neighbourhood, but that too is something that we may encourage and promote; it is not something that we can impose upon others."¹⁴

In addition to the still-existing tradition of nonalignment and noninterference, the Indian elite's ideational approach to democracy promotion as a policy is strongly shaped by another aspect, which the authors dealing with India's activities in support of democracy have not highlighted appropriately so far: by negative perceptions and critical judgments about democracy promotion as it has been practiced by "Western" countries. Interestingly, this normatively loaded notion of "Western" democracy promotion is nearly exclusively identified with the policies pursued by the United States—especially since the prioritization of this topic under the Bush administration and the invasion of Iraq.¹⁵

¹¹ MEA, India, "Does India have a neighbourhood policy?"—Talk by Foreign Secretary at ICWA, 9 September 2006.

¹² The most significant concession was the announcement of duty-free access to India's market for the least developed countries (LDCs) of South Asia by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh at the 2007 summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). See MEA, India, Address by Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh to the 14th SAARC Summit, 3 April 2007.

¹³ MEA, India, Address by Minister of External Affairs Shri Pranab Mukherjee at the Defence Services Staff College, Wellington, "Shaping India's Foreign Policy to Stake Its Rightful Place in the Comity of Nations," 22 January 2008.

¹⁴ MEA, India, Foreign Secretary Mr. Shyam Saran's speech "India and its Neighbours" at the India International Centre (IIC), 14 February 2005.

¹⁵ Interview with government official O3, New Delhi, 20 November 2008; interview with former Indian diplomat, E5, New Delhi, 7 November 2008; interview with expert E11, New Delhi, 18 November 2008; interview with journalist J3, New Delhi, 10 December 2008.

At first glance, India's multilateral policies related to democracy seem to disconfirm this assessment. In fact, in the context of New Delhi's rapprochement to Washington, India joined several US-driven multilateral initiatives for democracy promotion (Cartwright 2009:418-422). In 2000 President Clinton persuaded India to serve as one of the 10 founding members of the Community of Democracies (Mohan 2007: 105), which in 2004 established the Democracy Caucus at the United Nations with the aim of promoting democracy and human rights in the context of the UN. In 2005, moreover, India contributed US\$10 million to the establishment of the UN Democracy Fund and agreed to take part in the so-called US-India Global Democracy Initiative. Despite its formal participation in these fora and initiatives, however, India's commitment and activities within them have been limited, leading Cartwright (2009: 421-425) and Wagner (2009: 23) to assume that the driving force behind this "new" readiness to engage in democracy-promotion rhetoric was India's wish to improve its relations with the US and to gain international recognition for its aspirations as an emerging power.

New Delhi's critical attitude towards democracy promotion is related, specifically, to the perceived double standards in the United States' policy on democracy and human rights, in line with what Carothers (2006) has termed a "backlash against democracy promotion" in many parts of the world. From the Indian perspective, the Bush administration's support for General Musharraf's undemocratic regime in Pakistan, which directly affected India's security interests in South Asia, was anathema (Chellaney 2002; Grover 2002). As one Indian analyst put it, "Bush can hardly strengthen U.S. global leadership by demanding democracy in enemy states while lubricating friendly dictatorships" (Chellaney 2002). Or, to cite a more vivid example of this resentment:

And yet we were told that, under American pressure, Musharraf was engaged in combatting fundamentalism. That was, of course, a lie. How can it be true when he is the patron of the jihadis in Afghanistan and Pakistan? Only the US State Department can fool itself to believe that he is engaged in promoting democracy. But, then, the USA has always been partial to dictators. (Menon 2002)

Beyond these criticisms, India's own experience of indigenous democratic development has spread the belief among policy makers that "to be successful, democracy must have a strong internal basis and cannot be enforced from abroad" (Mohan 2007: 105).

To summarize, despite India's pride in its own democratic achievements and the firm belief in democracy that is widespread among the elite and the broader population, New Delhi has a highly critical attitude towards democracy promotion as it has been pursued, so far, by the "West"—with Western democracy promotion mainly equated, however, with US policies. In combination with India's still deep-rooted tradition of nonalignment and with its more cooperative approach to the neighborhood since the adoption of the Gujral Doctrine, this critical attitude has led to a high degree of reluctance on the part of India to engage in democracy-promotion activities.¹⁶

¹⁶ Faust/Wagner (2010: 4) add a global and a domestic factor to explain India's "defensive approach" to democracy promotion: on the one hand, India's fear of losing its position as a representative of the "South"; on the other, the fear of triggering a wave of criticism of India's own democracy.

2.2 The Prioritization of Foreign Policy Goals

In the following, India's main goals for the South Asian region will be assessed with a view to determining their compatibility with the goal of democracy promotion. Even though the Indian Ministry of External Affairs does not formulate anything like official programmatic documents explicitly stating New Delhi's foreign policy goals, these can be inferred very well through a qualitative content analysis of "key" speeches held by important representatives of the Indian foreign policy-making establishment.¹⁷ When complemented with an assessment of India's goals by the experts interviewed, the analysis allows for the identification of four major goals on the part of the Indian government for the South Asian region overall.¹⁸

India's primary goal for South Asia as a whole can be considered to be stability or, as it is sometimes stated, having a "peaceful periphery." As Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon put it, "[t]he first area of focus for our foreign policy is naturally our neighbourhood, for unless we have a peaceful and prosperous periphery we will not be able to focus on our primary tasks of socio-economic development."¹⁹ Or, as Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran stated, "[f]or our own sustained economic development and the welfare of our people we need a peaceful and tranquil periphery."²⁰ That is, the need for stability is closely related to India's own interest in not being unsettled by crises taking place in the neighborhood. The principle of stability was of particular importance in the case of Nepal, as will be discussed later.

