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A Brief Study of the Changing Nature of Indian Foreign Policy

Bapukan Saikia

Dept. of Political Science

Assam University, Silchar, Assam

bapukan.pol@gmail.com

The foreign policy of a country is the sum total of the principles, interests and objectives which it seeks to promote through its relations with other countries. It is also "for influencing and changing the behaviour of other states" and for 'adjusting' its own "activities to the international environment". So, "the conduct and formulation of foreign policy is governed by the interplay of numerous determinants, institutions, processes and personalities".¹ Preservation of national interest, achievement of world peace, disarmament, independence for Afro-Asian nations have been important objectives of India's foreign policy. These objectives are sought to be achieved through some principles viz. Panchsheel, nonalignment, anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, anti-racism and strengthening the UN. Keeping old friendship and looking for new friendships is another challenge for our foreign policy after the cold war has ended. For example, India is interested in strengthening its relations without damaging its relations with Arab countries. Similarly, India's foreign policy is tackling new tasks like deepening economic and security cooperation with the United States, while at the same time opposing unilateral actions against Iraq and Yugoslavia. Finally, India is realizing the growing importance of economic aspects of foreign policy. Hence, it is trying to establish a new basis for its relations with neighbouring countries in South Asia, China and the South East Asian countries.² INDIA'S foreign policy between 1947 and 1964 was conceived almost entirely by one man - Jawaharlal Nehru. It was Jawaharlal Nehru, the architect of India's foreign policy, who continuously held the External Affairs Ministry as well from 1947 to 1964, played a decisive role in shaping the India's post-independence foreign policy. His contribution towards India's foreign policy formulation and implementation was memorable and highly appreciable. Nehru's authority on foreign policy matters was all in all and his word in cabinet discussions was final, to which several members of the Congress and his colleagues in the government supported actively. In short, Nehru's role in India's foreign policy matters was a one-man show.³

The systemic constraints on India's foreign policy stemmed from the onset of the Cold War which virtually coincided with India's independence in 1947. Interestingly enough, neither the Soviet Union nor the United States evinced any great interest in India at the onset of the Cold War. The United States was virtually ignorant about India and had few cultural, strategic or economic links with the nascent nation. Consequently, in the immediate aftermath of India's independence it paid scant attention to India. Simultaneously, the Soviet Union did not attach any strategic significance to India. This mutual lack of interest in India actually worked to India's advantage as it gave the country considerable room for maneuver.⁴ During cold war despite the unfavorable conditions in the international situation, India, which like other nations, was moving inevitably towards the establishment of peace and security, came under the heavy influence of Super Power conflicts when it was groping in the dark to evolve its independent foreign policy. India believed that the only way through which it could achieve its goal was to adopt a policy of nonalignment. Later on it not only became the basic principles but also the corner stone of India's foreign policy. Perhaps, it is the nonalignment, which played a historic role during the Cold War period that helped India to identify and retain its power status and position in the international arena.⁵

¹ <http://www.universityofcalicut.info/cuonline/exnotif/ex5437.pdf>

² <http://download.nos.org/srsec317newE/317EL26.pdf>

³ http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/95278/8/08_chapter%202.pdf

⁴ Sumit Ganguly, *India's Foreign Policy: Retrospect and Prospect*, www.ufmg.br/cei/wp-content/uploads/indianforeignpolicy_ganguly.doc

