

INDIA'S INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS AND FOREIGN POLICY IN CONTEMPORARY DECADAL

Varsha. M. Potdar, Asst. Prof. Political Science. Smt. A. R. Patil, Kanya Mahavidyalay, Ichalkaranji
Gmail - varshampotdar@gmail.com, Mob.No.7798665969

Abstract: India is showing a new image of itself to the world and the world is recognising that today, India is indeed a country to be reckoned with. 60 years on, Jawaharlal Nehru's dream of India being recognised as a global power has never been closer. India always aspired global recognition, however for almost half a century India was seen as overpopulated, poor and irrelevant. Although the hegemony in the South Asian region and a leader within the Non Aligned Movement this hardly mattered on the wider world stage. India's foreign policy in the first 45 years after independence was very flexible and reactive in nature. The global vision engendered by Nehru was based on moral supremacy and leadership of the developing world as well as economic self sufficiency at home. These moral principles focused largely on issues of superpower domination and anti-imperialism and were passed on from government to government till the late 1980s. However as the world around India changed these principles slowly became obsolete. India's foreign policy formulation changed first under the United Front governments in the mid 1990s and then more radically under the BJP led NDA alliance in 1998. The backdrops to the changes were the economic reforms which had been started in 1991. India was opening up to the world and economic growth rather than self sufficiency became the major driver for international relations. The realisation that foreign relations, energy policy and economic growth are linked has led to a new foreign policy formulation. New Delhi's priority today is to protect India's economic growth and foreign policy has been harnessed to create linkages with those countries that could provide energy security. This is because India sees that the only way it can maintain its' current position on the global scale is through its growth. But India's new foreign policy formulation goes beyond securing oil and gas resources. Over the last few years India has been negotiating a nuclear deal with the US. This deal's main objectives are to help India's civilian nuclear power expansion as well as increasing business between the US and India. However this agreement goes well beyond energy security and economic growth. The most pertinent result of these negotiations is India's recognition as a nuclear weapons state. With this recognition India achieves a large milestone towards global power status and fulfils Nehru's vision, albeit in a manner which could have never been imagined by India's first prime minister.

Introduction: India is the second most populous country and the world's most-populous democracy. It is one of the fastest growing economies in the world. It is no more a regional power only, but showing every potential of a global power. These are contributing to its growing influence in the international affairs.

India has a cherished history of collaboration with several countries as the leader of the developing world. India was one of the founding members of several international organisations, most notably the United Nations, the Non-Aligned Movement, the Asian Development Bank and the G-20 industrial nations. India also played an important role in international organisations like East Asia Summit, World Trade Organisation, International Monetary Fund, G8 + 5, IBSA Dialogue Forum and regional organisations which include SAARC, BIMSTEC etc.

On Indian Public Diplomacy:

The 21st century realignment of power is becoming more of a reality day-by-day, with the influence of Western powers waning to some extent and an increasingly assertive role being played by the rising powers like China and India in the global context. This trend has most recently been hastened by the global economic downturn that comparatively had less effect on the Chinese and Indian economy compared to those of the United States and Europe. India's exponential economic growth and recognition of its de-facto nuclear status by the US and other powers (after the Indo-US nuclear deal) have altered external perceptions of India, with the country being viewed as an emerging power with expanding global clout. In this scenario, India's attempt to amplify its soft power through public diplomacy becomes crucial.

India as new claimant of a place at the high table in the world has huge stakes in the arena of global politics and thus, maintaining and enhancing its influence remains a top priority for the country. In the 21st century, there has been more of a need for states to use soft power so as to enhance one's attractiveness in international arena and to show one's better side in order to stimulate cooperation and dampen resistance, particularly concerning security policies. In this context, public diplomacy has become a very important instrument of soft power, as well as being a vital tool of Indian foreign policy. The undercurrent of Indian public diplomacy is to avow India as a rising power of undeniable international significance and influence, which is consistent with India's demand to win a place at the high table by being granted the permanent seat

