

India's Foreign Policy during Modi Regime

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ABSTRACT

India prominent place in the global politics especially in the 21st century owes due to its proactive foreign policy. A major thrust in India's foreign policy takes place with the arrival of Prime Minister Narendra Modi into the picture. Modi government has undertaken numerous policy stances which were overlooked by the former government in the country. India under Modi not only focus towards one direction rather on multidimensional foreign policy. It was in 2015, India look east got transformed in to Act east wherein not only scope but also area of focus got expanded. Furthermore, a drastic shift can be delineated in India's foreign policy stance towards Israel. Notwithstanding with this, India earlier foreign policy posture of NAM got replaced with proactive involvement in both bilateral and multilateral engagements. Moreover, a proactive and comprehensive foreign policy can also be seen in the Indian Ocean region. This paper seeks to examine the foreign policy initiatives undertaken by Modi led govt. Moreover, it also seeks to examine what are the major constraints to India's foreign policy as well. India being a prominent player in the global politics needs to perpetuate the proactive foreign policy in order to achieve its national interests.

KEYWORDS: Foreign policy, Look east, Act east, Multilateralism, Indian Ocean region.

INTRODUCTION

Foreign policy of the states reflect their national interests. To accomplish the national interests foreign policy of the states determined by numerous determinants. One such key determinant besides other is the leadership of the country. History is testimony to the fact that how leaders had shaped the discourse of foreign policy to accomplish their desired objectives. In the contemporary period a corollary of leadership role in shaping the foreign policy discourse can be easily traced by the influential role of Modi on India's foreign policy. Since Narendra Modi's elevation to the prime ministership in May 2014, India has hosted an American president at its Republic Day celebrations and finalised its application to join the Chinese and Russian-led Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) (Hall, 2016). It has agreed a Joint Strategic Vision for the Asia-Pacific and Indian Ocean region with the US (White House, 2015) and become a founding member of China's Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB) (Aneja, 2015).

In contrast to his predecessor, Manmohan Singh, Modi proved a very enthusiastic traveller, embarking on as many foreign visits during his first term in office as Singh did in a decade, attending a series of high-profile summits, and aiming to establish rapport with his counterparts in China, Japan, and the United States, as well as in South Asia. Moreover, Modi government also pledged to regroup Indian foreign policy in a set of principles more in tune with what it views as India's traditions, and to restore its standing in the world, ensuring its status and interests are respected by all, including major powers like the United States or China (Ganguly & Hall, 2021).

This paper seeks to analyse major initiatives undertaken in the Indian foreign policy during Modi regime and what are the major constraints for India's foreign policy to achieve its core and peripheral national interest as well.

FROM NON-ALIGNMENT TO MULTI LATERALISM

During Cold war period non-alignment was the main principle of India's foreign policy. Non-alignment, meaning to keep away from power politics was a defining feature of Indian foreign policy. Being 'a

weak postcolonial state, India had a strong desire to prevent other powers from limiting its own room for manoeuvre' (Mohan 2008). Non-alignment entailed: adherence to the principles of the United Nations; the avoidance of both military alliances and substantive integration into the American-underpinned global market, such as it then was; and active engagement in key normative debates concerning the management of international and intra-state conflict (Rana, 1969). The non-alignment policy was adopted to ensure the 'independence' of Indian foreign policy. But in the post-Cold War era, where the Non-Aligned Movement was declared dead and aligning with the USA became a fashion, to provide maximum options to foreign policymakers, India adopted a strategy called 'strategic autonomy' (Gupta and Chatterjee, 2015). The new strategy led India to 'emphasis on an institutionalised, classic multilateralism' (Narlikar 2013,) at the global level while enhancing India's 'capacity to pursue its interests with minimal reference to other major powers' at the regional level (Hall, 2016). This shift in India's foreign policy posture is attributed due to numerous factors like emergence of new world order, change in India's economic structure and leadership as well.

LOOK EAST TO ACT EAST

India look east policy was launched in the early 1990 as a part of India's concerted efforts to elevate the strategic importance of south east Asia in India's foreign policy agenda. The Look East Policy was formulated with Eastern regions for forging strategic and security cooperation for better economic cooperation. The former PM Rao and its successive government's focus was Eastern region in general Vietnam and Japan in particular (Gupta, 2016). India's "Look East Policy," rechristened as the "Act East Policy" by Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Furthermore, its scope and focus also got expanded under Act East policy. Through the "Act East Policy," India is not only striving to engage the ASEAN member countries but also the countries of the Asia-Pacific region in political, strategic, cultural, and economic domains. This is manifested in ongoing attempts to strengthen ties with Australia, Japan, South Korea, and the Pacific Island countries among others (Mishra, 2016). India's 'Act East' Policy is based on connectivity and infrastructure development, security and strategic, trade and energy. This was specially done to address the poor and delayed implementation of the joint projects and cooperatives programmes of ASEAN members (Bajpai, 2016). The Look (Act) East Policy initiated by the government is seen as a more pragmatic and viable strategy for peace and development of the North East. Improving physical connectivity with neighbouring countries building roads, railway networks and water ways were expected to solve the problems of underdevelopment in the North East India.