⁵ http://shodhganga.inflibnet.ac.in/bitstream/10603/95278/8/08_chapter%202.pdf

The state of Nehru's health may compel the transfer of his power to the hands of others. In January, 1964, the Indian leader asked T. T. Krishnamachari, the Finance Minister, to handle routine questions in the Ministry of External Affairs and he recalled Lal Bahadur Shastri, a former Home Minister, to rejoin the Cabinet to help on internal matters, some of them related to foreign affairs. The health question also permits Nehru's daughter and Mrs. Pandit to receive new power because of their services to the 74-year-old leader.⁶ The general election of 1967 initiated the decline of Congress hegemony. The following two decades were characterized by 'the politics of exit', whereby new regional parties were formed by groups breaking away from Congress. Domestically, Mrs. Gandhi used every method possible- constitutional and unconstitutional to centralize power and to bring recalcitrant political actors into line, making extensive use of 'President's rule' in suspending state governments. It is a tribute to the roots put down by Nehru's democratic outlook that the damage to the democratic process inflicted by Mrs. Gandhi, reaching its nadir during the emergency years (1975-7), was rewarded by a massive electoral defeat in 1977.⁷ In the parliamentary election of March 1977, Indira Gandhi was defeated but while addressing the nation, Janta Party leader Morarji Desai as Prime Minister stressed to follow same policy on external issues. Mr. Atal Bihari Vajpayee delivered a speech on 30th March 1977, stating that new government would maintain Non-Alignment features in more balanced way. In addition, he stressed that no immediate fundamental changes on external policy matters should be expected because India has no need to do so. On the issue of Red Army's invasion into Afghanistan in 1979, India initially hesitated to condemn invasion despite of having good relationship with the Afghan government. By keeping international political scenario in mind, India stated that interference in the internal matters of a state should be considered as serious violation of international law on sovereignty. The Indian government issued this statement without mentioning the name of Soviet Union. On issue of Israel recognition, New Delhi simply denied because it did not want to keep the Muslim community in the lap of Pakistan. India recognized Israel in 1992 when the Cold War ended and Washington established global supremacy. After the Soviet Union collapsed, Indian leadership always treated Moscow as second super power, maintained its relationship in balanced respectable manners. New Delhi strengthened relationship with America but decisions on foreign affairs are approached not of Pro-US posture.⁸ P. V. Narasimha Rao, in the wake of the Congress Party's narrow electoral victory in 1991, moved quickly to reorient the country's economy and began to reshape a foreign policy that would bolster his chances of success at home. He named Manmohan Singh, a veteran bureaucrat who had become a supporter of market reforms, to lead the effort. As the new finance minister, he put together an economic package intended to jump-start the economy and alleviate the balance of payments problem. On Singh's advice, Rao devalued the rupee to make Indian products more competitive in international markets. He also moved to dismantle a stifling license system that encouraged inefficiency and corruption. In order to encourage the import of high technology, Rao lowered tariffs, then among the world's highest. Finally, Rao's administration diluted the doctrine of self-reliance by encouraging foreign investment, especially in infrastructure. This involved several foreign trips on his part to drum up support for investment in India. Internationally, the end of the Cold War and the collapse of the USSR have had profound security implications for India. The cumulative impact has been to make India feel more secure and thus more willing to be innovative in its foreign policy. During the four decades after independence, India structured its foreign policy around security concerns related to threats from Pakistan and China. Since the end of the Cold War, relations with China have improved, surviving the brief chill of mid-1998 when Indian officials, including the defense minister, referred to alleged dangers from China to justify its 1998 nuclear tests. The improvement of Chinese relations with Russia that followed the ending of the Cold War removed a major impediment to better Sino-Indian ties.⁹

The changes in Indian foreign policy are based on India's aspirations for great power status and coincide with, or at least follow the Indian economic reforms since the 1990s. The argument is that India's rising gross domestic product (GDP), its large middle class, and its military and nuclear capability make it a potential power. India's strategic thinkers have argued that non-alignment is "irrelevant" and not in "national interest". They advocate that alignment with the sole superpower is in the interest of making India a great power.¹⁰ One of the successful achievements the Indian policy makers achieved was 123 Agreement which signed between New Delhi and Washington. It was simply given expression Indians Recognitions as a major power and further US acknowledgement of India as responsible state, heeding of strong Non- Proliferation Record. President Bush stated "Indio-US Deal on 8th October 2008, the law now titled "United State-India Nuclear Co-operation Approval and Non-Proliferation Enhancement Act" is a product of the March 2006 Agreement between India and US on civic Nuclear co-operation based on Joint statement between President Bush and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh on 18th July 2005". The agreement is the result of "India's strong Non-Proliferation Record despite not being a 'Party' to the nuclear non-proliferation Treaty (NPT)". In addition, the analysis's viewed that the Indo-US deal should be taken as India's recognition as 'De-facto Nuclear Weapon state'.¹¹