on the United Nations Security Council. India has already proved itself as a capable military and economic power in the world, yet somehow it finds struggles to project this power to the world. There are limits on what hard power can accomplish and thus a judicious mix of hard and soft power or what is termed as 'smart power', is needed. Thus, the principal modus operandi for augmenting India's influence in the world can be achieved by expanding its soft power. Soft power, the term coined by Joseph Nye, has become a portent measure of a country's power and influence in the world today. Soft power is the ability to get what one wants through attraction rather than coercion or payments. Soft power largely emanates from a country's culture, its political values and institutions and its foreign policy. India finds itself well-placed in possessing soft power resources because of its rich culture and history, its democratic credentials, its technological advancement, its large and influential diaspora and the leadership India wields among the developing nations through multilateral institutions like Non-Alignment movement. Thus, what distinguishes India's claim to global leadership is its unique, unobtrusive, persuasive 'soft power' or what South Asia expert Steven Cohen calls 'India's reputational power'. One of the most important tools for exercising a country's soft power is public diplomacy. Public diplomacy can be defined as, "A government's process of communicating with foreign publics in an attempt to bring about an understanding for its nation's ideas and ideals, its institutions and culture, as well as its national goals and current policies." It can be seen as an instrument that a country's government uses to mobilise its resources to communicate with and attract the public of other countries (rather than merely their governments) to promote its national interests through a number of means, such as broadcasting, direct outreach programmes, cultural diplomacy, educational and professional exchanges and so forth. Public diplomacy is not only limited to influencing foreign publics, but also for gaining feedback on the foreign perception of the host country. However, the most significant role of public diplomacy is to inform, explain and interpret the nation's goals and strategies to foreign publics, in order to garner their support and create goodwill among other nations in order to achieve its national interests.

The innovations in India's foreign policy strategy since the early 1990s has resulted in the happy situation of simultaneous expansion of relations with all the major powers, growing weight in Asia and the Indian Ocean regions, and the prospect of improved relations with important neighbours. Given its impending relative rise in the international system, India is bound to be confronted by a number of challenges. First the new focus on the importance of power is not without problems. Despite being marginalized in recent years, the imperatives of idealism and moralism have not completely disappeared from India's foreign policy. Since 1991, India has moved from its traditional emphasis on the "power of the argument" to a new stress on the "argument of power". Given its noisy democracy, India cannot build domestic political support to foreign policy initiatives purely on the argument of power. It would continue to need a set of values and norms to justify its actions on the world stage. As a consequence the tension between "power and principle" would remain an enduring one in India's foreign policy strategy.

Second, increased power potential will mean that India would have to take positions on major international issues and regional conflicts. In recent years, New Delhi has either avoided or merely substituted them with generalized slogans. Just as Beijing is being pressed to become a "stake-holder" in the international system, New Delhi too would come under greater pressure to stop being a "free rider". In other words, India would have to often find ways to limit the pursuit of "national interest" in order to contribute to "collective interests" of the international system.

Third, as India emerges as an important element of future balance of power in the world, it would be pressed to make choices in favour of one or the other great powers at least on specific issues. The absence of great power confrontation in the last few years has allowed India the luxury of converting the slogan of "non-alignment" into an "independent" foreign policy. But amidst potential new rivalries among the U.S., China, Europe, Russia, and Japan, New Delhi would be compelled to make often wrenching political choices. While India making potential alliances with one or other major powers cannot be ruled out in the future, as a large country, India would remain loath to limit its freedom of action through formal alliances.

Fourth, the demands on India to contribute to order and stability in its immediate and extended neighbourhood would dramatically increase in the coming decades. This would in turn draw India deeper into great power rivalries in various regions and the internal conflicts of smaller countries. Use of military force, either unilaterally or under multilateral mechanisms, could also become frequent. Meanwhile the India, like China, is increasingly turning towards other developing countries for stable supply of energy and mineral resources, giving growing amounts of economic assistance, providing arms and military training, and seeking long-term naval access arrangements. A rising India would, then, be no longer remain immune to the many tragedies of great power politics. Finally, India, like other great powers before it, is also in the danger of falling a victim to ultranationalism and an over-determination of national interest. Tempering

nationalism and balancing ends and means are two challenges that come inseparably with a rising power potential on the world stage

