



## Strategic Triangulation

*Wall Street Journal:*

**“India’s ruling Bharatiya Janata Party is, from the standpoint of American national interests, the most important foreign political party in the world”**

NEW DELHI and LUCKNOW, India — On 21 March 2023 *Wall Street Journal* foreign affairs analyst Walter Russell Mead published his weekly “Global View” column with the title “India’s BJP Is the World’s Most Important Party.” He went on to add that “It may also be the least understood.”

Mr. Mead’s column appeared immediately “[a]fter an intensive series of meetings with senior BJP and RSS leaders, as well as some of their critics,” facilitated by Dr. Timothy S. Shah, Director of Strategic Initiatives for the Center for Shared Civilizational Values, and Sri Ram Madhav Varanasi, who previously served as National General Secretary of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP). Mr. Madhav is also a member of the National Executive of the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh (National Volunteer Corps, or RSS), a Hindu-nationalist mass organization established in 1925.

The article continues:

*The BJP is poorly understood because it grows out of a political and cultural history unfamiliar to most non-Indians. The BJP’s electoral dominance reflects the success of a once obscure and marginal social movement of national renewal based on efforts by generations of social thinkers and activists to chart a distinctively Hindu path to modernization....*

*I am convinced that Americans and Westerners generally need to engage much more deeply with a complex and powerful [Hindu-nationalist] movement. From a fringe of mostly marginalized intellectuals and religious enthusiasts, the RSS has become perhaps the most powerful civil-society organization in the world. Its rural and urban development programs, religious education and revival efforts and civic activism, staffed by thousands of volunteers from all walks of life, have succeeded in forming the political consciousness and focusing the energies of hundreds of millions of people.*

Mr. Mead’s visit to India built on an intensive fact-finding trip to India and Indonesia in 2022, when he met with leaders of the world’s largest Muslim organization, Nahdlatul Ulama — who co-founded the Center for Shared Civilizational Values — and a number of senior cabinet ministers.

In a June 2022 article titled “Indonesia Tunes Out the U.S.,” Mr. Mead wrote that “‘Pivot to Asia’ skeptics in Jakarta fear Biden and the American foreign-policy establishment care more about Europe than them.... The Indonesians I met do not hate the U.S. They are not ‘pro-

China.’ Indeed, they are concerned about Chinese attempts to enforce claims of sovereignty in the South China Sea and beyond. They want more America, not less, in the region...

“A real pivot to Asia would frequently require American policy makers to elevate the interests and concerns of Asian partners over those of longstanding allies in Europe. Many Indonesians don’t think that has happened yet; they may not be totally wrong.”

The article also noted the strategic importance of Nahdlatul Ulama to the Indo-Pacific region. “Support for democratic and pluralistic values is deeply rooted in Indonesian society. The Indonesian brand of Islam is notably tolerant, and the Nahdlatul Ulama, at up to 90 million members the largest Islamic association in the world, supports democratic governance and the rules-based international order while opposing the imposition of Muslim religious law on minorities. Its current general [chairman], Yahya Cholil Staqf, has visited Jerusalem and publicly attacked anti-Semitism. His brother, Indonesia’s religious-affairs minister, recently invited Pope Francis to visit the country.”

Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and the Center for Shared Civilizational Values (CSCV) are systematically implementing a policy of “strategic triangulation” in key regions of the world, including [Europe](#), [North America](#), the [Middle East](#), [Sub-Saharan Africa](#), and the [Indo-Pacific](#). Concrete manifestations of this policy include the [G20 Religion Forum \(R20\)](#) and the Ashoka Approach.

Nahdlatul Ulama established the R20 in conjunction with Indonesia’s Presidency of the G20 and appointed CSCV to serve as its permanent secretariat. Held in Bali, Indonesia, from 2 – 3 November 2022, the R20 Summit of International Religious Leaders laid the foundation for a long-term effort to ensure that religion functions as a genuine and dynamic source of solutions, rather than problems, in the 21st century.

The [Ashoka Approach](#), also established by NU and CSCV, seeks to foster the re-emergence of South and Southeast Asia as a cohesive, vital, and proactive civilizational sphere capable of functioning as an independent pillar of support for a rules-based international order founded upon shared civilizational values.

As Walter Mead observed in his latest article:

*Mohan Bhagwat, the spiritual leader of the RSS, spoke to me about the need to accelerate India’s economic growth, and disavowed the idea that religious minorities should suffer discrimination or loss of civil rights.*

*How these statements by top leaders to a foreign journalist will percolate down to the grass roots is impossible to predict. But I did get the impression that the leadership of a once-marginalized movement wants to position itself as the natural establishment of a rising power and is looking to engage deeply and fruitfully with the outside world without losing touch with its social and political base.*