

PUTTING THE PERIPHERY AT THE CENTER: INDIAN STATES' ROLE IN FOREIGN POLICY

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India's states traditionally haven't played any significant role in the formulation of foreign policy, but this may be changing to some degree. Economic liberalization and the emergence of coalition governments in New Delhi have created an environment conducive for states to proactively engage the central government on foreign policy issues that affect their interests. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has realized the necessity of getting the country's regional governments on board with his foreign policy endeavors, but efforts to make good on this vision have had limited success. New Delhi needs to institutionalize the legitimate foreign policy role that Indian states are starting to play so that they can put forward their views in a constructive manner.

Key Themes

- In recent years, Indian states have begun playing a larger role in foreign policy than they previously did, due to the country's economic liberalization and the rising influence of regional political parties.
- The current government led by Prime Minister Modi has been more accepting of states playing a role in foreign policy than past administrations. It seems to view such engagement not as a negative form of interference but as a useful asset for pursuing the country's national interests abroad. The creation of the States Division within the Ministry of External Affairs is indicative of this new willingness to mainstream regional voices on foreign policy matters.
- Modi has implemented some measures to integrate states into the foreign policy making process, but these efforts have been largely ad hoc and functionalist rather than holistic and structurally transformative.
- The Modi government's efforts are informed by the logic of using the tools of diplomacy for promoting economic development and foreign direct investment, with very little focus on strategic security issues.
- Modi's government will need to take a more consensus-based approach and make institutional adjustments in order to make good on promises of broadening states' role on foreign policy making.

Institutionalizing Indian States' Foreign Policy Role

- The Modi government should strengthen existing coordination mechanisms such as the Inter-State Council and National Development Council.
- The Modi administration should allow state governments to place personnel in new and existing institutions, empowering state-level officials to coordinate with Indian central government officials and foreign diplomats in state capitals, foreign capitals, and New Delhi.
- The Modi government should institutionalize ways for top officials in the Ministry of External Affairs to regularly meet and consult with their leading counterparts in state governments.
- State governments should consider creating their own institutional frameworks to engage the central government on foreign policy issues.

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