Bold Initiatives Stymied by Systemic Weakness : During the hustings last year foreign policy was barely mentioned in Narendra Modi's campaign. However a year after his stunning victory, which gave India its first majority government in nearly 30 years, Prime Minister Modi has emerged as one of the most dynamic Indian and, indeed, international leaders in the realm of foreign policy. As he marks his first anniversary he has already notched an impressive list of foreign policy 'firsts': the first to invite leaders from the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC) countries to his swearing-in; the first to host an American president at the Republic Day celebrations and have two summits within six months; the first to call for "peace, stability and order" in oceans, outer space and cyber space; and the first to articulate the need for India to lead the fight against climate change and take responsibility to help counter new threats to global peace and security.

Foreign Policy Priorities :In retrospect Mr. Modi's foreign policy activism is inevitable and is driven by the twin objectives of making India the world's third largest economy and, consequently, a key player in an emerging multipolar world. To achieve these objectives, two conditions are essential: first, ensuring a no-war scenario in the SAARC neighbourhood, which would make India an attractive destination for foreign investment and, second, developing the ability to shape the rules in global institutions, which will have a direct bearing on the country's economic well-being. These objectives are not new. What has changed in Mr. Modi's stead has been the implementation and operationalization of some of the New Panchsheel in a more meaningful way to deepen and widen India's foreign policy engagement. The major thrust of Mr. Modi's foreign trips and bilateral engagements so far has been to attract investment and technology by reviving stalled ties with strategically important countries, such as the United States and France, and energizing decades-old neglected relationships with Japan, Australia, Germany and Canada. His robust engagement led to Japan and France promising to invest 35 billion dollars and 2 billion euros respectively and the U.S-India Business Council estimating 41 billion dollars investment in coming years. Chinese premier Xi Jinping's September 2014 visit to India saw Beijing committing to invest 20 billion dollars in India over the next five years. Similarly, breakthroughs in agreements on civil nuclear cooperation with Canada and the U.S. further bolstered his foreign policy and economic agenda. Nonetheless, the sum of these investments is still only a fraction of the one trillion dollars that India estimates it needs for infrastructure alone. Mr. Modi's proactive participation in multilateral fora such as the United Nations General Assembly, the Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (BRICS) summit, and the G-20 summit was also primarily aimed at seeking investment or, as a corollary, shaping emerging norms and institutions. The former was evident in India's active involvement in the establishment of the New Development Bank at the BRICS summit and New Delhi's appointment as the bank's inaugural president. Signing up to the Chinese-led Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank further reflects a desire to seek new streams of investment. Similarly, Mr. Modi's government used the G-20 summit in Australia to highlight its investment, infrastructure and human resources priorities. Mr. Modi's rapport with world leaders in multilateral fora signals an important shift in attitudes towards India and its potential. Mr. Modi has also systematically courted the influential Indian Diaspora in the developed world to perform two roles: first as ambassadors garnering support for India's global rise in their host nations and, second, as a source for foreign direct investment as well as remittances, given that India is the world's leading recipient of foreign remittances constituting about 3.7 per cent of its GDP. While his now familiar ritual of addressing the Diaspora in rock concert like settings is a start, the process will have to be sustained if overseas Indians are to be convinced to invest politically and economically in India. Mr. Modi's directive to India's diplomats at the annual Head of Missions conclave in February to engage more actively with the Indian diaspora to invest in India is an effort in this direction.

