

## Always a rule-maker

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and French President Emmanuel Macron at the International Solar Alliance Founding Conference in New Delhi on Sunday | Photo Credit: [PTI](#)

The inaugural International Solar Alliance (ISA) summit underlines India's place in the new world order. Global equitable sustainable development, which is the basis of the ISA, suggests a 'third' way to the inequality and environmental damage characterising the current U.S. and China-led models. This vision follows from India's call for 'climate justice', which reframes climate change as a social and not a physical problem. The shift fills the gap in the thrust of the 'Chinese dream' and 'America first', both of which ignore sustainable development. In January, the big takeaway from the ASEAN-India Summit was that countries in the region questioned the benefits of China's model of a new order and the U.S.'s commitment to the existing order and considered India as a balancing factor. This is also why China and the U.S. are seeking to work with India.

U.S. President Donald Trump said: "Any nation that trades away its prosperity for security will end up losing both." This statement recognises the defining feature of the 21st century. The challenge for India is to take advantage of global trends and push infrastructure, e-commerce, human capital and technology development to position itself in the emerging global economic triumvirate, which must operate within global ecological limits, and as a cyber global power. India should now give primacy to rules that will chart a path for its own sustainable prosperity rather than seek congruent interests.

### Jointly shaping new rules

Questions around the existing political and economic order suggest that India should not reject collaboration in the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), which is the framework for a new order. Rather, it should work with China to jointly set the new multilateral rules. Part of this dynamics is being played out in the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), where India must consider longer-term and not immediate interests.

India and China have together been questioning the injustice of current global rules. They, along with other BRICS members, set up the BRICS Development Bank and established the BRICS Contingent Reserve Arrangement. In 2015, China launched the Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank of which India is the second largest shareholder. The RCEP, dominated by China and India, avoids rules on labour, environment and intellectual property rights espoused by the U.S., the European Union, and Japan. There is an emerging clash in the United Nations, World Trade Organisation, and the climate treaty with the U.S. weakening multilateral rules by redefining what is 'fair'. It is also becoming clear that in a multipolar world China cannot shape rules for the 'Asian Century' by itself, just as India should not expect countries in Asia to choose between itself and China, as they see the BRI as the only source of much-needed investment.

The two sides have just recognised "sensitivity to each other's concerns, interests and aspirations" and China has suggested they "meet halfway". New opportunities are emerging with Beijing's willingness to discuss Delhi's concerns about Pakistan and the BRI. The aim should be to demarcate the border, a colonial legacy, and for the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation to develop Asia-specific rules for non-aggression to institutionalise China's stated support for non-hierarchical relations.

### Maritime trade routes

Indian Ocean trade routes, which have always connected the east and west, are an expanding

conduits for half the world's container traffic, one-third of bulk cargo transport, and nearly two-thirds of global maritime oil trade. The UN Convention on the Law of the Sea was designed to maintain public order at sea, but is inadequate for current needs. A U.S. withdrawing from economic multilateralism needs India to shore up its strategic influence in Asia. China is wary of India's security understanding with ASEAN as it negotiates a Code of Conduct to meet challenges to its 'Nine-Dash Line'. Statesmanship would require India to limit itself to its own naval enclaves of the littoral states of the Indian Ocean and organise platforms which include China and Japan and allow for the development of Indian Ocean-centric rules of engagement.

The just-concluded reciprocal logistics support between the Indian armed forces and France limits itself to the Indian Ocean Region, India's security perimeter. Partnership should be extended to the Francophone Indian Ocean Commission. New global vision also matters.

In 2018, India will have to make hard choices. It will need to strike a balance between being a part of the Quad and partnering with Russia and China, as they are now considered the biggest threat by the U.S.

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