The second major foreign policy goal pursued by New Delhi in the region is closely related to stability: avoiding negative security externalities for India. More concretely, these are constituted by terrorism and by the activities of insurgent groups—that is, by all kinds of anti-India activities carried out from the territories of neighboring states and capable of activating destabilizing forces inside India.²¹ In the case of Nepal, New Delhi feared a spread of

¹⁷ On the selection of "key" texts in discourse analysis, see Neumann (2008).

¹⁸ The following speeches, available at <http://meaindia.nic.in/>, were selected as "key" texts: Ministry of External Affairs (MEA), India, Challenges Ahead—India's Views on Regional Development, Foreign Secretary's Presentation at IFRI (French Institute for International Relations), Paris, 17 December 2002; MEA, India, Foreign Secretary Mr. Shyam Saran's speech "India and its Neighbours" at the India International Centre (IIC), 14 February 2005; MEA, India, Statement by Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh at the 13th SAARC Summit, Dhaka, 12 November 2005; MEA, India, "Does India have a Neighbourhood Policy?"—Talk by Foreign Secretary at ICWA, 9 September 2006; MEA, India, "The Challenges Ahead for India's Foreign Policy"—Speech by Foreign Secretary, Shri Shivshankar Menon at the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi, 10 April 2007.

¹⁹ MEA, India, "The Challenges Ahead for India's Foreign Policy"—Speech by Foreign Secretary, Shri Shivshankar Menon at the Observer Research Foundation, New Delhi, 10 April 2007.

²⁰ MEA, India, Foreign Secretary Mr. Shyam Saran's speech "India and its Neighbours" at the India International Centre (IIC), 14 February 2005.

²¹ Ibid. As Prime Minister Manmohan Singh put it, "[i]nternal security is today a larger concern for us than direct external threats. In fact, the most virulent manifestation of the major external threat that we face is in its internal forms, as we saw in Mumbai in July." Reference was made, in this case, to the problem of terrorism. Government of India, Prime Minister, Extracts of PM's address at the Combined Commander's Conference, 18 October 2006.

insurgency to its own states on the border with Nepal and a strengthening of Naxalism. In fact, India itself was (and still is) affected by the activities of Maoist rebels, the so-called Naxalites, with Prime Minister Manmohan Singh defining left-wing extremism as “the single-biggest internal security challenge ever faced by our country” (Muni 2008a: 17).²²

India's third broad, stated goal is that of economic development, dynamism, and “collective prosperity” in the region as a whole.²³ Starting in 2005 this objective was prominently related to the notion of “connectivity,” the idea of (re)establishing communication and transportation links between the countries of the region.²⁴ The notion of interdependence among South Asian countries is also related to the principle of stability in South Asia:

So, even if there are political changes which may take place in that country, which, of course, you should always be responsive to, the fact is that the stand of interdependence is to provide a certain stability to the relationship despite political changes, because the logic of the interdependence will not permit the political relationship to swing from one side to another.²⁵

Therefore, the goal of economic development and collective prosperity for the whole South Asian region needs to be considered in the context of India's primary goal of stability. Moreover, as one of the experts interviewed put it, “development is more a national goal than a goal for the region.”²⁶ All this could cause us to assume that India's official discourses about connectivity and collective prosperity might be rhetorical moves rather than foreign policy objectives of primary importance.

Finally, a goal not explicitly stated in official documents, but equally relevant for India, is the limitation of external powers' involvement in what India considers to be its sphere of influence: “India wants to have its say in the region.”²⁷ Despite its abandonment of the Indira Doctrine and its readiness to accept external actors' activities in South Asia—such as the Norwegian mediation in Sri Lanka or the UN mission in Nepal—New Delhi has displayed a high degree of uneasiness with China's growing presence in its neighborhood. This emerged very clearly in a public statement by India's national security advisor M.K. Narayanan, who explicitly stated that India did not approve of the Sri Lankan government's arms purchases from countries like China and Pakistan and highlighted India's position as the regional power in South Asia:

²² For an account of Naxalite activities in India, see Ramana (2008).

²³ MEA, India, Statement by Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh at the 13th SAARC Summit, Dhaka, 12 November 2005.

²⁴ The notion of connectivity was prominently outlined by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh in his speech at the 13th SAARC Summit. Ibid.

²⁵ MEA, India, “Does India have a Neighbourhood Policy?”—Talk by Foreign Secretary at ICWA, 9 September 2006.

²⁶ Interview with expert E11, New Delhi, 18 November 2008.

²⁷ Interview with expert E16, New Delhi, 26 November 2008.