While the opening up of the political space to new social groups has deepened democracy in India, severe political fragmentation has created obstacles to effective policy-making. India's region is fraught with security threats arising out of unstable,

⁶ Paul F. Power, (1964), "Indian Foreign Policy: The Age of Nehru", *The Review of Politics*, Vol. 26, No. 2, pp. 257-286

⁷ Rohan Mukherjee and David M. Malone, (2011), "Indian foreign policy and contemporary security challenges", *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-), Vol. 87, No. 1, pp. 87-104

⁸ Dr. Iram Khalid, "Indian Foreign Policy; Continuity and Readjustments", [pu.edu.pk/images/journal/pols/Currentissue-pdf/Indian%20foreign%20policy%20analysis%20\(email\)\[1\].pdf](http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/pols/Currentissue-pdf/Indian%20foreign%20policy%20analysis%20(email)[1].pdf)

⁹ Walter Andersen, (2001), "Recent Trends in Indian Foreign Policy", *Asian Survey*, Vol. 41, No. 5, pp. 765-776

¹⁰ Kamal Mitra Chenoy and Anuradha M. Chenoy, "India's Foreign Policy Shifts and the Calculus of Power", *Economic and Political Weekly*, Vol. 42, No. 35 pp. 3547-3554

¹¹ Dr. Iram Khalid, "Indian Foreign Policy; Continuity and Readjustments", [pu.edu.pk/images/journal/pols/Currentissue-pdf/Indian%20foreign%20policy%20analysis%20\(email\)\[1\].pdf](http://pu.edu.pk/images/journal/pols/Currentissue-pdf/Indian%20foreign%20policy%20analysis%20(email)[1].pdf)

often weak states such as Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Bangladesh, Burma/Myanmar and Afghanistan, a near neighbour in which India is heavily invested. Further afield, India could serve as a pivot in a new triangle much promoted by commentators, composed of the United States, China and India. Beyond the sphere of enjoyable geostrategic speculation, India has in recent times benefited from cooperation with the US, while it grapples with perennial potential security threats emanating from China. India's regional and global security concerns are reflected in its military modernization, maritime security and nuclear policies. Nonetheless, domestic security concerns continue to influence Indian perceptions of regional security.¹²

The Narendra Modi-led government which came into power in 2014 has accorded high priority to India's Look East Policy. During his opening statement at the 12th ASEAN summit, he underscored the importance of the 10-nation ASEAN bloc in a new era of economic development, trade, investments and industrialization. He made known to the world that India is not merely 'Looking East' but is now 'Acting East' as well, thus, revising the title to 'India's Act-East Policy'. This phase was also characterized by an expanded definition of 'East' extending from Australia to China. There has been a consensus in India cutting across the political spectrum in support of the revision of the 'Look East Policy'. This enthusiasm and intensity in momentum of various actors in the economy is marking another shift in this foreign policy, of 'Thinking East' too.¹³ New Delhi understands that unless its neighbourhood is peaceful, the development goals it sets for itself are unattainable. It understands that India has to be the locomotive of growth for the entire region. Towards this end, India is engaging each one of its neighbours more vigorously. The first sign was Modi's invitation to the heads of government of all the SAARC countries to the new government's swearing-in ceremony in May 2014. The themes of greater connectivity, stronger cooperation, and broader contacts dominate India's engagement with its neighbours today. Importantly, the neighbours have also reciprocated this outreach.¹⁴ Thus from the above overview we have witnessed some dynamic as well as changing nature of Indian foreign policy from Nehru to Modi era.

¹² Rohan Mukherjee and David M. Malone, (2011), "Indian foreign policy and contemporary security challenges", *International Affairs* (Royal Institute of International Affairs 1944-), Vol. 87, No. 1, pp. 87-104

¹³ *India's Look East - Act East Policy: A Bridge to the Asian Neighbourhood*, SIIS, Symbiosis International University

¹⁴ Nandan Unnikrishnan & Uma Purushothaman, (2016), "India in the Modern World/ Indian Foreign Policy: Priorities and Imperatives", *Russia In Global Affairs*. <http://www.globalaffairs.ru/number/I-vse-zhe-po-zavetam-Neru-17845>

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