This chapter examines the different types of diplomacy SMPs may pursue in order to promote their preferred vision of reform internationalism. SMPs generally aspire to influence negotiations in order to secure benefits for the global South and ensure the stability of global governance, but this objective can be pursued through different bargaining strategies. A defensive approach to reform will seek the rebalancing of existing commitments between developed and developing countries and prioritise the resolution of existing imbalances before new agendas can be negotiated. A proactive approach will facilitate the consensus-building required for initiating new agendas if it is deemed that only such engagement will secure the stability of global governance. SMPs can mobilise different segments of the global South to promote these different agendas, but they may also interpret the broader climate surrounding each negotiation in different ways. They may fail to recognise the firm structural leadership provided by major powers and the processes of consensus-building that take place beyond their sphere of influence. SMPs that correctly interpret these conditions are better positioned to exert influence that is disproportionate to their limited material capabilities.

2.1 India’s approach to the WTO

India’s world view of multilateral trade negotiations at the time of the Doha ministerial was informed by a reformist bargaining approach. This reformist approach was largely epitomised by India’s reintegration with the global trading system after the UR of the General Agreement on Trade and Tariffs (GATT) (Efstathopoulos and Kelly, 2014). Since the creation of the WTO in 1995, India had gradually shifted from a reactive mode towards a proactive stance in WTO negotiations (Tripathi, 2008).
It maintained, nevertheless, a combative negotiating mentality that largely derived from its foreign policy tradition of defending the collective causes of the Third World. It engaged in coalitions that defended the interests of the global South and pursued a combative diplomacy that challenged the unequal structures of the liberal trade order (Narlikar, 2006).

India’s statements in the WTO during 2000–1 reflect both its reformist world view of multilateral trade and its combative bargaining strategy. Its approach perceived the broader regulatory and legal framework of the WTO as sufficient for governing key areas such as agriculture and services. Reforming the WTO system was imperative, however, for meeting the needs of developing countries and realising the developmental potential of the WTO. India pursued a combative bargaining strategy in order to promote its reformist agenda and achieve the rebalancing of commitments between the North and the South. Its combative strategy entailed two goals: (i) maintaining the focus of negotiations on outstanding implementation issues from the UR and (ii) blocking the introduction of new trade issues and resisting the launch of a new round of negotiations.

India’s reformism is particularly reflected in the statements made in the specialised committees of the WTO, especially in agriculture and services. In agriculture, India accepted the basic parameters of agricultural liberalisation that had been set by the Uruguay Round Agreement on Agriculture (AoA) (WTO, G/AG/NG/W/102, p. 1, 7, 17). The agreement was seen as sufficient for monitoring progress in implementation issues, reducing trade barriers and achieving Special and Differential Treatment (S&D) for developing countries. The agreement allowed for promoting reforms and overseeing “progress towards establishing a fair and market oriented agricultural trading system” (WTO, G/AG/NG/W/33, p. 1). While the AoA was perceived as legitimate, the inherent inequalities of the UR had to be addressed through a series of reforms. The problem was therefore located in the implementation of the AoA rather than in the agreement itself. The Indian delegation noted: “the Agreement on Agriculture, which achieved success in defining rules for international trade in agriculture, has little to show in terms of effective market opening for developing countries. The gains that the developing countries had anticipated did not materialise” (WTO, G/AG/NG/W/33, p. 2). For India, the continuation of the reform process was vital for restructuring agricultural trade as envisioned in the AoA (WTO, G/AG/NG/W/102, pp. 7, 13, 16). Developed countries were particularly responsible for sustaining the reform process and were expected to eliminate trade-distorting practices