We are the big power in this region. Let us make it very clear. We strongly believe that whatever requirements the Sri Lankan government has, they should come to us. And we will give them what we think is necessary. We do not favour their going to China or Pakistan or any other country.²⁸

In Nepal in particular, China's activities have long constituted a source of concern for India, at least since the Nepalese king Mahendra started "playing the China card" against India in the 1960s (Singh 1988: 152-158; Rose 1971: 238-242).

The promotion of democracy does not figure as one of India's stated foreign policy goals; its tabooization has already been mentioned above. More than this, the promotion of democracy seems to hardly be compatible with goals like the limitation of negative security externalities and, especially, the provision of support for stable regimes in neighboring South Asian countries. As highlighted by Wagner (2009: 5-6), the goal of stability has often prompted New Delhi to privilege this objective over democracy, leading to highly contradictory policies on India's part. The country's involvement in the peace and democratization process in Nepal, which will be addressed in the following section, is clearly illustrative of this problem. Overall, India's regional policy goals and their limited compatibility with democracy promotion help to explain India's reluctance to export its regime type abroad.

3 India's Role in Nepal's Return to Democracy

Despite India's overall 'traditional' rejection of democracy promotion, its engagement in the peace and democratization process in Nepal between 2005 and 2008 could lead us to believe that a change in India's attitude on this issue has taken place.

The years 2005–2008 represented a period of extraordinary change for Nepal. The Hindu monarchy, which had existed for 238 years, was abolished by a broad popular movement; the bloody civil war which had ravaged the country for 10 years came to an end; the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (CPN-M) renounced violence and agreed to enter the political mainstream; and (surprisingly for many observers) the Maoists won the Constituent Assembly elections and their leader Prachanda became the first prime minister of the Republic of Nepal.

In addition to civil society and domestic political actors, external actors—above all India—also played an important role in this historic and extremely turbulent peace and democratization process. The extent of India's involvement is related to the traditionally very close bilateral relations between the two countries. No other neighboring state is so tightly bound to India from both a strategic and a cultural point of view (Paranjpe/Thomas 1991: 176). The close relationship between India and Nepal was formalized with the Treaty of Peace and

²⁸ "Centre considering unified command for armed forces," *The Hindu*, 1 June 2007, <http://www.hindu.com/2007/06/01/stories/2007060108050100.htm> (08 April 2009).

Friendship in 1950. Since then India and Nepal have had an entirely open border and free trade; Nepali citizens have been allowed to move freely in India and are in many regards conferred the same rights as Indian nationals (Rose 1971: 185–186).

Two main phases in India's engagement in domestic events in Nepal between 2005 and 2008 can be identified, with the reinstatement of democracy by King Gyanendra on April 24, 2006 marking the transition from the first to the second. For the sake of clarity, these two phases will be discussed separately in order to highlight the shift towards more explicit support for democracy on the part of India.²⁹

3.1 Informal Engagement

When the Nepalese king Gyanendra seized power on February 1, 2005 and enforced direct royal rule, Nepal's constitutional democracy had already been weakened and eroded. In fact, in October 2002 the king had dismissed the prime minister, dissolved parliament, and nominated a new prime minister from the royalist Rashtriya Prajatantra Party (RPP) (Ghosh 2003). King Gyanendra justified his move with the need to crush the Maoist rebellion, which was spreading rapidly across the country.³⁰ The Maoists, who started their "People's War" with few weapons and limited funds, controlled more than half of Nepal's districts in 2001 (Upreti 2008: 113) and had established "people's governments" in many areas, thereby replacing the institutions of the Nepalese state (Whelpton 2005: 209). By 2001 King Gyanendra had started deploying the Royal Nepal Army (RNA) to fight the Maoists and the conflict had degenerated into a full-fledged civil war with a total death toll of 13,000 victims.

With Gyandendra's seizure of power on February 1, 2005 came the declaration of a state of emergency; the restriction of fundamental freedoms; the banning of several newspapers and television and broadcasting channels; the prohibition of demonstrations; and several arbitrary arrests, among others of the democratic parties' leaders. The Nepalese political

²⁹ The analysis of India's approach to Nepal is based on an assessment of the nonverbal and verbal foreign policy means employed by India and arrayed along a continuum reaching from cooperation to coercion. This allows us to highlight the extent to which New Delhi supported or put pressure on the government of Nepal according to the domestic developments in that country. The nonverbal means are identified through the analysis of significant events as reported in the press, while the verbal means are identified through a qualitative content analysis of all official statements, press briefings, declarations, and Q&A sessions in parliament on Nepal issued in the time span analyzed and available on the MEA website (<http://meaindia.nic.in/>) as well as of all relevant speeches by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh available at <http://pmindia.nic.in/speeches.htm>. These primary sources were coded with the help of the Atlas.ti software according to their more or less threatening and coercive or cooperative and conciliatory "tone" according to the following "code families": threat, diplomatic pressure, hard persuasion, neutral statement, soft persuasion, promise/commitment, diplomatic praise, and leadership. These data were complemented by the expert interviews mentioned above.

