

Opinions from the Rising Generation

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Advice from the Rising Generation: An Opinion from India

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WHEN PRESIDENT BARACK OBAMA VISITED INDIA IN 2010, HE WOWED A NATION OF more than 1.2 billion people by predicting that the United States and India would form “one of the defining partnerships of the 21st century.” For Indians, Obama’s words represented not only a prediction but also a promise for more engagement, trade, and resource sharing. The next White House will play a crucial role in furthering this partnership.

Since I am writing this note from New Delhi, allow me to put forward the viewpoint from these parts. Indians *like* the United States of America. More specifically, *young Indians like the United States*. According to a June 2016 survey by the Pew Research Center, 49 percent of Indians older than age 50 have a favorable view of the United States. When you look at Indians between ages 18 and 34, however, a considerably larger proportion (61 percent) hold positive views. This generational difference in perceptions of the United States—a 12 percentage point gap between the old and young—is one of the largest such divergences in the world right now. The gap is made all the more important given that most Indians are quite young; half of the population is younger than age 27. The data represents a trend: more and more young Indians admire the United States. They seem to sense the shared values of democracy, freedom, and entrepreneurship. When they can, these young Indians vote with their feet: 132,888 Indian students were enrolled in U.S. schools and colleges in 2015. When they can, many of them stay on to build their own versions of the American Dream, even while maintaining strong links to the land of their birth. American soft power is alive and well in India.

What do Indians want from the next White House? I can only hazard a guess; but from years of living and now reporting in this country, I can point to at least a couple of issues that will define India in the next few decades—and they just happen to be issues on which the United States can partner.

The first is technology. Indians are embarking on a digital revolution. More than 700 million Indians are expected to discover the Internet on smartphones in the next decade. That will triple the number of Indians currently online. Remember how the automobile transformed the United States in the 20th century, with highways, supermarkets, malls, and suburbia? Well, in a somewhat similar way, the smartphone may transform 21st century India with new connections and opportunities. Every Indian will use a U.S.-made product daily, and those products are likely going to be called Google, Facebook, or Apple. This is a tremendous soft power asset. **And there is a role for the U.S. government as well—to lead the way on Internet rules and freedoms, on net neutrality, on cybercrime, and on cyber security.**

The second issue that will animate a growing number of young Indians is pollution and climate change. As I write this note, New Delhi’s air is rated as “Hazardous” with a real-time Air Quality Index north of 500 (Washington, D.C. is currently rated at only 64). How do I know these numbers? I tend to look at the public meter readings at the U.S. Embassy near my office in New Delhi. U.S. leadership in highlighting poor air quality around the world is important. And yet, young Indians will tell you they are searching for answers, not problems. **Technological help to create cheaper and cleaner energy would go a long way toward further endearing the United States to Indian youth.** Or try money—I can’t think of a better global return on U.S. loans. As Indians get richer, they will justifiably want more

air conditioners (which also happen to be massive pollutants). Washington's leadership in hammering out a deal in Rwanda last month reducing the use of hydrofluorocarbons used in air conditioners is the kind of long-term planning that poor countries including India may fight initially (because, New Delhi argues, its people need the chance to grow and consume the comforts of modernity) but will be appreciated in the longer term.

Once-colonized countries such as India eye any form of “interference” with great suspicion. At the same time, there is a reason why younger Indians look to the United States with hope—I think it is because they are looking for global leadership on the issues that do not always make the front pages of their newspapers or their parliamentary debates—issues such as climate change, clean energy, cyber security, and the fight against disease and poverty. But if Washington can lead on these issues globally, maybe in the future you will find that the older generations will like the United States just as much as the idealistic young.

Connecting the New Nodes: U.S. Interests in the Era of Climate Change

Magdalena J. Seol

DURING THE U.S. PRESIDENTIAL CAMPAIGN, PRESIDENT-ELECT TRUMP ARGUED THAT GLOBAL EFFORTS TO ADDRESS CLIMATE CHANGE, SUCH AS THE PARIS CLIMATE AGREEMENT, WERE A “BAD DEAL” that posed an unnecessary burden for business. Although he initially indicated he could withdraw from the Paris Agreement, he has more recently suggested that he has an open mind. I would urge him to reconsider his opposition to climate change cooperation. As more than 300 U.S. businesses recently argued in an open letter, failing to invest in a more energy-efficient and green future will be a “bad deal” for long-term U.S. interests.

The global economy is undergoing profound changes. It is moving, inexorably, toward a green economy. Last year's Paris Climate Agreement, while by itself far from enough to limit the increase in global warming to a desired target, has become an important catalyst for global economic cooperation and integration regardless of whether or not one believes in global warming. The 21st century economy, including America's very own, will be rebuilt on a new, high-tech, climate-safe, and low-carbon system. The United States is already invested in this new system—it cannot disconnect from the new rules of the game. As we saw during the 2016 COP22 Conference in Marrakesh, regardless of the claims of climate change deniers, the overwhelming majority of countries on the planet are marching on toward a more green and sustainable economy. Ultimately, U.S. businesses and the economy will lose by disengaging from this progress. And, in turn, U.S. disengagement means that everyone loses—even China is warning the United States against abandoning the Paris Agreement.

President-elect Trump may also find that climate change is not just an economic issue, but an important national security agenda. The consequences of climate change, such as storms, extreme heat, droughts, and floods, impose serious threats to the United States and other countries. Domestically, the effects of climate change can overwhelm disaster-response capabilities; internationally, they cause humanitarian disasters that contribute to political violence affecting multiple countries. Beyond these threats, there is also a strategic dimension to reducing greenhouse gas emissions. Working together with countries such as China and India to reduce emissions can help the United States integrate those countries into the global rules-based order; it can also help facilitate a more stable development trajectory for

countries such as Indonesia. It can potentially be applied in facilitating changes in deadlock situations like the Democratic People's Republic of Korea.

The Asian region is still dealing with volatile economic, military, political, and demographic transitions, from China's economic slowdown and increasing tensions over the South China Sea to environmental degradation and demographic problems throughout the region. Climate change affects almost all of these problems, both directly and indirectly. It serves as a threat multiplier that significantly intensifies the region's instability.

Asia will need bold actions and closer partnerships with other countries to tackle these complex challenges. Partnership on climate change and environmental issues can provide a relatively safe entry point for political cooperation that can keep bilateral channels open even in the midst of ongoing friction. In some cases, such cooperation may provide a way out of conflict or may even offer ideas for innovative institutional and governance mechanisms. As we recently saw, China's partnership with the United States on the Paris Agreement helped to keep open a channel for both nations to work together regardless of intensifying tensions on issues such as the South China Sea.

Unlike many other global threats, in terms of climate change, we have a clear understanding of the limited time frame for intervention. The next few decades offer a brief window of opportunity for global leaders to minimize large-scale and potentially catastrophic consequences. The broad international consensus that is building around this issue is helping to generate concrete policy proposals to prevent these outcomes. President-elect Trump and his administration should harness this growing cooperation, and the opportunity it provides to advance U.S. political and economic purposes. The march toward a greener future is underway; I hope the United States will continue to stay on this path.