

Gandhi, India and the Road Not Taken



Jan 30, 2018 | 0900 GMT

Forecast Update

In Stratfor's 2018 Annual Forecast, we explained that New Delhi will focus on implementing the Goods and Services Tax. The broad-ranging tax reform under Prime Minister Narendra Modi is aimed at making India a more attractive country for foreign investment, and part of the decadeslong effort of moving away from Gandhi and Nehru's emphasis on self-reliance toward global economic integration.

[See 2018 Annual Forecast](#)

With three rapid gunshots, Nathuram Godse altered the course of Indian history. On Jan. 30, 1948, the militant Hindu nationalist killed Mohandas Karamchand Gandhi while the 78-year old leader of the Indian independence movement was en route to his evening prayers in New Delhi's Birla House. The assassination would plunge a newly liberated India into mourning — independence had come less than six months before — and Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Gandhi's foremost disciple, would use the

incident to suppress the Rashtriya Swayamsewak Sangh (RSS), the Hindu nationalist organization that Godse had once been affiliated with. Ahead of his execution in 1949, the unremorseful Godse rattled off a litany of grievances against Gandhi's ideology in a courtroom letter focused on Muslim appeasement, the carnage born of Partition, and the creation of Pakistan.

Seventy years have passed since Gandhi's death. But echoes of Godse's letter resonate in India's current political landscape as the world's largest democracy staggers toward modernization. Hindu nationalism has witnessed a recrudescence under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, whose center-right Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) in the 2014 national elections soundly defeated the Indian National Congress, the party Gandhi and Nehru led during their anti-colonialist struggle against the British Empire. To be sure, Godse was on the fringe of the Hindu nationalist movement and represented its most militant manifestation, and the BJP and its ideological parent organization, the RSS, by and large reject his extremism and honor Gandhi as the father of the nation. But along with the pragmatic elements within the BJP today — which are less interested in stoking communal divisions than in attracting foreign investment to catalyze India's \$2 trillion economy — a portion of the ruling party's electorate harbors a visceral disdain for Pakistan. Not only that, they question the commitment of India's Muslim community of 180 million to the project of Indian nationhood. In a masterful political strategy, the BJP tapped into this undercurrent during the 2014 elections that brought Modi to power, and none of the 282 candidates who won their seats in Parliament was Muslim.

Then there is Pakistan. Gandhi was opposed to [the partition that led to that country's birth](#) alongside India in August 1947, even going so far as to suggest that Mohammed Ali Jinnah, Pakistan's founder, become the prime minister of an undivided India. But the Partition could not be stopped. It triggered the migration of about 15 million people across the new boundaries, unleashing a bloodbath as Hindus, Muslims and Sikhs collided with one another during the mass upheaval. The widespread violence borne of Partition seemed to be an affront to Gandhi's philosophy of nonviolence, and the man known as Mahatma — an honorific title meaning "great soul" — refused to take part in independence day festivities on Aug. 15, 1947. Today, India and Pakistan remain at odds, possessing nuclear weapons and having waged three wars, including one over Kashmir, the disputed territory at the heart of their rivalry. And as India

[partners with Afghanistan](#) in a bid to challenge Pakistan's quest for influence in the warring country, the antagonism between Islamabad and New Delhi will only persist.

Mohandas K. Gandhi leads the Salt March to protest the government's monopoly on salt in 1930.
(Central Press/Getty Images)



Finally, there is Gandhi's own vision for India. Gandhi rejected the materialism of the West as decadent, and he advocated the establishment of a new Indian republic based on a federation of villages. He also advocated self-reliance, or swaraj, a philosophy borne in reaction to India's colonial subjugation. But the country deviated from both of these paths. Nehru would steer India on a course inspired by self-reliance, in part by employing a program of import substitution. But India's economic problems under this approach, which resulted in tepid growth rates, came to a head in 1991, when the collapse of the Soviet Union — India's strongest international partner — roughly coincided with the country's [balance of payments crisis](#). In response, Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao and Finance Minister Manmohan Singh began to dismantle the elaborate system of red tape for businesses known as the "License Raj." That decision marked a defeat for Gandhi's swaraj, and it accelerated India's integration into the global economy. It also increased the country's reliance on seaborne trade and thus spurred its expanding [naval capacity in the Indian Ocean](#), which also symbolized its rising military power. And as China's naval capacity increases in the region, so will India's maritime presence.

Indeed, far from preaching self-reliance — which in today's world implies protectionism — Modi was singing the virtues of globalization while addressing the global elite at the [World Economic Forum](#) in Davos, Switzerland. And for India, this will be the path to follow. The country may embrace Gandhian rhetoric, but it is an aspiring great power and home to an expanding consumer market. Materialism, military spending and urbanization are the trends that will continue to shape India's future, even as Gandhi and Godse — one the father of the nation, the other his assassin — come to define the past.

Stratfor

WORLDVIEW™

YOU'RE READING

Gandhi, India and the Road Not Taken

CONNECTED CONTENT

Send us your thoughts on this report

Gandhi, India and the Road Not Taken is republished with permission of Stratfor Enterprises, LLC.

STRATFOR

Stratfor Enterprises, LLC
221 West 6th Street, Suite 400

P.O. Box 92529

Austin, Texas 78709-2529

+1.512.744.4300

+1.877.978.7284 (Toll Free)