³⁰ For an account of the Maoists' goals and ideology and of their "People's War," see Upreti (2008) and Muni (2003).

parties, united in a loose coalition called the Seven Party Alliance (SPA),³¹ started agitating against the king's takeover, demanding the reinstatement of parliament, the formation of an all-party government, negotiations with the Maoists, and elections for a constituent assembly. Gyanendra's coup d'état thus facilitated a rapprochement between the democratic parties and the Maoists which would not have been possible under different circumstances (Mehta 2008: 135).³² The civilian population also played a fundamental role in this crucial phase: the people's resentment towards King Gyanendra's authoritarian regime exploded in April 2006, leading to the largest mass protest in the history of Nepal. This protest was called Jan Andolan II in reference to the 1990 uprising which had led to the establishment of the constitutional monarchy (Cherian 2005a). Eventually the pressure from the streets forced the king to declare, on April 21, 2006, his readiness to return to the status quo which had prevailed before February 1, 2005 by inviting the democratic parties to nominate a new prime minister (ICG 2006: 10). Since this meant, however, that Gyanendra had no intention of restoring the parliament, the tension in the country grew. Finally, on April 24, King Gyanendra was forced to announce the reinstatement of the lower house of parliament, putting an end to his 15-month-long authoritarian rule.³³

India's role in this turbulent period was ambiguous. Traditionally New Delhi's preferred political settlement for Nepal was the so-called "twin pillar" (or "two pillar") approach, based on the coexistence of the constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy (Mishra 2004: 639). In the context of Nepal's civil war and given the risk of spillover effects in India from the Maoist insurgency, New Delhi maintained its traditional political course regarding Nepal. The twin-pillar approach appeared to be the best guarantee for the development of a "national response to the situation,"³⁴ that is, to Maoist insurgency. The Indian government therefore reacted to the gradual erosion of Nepalese democracy between 2002 and 2005 with only moderate protests in order not to alienate the king.

King Gyanendra's coup d'état on February 1, 2005 initially seemed to provoke a policy change on New Delhi's part, inducing it to take a position more clearly supportive of democracy. Like the rest of the international community (Manchanda 2005), India reacted to the coup with protests and critique, defining the king's actions as "a serious setback to the cause of democracy" and "a cause of grave concern to India."³⁵ This reaction was also dictated by

³¹ The following parties formed the SPA: Nepali Congress (NC), Communist Party of Nepal (Unified Marxist Leninist, CPN-UML), Nepal Sadbhavana Party (Anandidevi, NSP (A)), Nepali Congress (Democratic, NC(D)), Janamorcha Nepal, Nepal Workers and Peasant Party (NWPP), and United Left Front (ULF). See ICG (2007: 1).

³² After Gyanendra's takeover, CPN-M leader Prachanda called on the political parties "to form a united front with the Maoists against this 'fratricidal, artificial king'" (Alam 2005).

³³ See Proclamation to the Nation from His Majesty King Gyanendra on 24 April 2006, available at http://www.unmin.org.np/downloads/keydocs/2006-04-24-Proclamation_of_HM_King.pdf (14 January 2009).

³⁴ MEA, India, Press Statement on Visit of H.E. Mr. Surya Bahadur Thapa, Prime Minister of Nepal, 25 November 2003.

³⁵ See MEA, India, Statement on Developments in Nepal, 1 February 2005.

the fact that India (and other external actors such as the US and the UK) had been advising the king against taking such a move over the previous months (Cherian 2005b). In addition to resorting to hard verbal persuasion tools (requests, exhortations),³⁶ New Delhi put pressure on King Gyanendra by imposing an embargo on arms supplies to Nepal.³⁷ However, this sanction was short-lived: the embargo was lifted as early as April 2005—after the end of the emergency—even though King Gyanendra had not fulfilled the conditions for the resumption of arms supplies, namely, the full restoration of democracy.³⁸ The Indian government's decision to resume supplying arms to the RNA reveals the primacy of the goal of limiting the influence of external powers, most notably China and Pakistan, on Nepal.³⁹ In fact, New Delhi was well aware that the suspension of supplies would cause the king, sooner or later, to buy weapons from somewhere else, most probably from China.⁴⁰ In fact, both China and Pakistan had refused to condemn Gyanendra's coup. China had sent its foreign minister on a two-day visit to Nepal after February 1, 2005, and Pakistan had offered US\$5 million in aid to Nepal (Bidwai 2005). Also, the other diplomatic measures undertaken by the Indian government in reaction to Gyanendra's coup were of limited relevance: New Delhi refused to participate in the summit of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) scheduled to take place in Dhaka at the beginning of February 2005, but this move later turned out to have been motivated by the security situation in Bangladesh and not so much by the willingness to protest against King Gyanendra's coup (Stachoske 2005: 133). Similarly, after the coup the Indian government issued several conciliatory statements, neutrally expressing India's preference for the twin-pillar approach without putting any pressure on the king.⁴¹ At the official level, therefore, India rhetorically supported a return to democracy but did not engage in policies that consistently reflected this preference.

³⁶ Just to cite an example: "In this context, we have called for a return to democratic processes at the earliest. All arrested political leaders, media personnel, intellectuals and human rights activists should be released immediately and allowed to exercise their Constitutional rights." MEA, India, Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question No. 365 to be Answered on 3 March 2005.