Threats and Constraints : It is worth noting that Mr. Modi's foreign policy initiatives have been undertaken in a vastly more chaotic and changing geopolitical and economic world as compared to his predecessors. India faces an economically rising China to the east, staking a claim on disputed territories in the Asia-Pacific region and spreading its influence to the littoral states of the Indian Ocean. To the west, the relationship with Pakistan continues to be fraught with difficulties with no solutions in sight in the near future. To the north, India faces a long-term ally and recalcitrant Russia, under sanctions by the western powers for its intervention in Ukraine. Beyond India's immediate neighbourhood, it has to adjust to an inwardly focused United States, bruised after a decade and a half of conflict and reluctant to flex its muscle anymore. Islamic terrorism remains a major threat to global security with long-established states – home to large number of Indians – fracturing across West Asia and Africa. The Indian hostages still in captivity in Iraq and the high-profile naval operations to evacuate Indians and other civilians from Iraq, Kuwait and

Yemen indicate the complexity and magnitude of this challenge. So far Mr. Modi has been reactive rather than proactive in addressing each of these issues even though, doubtless, they will impact on India's strategic future in the years to come. The challenge for Mr. Modi then is to leverage foreign policy to advance India's economic agenda rather than have it derailed by events abroad. At home the government's foreign policy objectives are likely to be stymied by three systemic issues. First, lack of capacity in the Indian foreign policy establishment—the smallest not only among the G-20 countries but also in the BRICS group of countries—to take on the responsibility that is being asked of it. Unless that is addressed both quantitatively and qualitatively, the government's bold initiatives might come to naught. While the government has taken steps to augment capacity, there is still a long way to go.

Second, apart from small numbers, India's foreign ministry also lacks an institutionalized process of policy planning and making. This was evidenced when the recently appointed Foreign Secretary, S. Jaishankar queried senior officers as to who does the thinking about overall foreign policy in the government and was met with embarrassed silence. Steps have now been taken to empower and revamp the policy planning and research division to fulfil this role. Third, the inability of New Delhi to effectively engage key state governments as stakeholders in the foreign policy process can also scuttle bold initiatives. For instance the West Bengal government's opposition to the Teesta River Agreement with Bangladesh left India's previous prime minister embarrassed in talks with Dhaka. Recognizing this concern the new government has established a new division within the foreign ministry to increase engagement between the Centre and state governments. Additionally, senior Foreign Service officers have been asked to work closely with at least two states so as to ensure their engagement in the foreign policy process. While these are all much needed initiatives to update the foreign policy process and apparatus the changes are unlikely to take effect before the government's second anniversary.

Conclusion:- India's foreign policy continues to grow and develop on the firm plank of strategic independence. Despite some of the most transformative changes and the beginning of a "new phase" since the 1990s, India's foreign policy has not changed much. "Real power may not yet be India's, but its weight is incontestable and its international influence is already being exercised in creative new ways". Accordingly, Tharoor writes, the mantra should no longer be non-alignment but what he calls "Multi-Alignment," which constitutes an effective strategy to new transnational challenges of the 21st century where neither autonomy nor alliance offer adequate answers. Be that as it may, India's foreign policy has acquired a new sense of direction. It is pragmatic. Moreover, it is imbued with a serious dose of realism seeking to make multi-directional engagements in global politics. Yet, there seems to be an unfinished agenda when it comes to India's relations with Asia. Likewise, the issue of Pakistan and the 'deficit of thrust' related to it continue to plague India - China relations. Strengthening relations with Africa, South America, and Central Asia must be undertaken with similar vigour. On the whole, India's foreign policy continues to suffer from a studied fatigue: the agenda and themes are much better defined than before and with a sense of strategic planning. However, there still seems to be apathy to move out of this 'comfort zone' and identify potential threats and challenges, or even possible partners and allies break this sentence into two. A recent document on the future trajectory of India's foreign policy *Nonalignment 2.0* delineates, "It is therefore imperative that we have a clear map of the terrain which we shall have to navigate in coming years – and, equally, that we have a definite sense of the national goals, values and interests that we need to pursue with consistency and vigour" – the map still seems rather fuzzy and the road not clear. Without a more unified vision and strategy for its international role, encompassing more than policies designed to enhance and capitalize on economic growth, India may find it hard to achieve a seat at the high table of international relations. Without a concurrent political agenda, a comprehensive defence policy – with effective humanitarian reach – and a clearer vision for India's place in the world and what it wishes to contribute to the rest of humanity, economic growth and integration are unlikely alone to produce a winning foreign policy.

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