



India's foreign policy, from Nehru to Modi: A paradigm shift

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Abstract

From the very onset of Narendra Modi's government at the centre, India has opted a very proactive foreign policy. This could be seen in giving up the policy of 'No first use of nuclear weapons', air strikes in Pakistan occupied Kashmir region at one hand and warming up the friendly relations with Saudi Arabia and U.A.E. on the other hand. Along with 'fast track diplomacy' through 'paradiplomacy' India has made relations with China, Japan and South Korea but pulled out the pact of Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) which encompassed about 40 per cent of global commerce and 35 per cent GDP involving 16 countries, home to 3.6 billion people or half the population of the world in his leadership. But still India has lot to do to get a permanent seat in United Nation.

Keywords: fast track diplomacy', Paradiplomacy', South Asian association for regional cooperation (SAARC), regional comprehensive economic partnership (RCEP)

1. Introduction

Since our independence, the foreign policy of our country has remained centred on the principles of peace, non-violence, non-alignment, anti-imperialism, anti-racism etc., which derive the idea from the beliefs and ideals of human welfare, equality of people, universal brotherhood, unity, secularism and diversity (Appadorai and Rajan, 1988) ^[1]. The major changes in foreign policy from the Nehruvian times include pragmatic decision making, unpredictability and integrating defence into diplomacy. It is also about increasing business and building trade ties, and leveraging soft power. The biggest achievement in the last five years was an intangible one, it was the status of the country on a global platform, which has risen phenomenally. Very few will dispute that India's standing has gone up in the last few years. The world now expects more from us. It is evident from natural calamity relief work in Mozambique. People there expected India to be the first respondent to their crisis. This is different from the 2004 tsunami, when they had expected the US and Japan to come to their aid.

2. Relations with neighbouring countries strategic partners

In recent times, especially since the Narendra Modi government came to power, commerce, trade and security have held key positions. Nonalignment, but alignment with all, has been the doctrine of India's foreign policy and the country is reaching out to many countries like Fiji and Israel to meet its diplomatic needs (Talbot, 2000; Murthy, 2001) ^[4, 3]. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's foreign policy is currently focused on improving relations with neighbouring countries in South Asia; Southeast Asian region and other major global powers. In pursuance of this, the Prime Minister has made several official visits to Bhutan, Nepal, Japan, the United States, Myanmar, Australia, Fiji, Israel and many other countries.

Through 'neighbourhood first' policy, more emphasis has been given to our immediate neighbours. Indeed, maintaining relations with immediate neighbours has been a

priority for the Modi Government. India has entered into several Memorandum of Understanding and agreements to encourage cooperation in regional issues like trade, connectivity, infrastructure and transit facility among the member states of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC).

Greater people-to-people contact, better connectivity and commercial linkages within the region are the core issues discussed in the SAARC summit. To play more proactive role in the Southeast Asian region, India follows the 'Act East' policy. Similarly, India has also initiated the 'link West' policy to ensure energy security, trade and employment linkages with the West Asian countries.

3. Fast track diplomacy and paradiplomacy

'Fast track diplomacy' and 'paradiplomacy' are the twin forces which are driving India's foreign policy now a days. Here, 'fast track diplomacy' means adopting a policy that is proactive, strong and sensitive; and 'paradiplomacy', states and cities are encouraged to forge special relations with other countries or federal states of another country or even cities of their interest in order. With these two theories, India has pursued a very dynamic and unique policy to pursue its desired goals. However, the main objective of its foreign policy has been promotion of trade, maintaining security, promoting transit facility among member states, sprucing infrastructure and enabling connectivity etc.

Through 'fast track diplomacy' and 'paradiplomacy' which is proactive, strong and sensitive policy and where states and cities would be encouraged to forge special relation with countries or federal states of another country or even cities of their interest in order, India has been on the right track to pursue its desired goals.

Simultaneously, New Delhi has also charted on the course of playing a proactive policies in the Indian Ocean Region and the Pacific Islands, which includes Mauritius, Seychelles and Sri Lanka. A number of measures to strengthen India's partnership with the Pacific Islands were proposed. This included the setting up of a special fund of

one billion dollar for adaptation of climate change vis-à-vis clean energy; establishing a 'trade office' in India; forming 'Pan Pacific Islands e-network' to reduce physical distance between the islands through measures like improving digital connectivity, extending visa on arrival at Indian airports for all 14 Pacific Island countries, space cooperation in space technology applications for improving the quality of life of the islands. Besides, Prime Minister Modi also visited the Central Asian countries to enhance cooperation in areas of security, nuclear energy, economic and trade cooperation.

4. Policy with regional organisation

The present Government has also pursued more proactive policies in regional organisations such as SAARC, Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) and Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa (BRICS) to create an option beyond the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund for their cooperation and development. The Prime Minister, in his SAARC summit in Kathmandu focused on greater people-to-people contact; better connectivity and commercial linkages within the region. India has also played an important role in ASEAN and BRICS in the recent times.

With the European countries, India has increased collaboration in the cultural, economic, social, technological and military realms. India is promoting its ambitious Make in India programme in a bid to make the country a manufacturing hub in the US, Russia, Germany and China with cooperation in areas of natural resource, trade and terrorism.

5. Balancing with Israel and Arab countries

Under Arab pressure, India had maintained distance from Israel for decades but it is now seeing advantages in a complementary relationship with Israel (Khosla, 2001). In a historic visit to Israel last month, the first ever by an Indian Prime Minister, Modi added a new chapter in India's foreign policy. Israel has been a global leader in water and food systems, which are two critical fields that India needs to upgrade. India wants to strengthen its manufacturing base and is looking to do so with technologies coming from Israel. Both countries are working on diamond trading and polishing.

Nonetheless, India has focused much on its security and domestic demand and has not taken into consideration whether other countries are pleased with the fact or are displeased with it. Now Indian foreign policy has moved forward from mere non-alignment to become a prime driver and is acting on the maxim of being non-aligned with any big powers to novel policies of exhibiting alignment with all or extending friendly gesture to, irrespective of their size and economic and military power. And focus has been on strengthening trade and defence ties with all countries. This is imperative at this point of time, for propelling forces today are primarily economic and aim at maintaining security.

6. Conclusion

We have moved forward from our traditional foreign policies, namely Non-Aligned Movement and Panchsheel treaty to a more proactive trade and security-oriented foreign policy. 'Act East' policy, 'neighbourhood first', 'link West' and 'Connect Central Asia' policy are practical manifestations of it. The paradigm of the world order has

changed completely today with the end of colonialism and disintegration of Union of Soviet Socialist Republics and the world today is not strictly bipolar or unipolar. Hence, it makes sense to approach nations, big and strong, with open arms in the pursuit of the interest of the nation. Globalisation and liberalisation are the realities of the present times and India is currently more focused on crucial areas like trade, economy, energy, security, terrorism. New India's foreign policy has not only given up the Nehruvian normative angst but has even shunned the pretences of normative behaviour. Economic and military power today are seen as tools to gain advantage vis-à-vis others, be it neighbours or the larger international system. To that extent, there is a strong link between internal and external posturing, unlike in the case of most previous governments which made a deliberate attempt to be internally liberal and externally realist.

7. References

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