³⁷ MEA, India, On the visit of External Affairs Minister Shri Natwar Singh to South Africa and working visit of Foreign Minister of Nepal to India, 7 March 2005; MEA, India, Rajya Sabha Unstarred Question No. 978 to be Answered on 10 March 2005.

³⁸ MEA, India, In response to a question on resumption of military supplies to Nepal (*sic*), 10 May 2005. See also Suryanarayana (2005).

³⁹ Even though some Indian experts (Bidwai 2005; interview with expert E16, New Delhi, 26 November 2008) underline the fact that India's leverage over Nepal is much more extensive than China's (and, therefore, that India should not fear China's presence in this country), the preoccupation about Nepal moving into China's sphere of influence should not be underestimated. As one of the interviewees stated very clearly, "Initially it was only China, but in the 1990s Pakistan came to Nepal and *opened a new flank* against India." Interview with expert E15, New Delhi, 25 November 2008.

⁴⁰ Interview with journalist J3, New Delhi, 10 December 2008. The acquisition of arms from China had already been an issue in the late 1980s and had led to a *de facto* blockade by India in 1989 (Whelpton 2005: 113).

⁴¹ For example MEA, India, Suo Moto Statement by External Affairs Minister Shri Natwar Singh on developments in Nepal and his visit to Afghanistan and Pakistan in Rajya Sabha, 4 March 2005: "We continue to be-

The most significant feature of India's foreign policy regarding Nepal in the years 2002–2006 is represented, however, by the existence of two parallel approaches to the crisis. At the informal level India actively contributed to Nepal's return to democracy and, accordingly, to the dismissal of the monarchy. Between 2004 and 2005 India assumed a facilitation role, which allowed for the initiation of a dialogue between Maoist leaders and the Seven Party Alliance, against King Gyanendra. In February 2004 a secret meeting reportedly took place between Madhav Nepal of the Communist Party of Nepal–Unified Marxist Leninist (CPN-UML) and representatives of the CNP-M in Lucknow, India (Manchanda 2004). Subsequent talks between the SPA and the Maoists ultimately led to the signing of the 12-point agreement – also called the New Delhi Agreement because it was finalized in the Indian capital (Mehta 2008: 135) – in November 2005. It was with this agreement that the Maoists and the SPA agreed to cooperate in order to put an end to Gyanendra's authoritarian rule, to establish a democratic system, and to carry out elections for a new constituent assembly.⁴² And it was this agreement which served as a point of departure for the signing of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA), with which the parties put an end to the civil war in Nepal.

It is difficult to say what concrete role the Indian government played in fostering this dialogue process. Talks took place at the informal level, based on well-established personal contacts between Nepalese and Indian political elites: "All was very informal. Every time there is a problem they come to India, they know people here, have studied together—so they just come and talk to their friends in India."⁴³ Indian experts prefer not to talk about Indian "mediation" between the Maoists and the SPA since they are always careful not to give the impression that India intervened in the internal affairs of a neighbor country. Most of the interviewees questioned about the concrete way in which India was involved in the dialogue process gave the following assessment of India's role: India offered the Nepalese Maoists and the SPA a neutral discussion platform, a place where they could meet and talk about the future of their country without being disturbed or observed by the Nepalese media.⁴⁴ Officially, India was involved only insofar as the secret services allowed the Maoist leaders to cross the border without any problems.⁴⁵ This is particularly remarkable since the CPN-M representatives were still being persecuted as terrorists in India (Mishra 2004: 637), a fact which reflected the importance of New Delhi's goal of avoiding the spillover of terrorist activities. While the Indian experts interviewed underlined that during the talks India did not exercise

lieve that the principles of multi-party democracy and constitutional monarchy, enshrined in the country's constitution will be adhered to in order to ensure political stability in the country."

⁴² See "12-point understanding reached between the Seven Political Parties and Nepal Communist Party (Maoist)," available at <http://www.unmin.org.np/downloads/keydocs/12-point%20understanding-22%20Nov%202005.pdf> (26 January 2009).

⁴³ Interview with government official O3, New Delhi, 20 November 2008.

⁴⁴ Interview with expert E5, New Delhi, 7 November 2008; interview with government official O4, New Delhi, 27/11/2008; interview with journalist J3, New Delhi, 10 December 2008.

⁴⁵ Interview with journalist J3, New Delhi, 10 December 008.

any kind of active or intrusive role, the Nepalese journalist Prashant Jha (2008) has advanced the view that a large part of Nepal's democratization process could not have taken place without Indian micromanagement.

To summarize, in 2005 we had the following paradoxical situation: while the Indian government continued to follow its twin-pillar approach, formally criticized King Gyanendra for his undemocratic behavior, and at the same time supported the regime in Kathmandu through the provision of weapons for the fight against the Maoists, at the informal level the Maoists and the SPA were holding talks in New Delhi (with reasonably significant official Indian involvement). These talks laid the foundation for the elimination of Gyanendra's authoritarian rule and paved the way for democracy. As highlighted by one of the experts interviewed, this dual approach to Nepal was due to the divergent priorities of the different Indian ministries involved in shaping New Delhi's Nepal policy. While the Ministry of Defence, with its long-standing relationship with the RNA, was committed to the survival of the monarchy, the Ministry of External Affairs came to realize that the Maoists needed to be given an appropriate political role but at the same time tried to stabilize the internal situation in the neighbor country as far as possible by maintaining good relations with the king.⁴⁶

During Jan Andolan II in April 2006, when Nepal faced becoming seriously destabilized by the mass protests against the king, the Indian government tried, with increasing urgency, to exercise diplomatic pressure on Gyanendra by requesting the release of arrested political leaders, professionals, and students.⁴⁷ To this end, India resorted to a mix of hard persuasion efforts (exhortations, expressions of concern),⁴⁸ neutral statements (reaffirmation of India's position),⁴⁹ and soft persuasion tools (expressions of hope, advice).⁵⁰ A last effort to persuade the king to reinstate democracy was made on April 21, when the Indian prime minister Manmohan Singh sent Karan Singh to Kathmandu as a special envoy to hold talks with the king. Karan Singh, an MP, a former minister and diplomat, the son of the last Maharaja of Kashmir, and a relative of the Nepalese royal dynasty through his wife, seemed to be the right person to persuade King Gyanendra to make concessions. But even though Karan Singh's visit induced the king to make some tentative steps towards the reinstatement of democracy it also provoked an intensification of the protests and growing resentment of India

⁴⁶ Interview with journalist J3, New Delhi, 10 December 2008.

⁴⁷ See, for example MEA, India, In response to questions on developments in Nepal, Press briefing, 6 April 2006: "The situation is an evolving one. For the present let me only say that we are concerned over the arrests and detention, once again, of several political leaders, professionals and students which we *strongly deplore*. These actions by the government in Nepal are counter-productive. There needs to be cooperation among the constitutional forces in Nepal, not confrontation. We *urge* the *immediate* release of those arrested and a return to the path of dialogue and reconciliation [emphasis added]."

⁴⁸ See, for example, MEA, India, Visit of Minister of State Mr. Anand Sharma to Namibia and response to questions on Sri Lanka and Nepal, press briefing, 21 April 2006.

⁴⁹ See, for example, MEA, India, In response to questions on Nepal, Press briefing, 12 April 2006.

⁵⁰ See, for example, *ibid*; MEA, India, On the visit of Dr. Karan Singh, Special Envoy of the Prime Minister questions on Nepal, Press briefing, 18 April 2006.

on the part of the Nepalese population. For the people on the streets, Karan Singh represented the personification of the feudal system they were trying to dismantle; New Delhi's persuasion efforts were interpreted as a clear evidence of India's support for the monarch. As one of the experts interviewed put it,

[...] a lot of people felt that Mr. Karan Singh's visit did not give the right message. [...] I think that if a neighbourhood general carries out a coup you don't send a general to discuss with him. So if a neighbourhood prince carries out a coup, you don't send a former prince to discuss with him!⁵¹

The ambiguity of India's attitude towards democracy in Nepal became even more evident when Gyanendra's announcement, on April 21, that he was going to transfer executive powers to a government to be formed by the democratic parties was greeted with relief by New Delhi. Like a large part of the international community, which "rushed to endorse the royal proposal without waiting to hear the response of Nepal's people and their representatives" (ICG 2006: 10), India welcomed Gyanendra's decision since it implied the promise of a return to multiparty democracy.⁵² However, the protesters on the streets were unsatisfied with Gyanendra's concessions, which they considered insufficient, and the SPA refused to form a government on the king's terms.

It was not only the international community that "lost credibility by attempting to pressure the parties into an unworkable compromise with the king" (ICG 2006: i) but also India, which had a deeper knowledge of the internal political dynamics in its neighbor country yet failed to assess the Nepalese people's mood. This again highlights the ambiguity of India's foreign policy. It was only the further escalation of the situation in Nepal which forced India to make a clear about-face in its policy of informal support for democracy and simultaneous endorsement of the king. After April 21 the protests became so heated that there was nothing India could do to support the king anymore. New Delhi realized that in order to keep some leverage over Nepal it needed to conform to the popular will. In a press conference on April 22, 2006, the Indian foreign secretary Shyam Saran declared the end of the two-pillar approach and India's readiness to accept the decisions of the Nepalese people about the future of their country:

As I mentioned, it is not really for India to decide what are the kind of political arrangements that the people of Nepal eventually wish to see established in Nepal. We have supported the restoration of democracy in Nepal. When we have been saying the twin pillars of constitutional monarchy and multiparty democracy, we have been reflecting only what the people of Nepal and the political parties in Nepal have wanted. If today or tomorrow the people of Nepal wish to see a different future for themselves, different kind of political arrangements for themselves, that is for the people of Nepal to decide, not for India to decide.⁵³

⁵¹ Interview with former diplomat, E5, New Delhi, 7 November 2008.

⁵² See MEA, India, Statement on Nepal, Press release, 21 April 2006.

⁵³ MEA, India, Press Briefing by Foreign Secretary Shri Shyam Saran on Nepal, 22 April 2006.

The conciliatory tone of Shyam Saran's speech was clearly an attempt to make amends for India's prolonged support for the king, which stood in opposition to the popular will in Nepal. It has to be taken into account, however, that the Indian government, while supporting the king as long as possible, at the same time reportedly played an important role in preventing a bloodbath. According to some reports, India influenced the Royal Nepal Army's top brass at the height of the April 2006 uprising in order to avoid the violent crushing of the mass movement (Cherian 2006). This is again a sign of India's enormous influence on events in Nepal and of the—at times—constructive informal role New Delhi played in Nepalese politics.

3.2 Formal Support for Democracy

The end of Jan Andolan II was followed by a bustling period marked by historic changes. On April 28 the first session of parliament since 2002 took place, and two days later an SPA government was formed under the leadership of Girija Prasad Koirala, a representative of the Nepali Congress and a former chief of government. In its session of May 18, 2006, the parliament introduced radical reforms which almost completely disempowered the king, leaving him only a representative function. The armed forces were put under the control of the government, and the Nepalese Hindu monarchy was transformed into a secular state (Gellner 2007: 83).

The new government had announced a ceasefire with the CPN-M even before May 18. It had removed their terrorist label and had invited them to take part in peace negotiations.⁵⁴ Finally, on November 21, 2006, the Comprehensive Peace Agreement (CPA) was signed with the Maoists, officially putting an end to the bloody civil war in Nepal.⁵⁵ The management of arms and armies was put under the supervision of the United Nations.⁵⁶

The Maoists, who were gradually integrated into Nepal's democratic institutions, most notably in the Interim Constituent Assembly formed in January 2007 and in the interim government operating from April 1, 2007,⁵⁷ pressured the SPA to abolish the monarchy even be-

⁵⁴ On the regimentation of the ceasefire, see The Code of Conduct for Ceasefire Agreed between the Government of Nepal and the CPN (Maoist) on 25 May 2006 at Gokarna, available at <http://www.unmin.org.np/downloads/keydocs/25-point%20agreement%20on%20COC%2025%20May,%202006.pdf> (14 January 2009).

⁵⁵ See Unofficial Translation of the Comprehensive Peace Agreement concluded between the Government of Nepal and the Communist Party of Nepal (Maoist) (November 21, 2006), available at http://www.unmin.org.np/downloads/keydocs/2006-11-29-peace_accord-MOFA.pdf (14 January 2009).

⁵⁶ In January 2007, the UN Security Council resolved to establish a political mission in Nepal (UNMIN) to monitor the management of arms and armed personnel, to assist in the monitoring of the ceasefire agreement, and to support the planning, preparation and conduct of the elections of the Constituent Assembly. See United Nations Security Council, Resolution 1740 (2007), available at <http://www.unmin.org.np/downloads/keydocs/2007-01-23-UN.political.mission.to.Nepal.ENG.pdf> (26 January 2009).

⁵⁷ See "Former rebels join Nepal's interim government; elections planned for June 20," International Herald Tribune, 01/04/2007, <http://www.iht.com/articles/ap/2007/04/02/asia/AS-GEN-Nepal-Rebels.php> (26 January 2009).

fore the Constituent Assembly elections. The elections took place on April 10, 2008, and the Maoists emerged—unexpectedly for many observers⁵⁸—as the strongest political party.⁵⁹ During its historic first session on May 28, 2008, the new parliament proclaimed the formation of the republic with an overwhelming majority,⁶⁰ bringing an end to the 240-year-old Shah dynasty. King Gyanendra, made a commoner, was given 15 days to leave his palace. On August 18, 2008, CPN-M leader Prachanda took office as the first prime minister of the Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal.⁶¹

In the course of these briefly outlined events following King Gyanendra's reinstatement of democracy on April 24, 2006, India pursued a policy of clear and open support for the successful establishment of democracy in Nepal. In addition to the use of praise and soft persuasion in diplomatic interactions, India contributed substantively to the democratic transition by facilitating further negotiations between the CPN-M and the other political parties. After the Maoists announced a three-month ceasefire on April 27, 2006, India intensified its efforts to induce them to join the political mainstream. A period of intense negotiations began, which, unlike those in previous years, increasingly took place at the official level. India's readiness to accept the CPN-M as a political actor was favored by the composition of the its own government at that time. In fact, the governing United Progressive Alliance (UPA) was supported by the parties of the Left Front, among them the Communist Party of India (Marxist) (CPI(M)), some of whose members had personal contacts to the Maoist leaders. On April 28, 2006, Sitaran Yechuri, an important member of the CPI(M), traveled to Nepal to convince the Maoists to give up violence and to support the democratization process.⁶² Moreover, India played an important role in promoting the early execution of elections, which had been repeatedly postponed.⁶³ With some donations of vehicles and food as well as of containers for the storage of arms under UN supervision, the Indian government supported the peace process, while more explicit support for democracy came with the adoption of "classic" democracy assistance measures during the April 2008 elections: India contributed to the training of the Nepalese election observers and provided computers, 200 electronic voting machines, and 75 vehicles to

⁵⁸ See, for example, Transparency International Nepal (2008).

⁵⁹ For an analysis of election results see ICG (2008) and Stachoske (2008).

⁶⁰ See "Federal Democratic Republic of Nepal," eKantipur.com, 28 May 2008. <http://www.kantipuronline.com/kolnews.php?&nid=148495> (19 January 2009).

⁶¹ See "PM Dahal takes charge of office," eKantipur.com, 18 August 2008, <http://www.kantipuronline.com/kolnews.php?&nid=157415> (15 June 2009).

⁶² On the other hand, the Maoists themselves, who had been gradually renouncing to their anti-India rhetoric, were looking for India's support. For example the "number two" Maoist leader Baburam Bhattarai met the Indian ambassador at the end of June with the aim of gaining India's support in the institutionalization of the peace and democratization process (Friedrich Ebert Stiftung 2006: 4).

⁶³ In October 2007 Shyam Saran was sent to Kathmandu as a special envoy of the Indian prime minister to convey India's interest in early elections. See MEA, India, Visit of Shri Shyam Saran, Special Envoy of the Prime Minister to Nepal, Press release, 10 December 2007.

the government of Nepal.⁶⁴ Therefore, we can observe a shift in India's Nepal policy after April 24, 2006 towards more consistent and open support for democracy.

4 Conclusion

How should we interpret India's mixed and multifaceted engagement in Nepal during the years 2005–2008, and particularly its about-face of 2006? Can we talk about a radical change in New Delhi's democracy-promotion policy in the sense of an increased readiness to get involved in activities intended to export its own regime type abroad? Or should India's foreign policy regarding Nepal be interpreted rather as being largely consistent with its traditional rejection of democracy promotion and, therefore, as a series of ad hoc measures primarily intended to achieve other goals: stability, the avoidance of spillover effects to India, the limitation of the influence of external powers over Nepal, and, accordingly, the maintenance of India's own influence?

The analysis provided in this paper suggests that the second hypothesis is the most plausible answer. In fact, even though India put pressure on King Gyanendra during the first phase by officially protesting against his coup and the suppression of fundamental liberties, its use of a combination of hard and soft persuasion in the following months revealed New Delhi's willingness to support the king as long as possible according to the twin-pillar theory. This was related to the Indian decision makers' need for the monarchy as a "fall-back institution for the stability and integrity of Nepal" (Muni 2008b: 186): the king was considered to be the actor most able to effectively cope with the destabilizing Maoist insurgency, which India feared could spread to its own border states. Accordingly, India's long-standing support for King Gyanendra and its readiness to coordinate its Nepal policy with the US (Cartwright 2009: 410) were determined to a large extent by the desire to weaken the Maoists militarily and to maintain a certain stability in the country. Only on one occasion did New Delhi resort to a tool that went beyond mere verbal pressure and corresponded to a typical case of negative conditionality: the suspension of arms supplies to Gyanendra in 2005. However, this effort was short-lived and, correspondingly, impinged on the credibility of India's pro-democracy efforts. Besides its desire to stabilize the country and to avoid negative spillover effects across the open border, India's main reason for compromising on the principle of support for democracy in Nepal seems to have been, as outlined above, the need to avoid a further increase in external (especially Chinese) influence in Nepal.

India's far-reaching involvement in the peace and democratization process through the informal facilitation of talks between the CPN-M and the SPA should be considered a forward-looking attempt to stabilize Nepal based on the recognition that the Maoists needed to

⁶⁴ See India-Nepal Relations. Embassy of India, Kathmandu, Nepal. <http://www.south-asia.com/Embassy-India/indneprel.htm> (5 February 2009). Interview with government official, O1, New Delhi, 17 November 2008.

be allowed to enter the political mainstream in order to avoid further violence. Against this background, the April 2006 about-face in India's approach to Nepal through its more decisive support for democracy should not be overestimated as signaling a radical change in New Delhi's policy. In fact, this shift took place when the security situation in Nepal was getting out of control, and after Karan Singh's visit had further contributed to stirring up popular sentiment. It became clear that the twin-pillar approach was not sustainable anymore, and the Indian government suddenly realized that it had to let the king fall in order to avoid Nepal's descent into complete anarchy.

Instead of viewing the case of Nepal as an indicator of a long-term change in India's strategic approach to democracy promotion, we should see it as a reactive short-term change in policy that was essentially motivated by India's desire to avoid the further destabilization of its neighbor. In this light, even India's facilitation efforts can be considered to have been a far-sighted stabilization measure which was based on the recognition that the involvement of the CPN-M in Nepal's political life had become unavoidable rather than on a transition to democracy promotion for its own sake. The "quiet" character of India's pro-democracy activities and the emphasis on Nepal's autonomy in deciding about its future, as exemplarily expressed in Shyam Saran's statement, reflect India's continued adherence to the principles of noninterference and sovereignty.

Therefore, going back to the question of India's potential transformation into a new democracy promoter, the Nepalese case, when analyzed in detail, reveals that New Delhi's engagement was rather occasional and contingent, and that it originated from the precariousness of Nepal's internal situation. Seen together with India's negative attitude towards democracy promotion as a policy and the primacy of its other foreign policy goals, this leads us to conclude that India has not become a major new actor in democracy promotion. New Delhi's approach to democracy promotion in the future is also likely to remain characterized by a high degree of restraint and by the primacy of pragmatism in dealing with undemocratic regimes.

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