NEIGHBOURHOOD FIRST POLICY

Since independence, India has pursued a neighbourhood policy that was based on the premise that 'the Subcontinent is India's exclusive sphere of influence and New Delhi must strive to prevent the intervention of great powers in the affairs of the region' (Mohan 2003). Like its predecessors, the Modi government also pays great attention to the neighbourhood. His first initiative in this direction was extending an invitation to all heads of government of SAARC countries for his oath taking ceremony. It was a clear indication of his desire to strengthen India's ties with its immediate neighbours. Through his visits to Bhutan, Nepal and Bangladesh, Modi made efforts to establish routine contacts with these neighbours rather than mere photographs that are generally part of regular bilateral or SAARC summits. In fact, according to Modi, he chose Bhutan as his first foreign visit destination because of the 'unique and special relationship' that the two countries shared. During the visit, he declared his government's aim of expanding bilateral ties and termed the relationship between two countries as "Bharat to Bhutan" (B2B) relations (Das, 2017). The positive gesture shown by the West Bengal government in the settlement of the land boundary dispute with Bangladesh explicitly reflects India's inclination towards its neighbourhood first policy (Chandra, 2017). With his visit to Sri Lanka, Modi became the first prime minister in 28 years after Rajiv Gandhi to take a tour to the nation. He emphasized on the shared strong historic and cultural links that exist between the two nations. It was clear that he was interested in making a fresh start with Sri Lanka

as that country emerges from a troubled and turbulent phase (Das, 2017). It is apparent that since the arrival of Modi govt a much-rejuvenated focus has been attached to India's neighbourhood which really has its role in achieving India's national interests in the region particularly and globally as well.

INDIA ISRAEL RELATIONS

India's earlier policy stance towards Israel underwent significant transformation with the arrival of Modi regime in the India. India earlier policy of reluctance now got replaced with more proactive involvement in the region especially Israel. Before dwelling into India's contemporary policy stance towards Israel, it is equally important to understand why it took more than half century to start coherent policy towards Israel. There have been many strands that have informed and continue to inform Indian policy. Having itself just achieved independence in 1947, India was opposed to colonisation in all its forms, and so empathised with the plight of the Palestinians, another colonised people. It viewed the creation of Israel as a continuation of the colonisation of Palestine in another form. Having suffered the agony of the communal divide, it was strongly averse to accepting religion as a basis for the creation of states. It was also apprehensive about Pakistan mobilising Muslim nations against India on the basis of Muslim sympathy. It countered malevolent Pakistani propaganda by being 'more loyal than the King' to the Palestinian cause. Further, as an aspirant to the leadership of the third world, India could not ignore Arab sentiments (Singh, 2017).

The demise of USSR in the 1990's and the emergence of uni polar world order has significant role in shaping the global politics in general and India's foreign policy in particular. The emergence of uni polar world order has raised question about the relevance of NAM, moreover the changing milieu even insist India to strengthen its diplomatic ties with USA, which has its ramifications on India's policy towards Israel as India established its diplomatic relations with Israel in January 1992, launching India-Israel ties on a new trajectory. Although the diplomatic ties got established between the two in the early 1990's however the relation didn't able to achieve its real potential until the arrival of the Modi regime in the India. India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi has set the stage for a quantum leap in bilateral ties. Since assuming the premiership in 2014, Israel has acquired greater priority over other West Asian countries in New Delhi's diplomatic agenda. Israel has become a key player in India's foreign policy calculations, with bilateral cooperation encompassing such areas as counterterrorism, cyber security, border management, intelligence sharing, science and technology (kaura, 2019). The relationship has grown by leaps and bounds, and stands on its own today marked by high-level visits and increasing exchanges in the field of homeland security and defence (Singh, 2017).

INDIA AND THE INDIAN OCEAN REGION

The Indian Ocean emerged as one of the most dynamic geopolitical flashpoints in the last two decades. The region is rich in energy resources and has been an important trade route between the East and the West. Given the fact that it is a significant energy trade route, the region is currently at the cusp of geo-strategic and geo economic shifts (Attanayake & Atmakuri, 2021). Considering the significance of Indian ocean region in the contemporary world order in general and India's endeavour of benign power in the region, India's Prime minister Narendra Modi has attached huge importance in the IOR. Since Modi's arrival, India launches numerous initiatives to strengthen its leverages in the Indian Ocean region. The Indian Navy released its latest maritime strategy, titled Ensuring Secure Seas: Indian Maritime Security Strategy in October 2015. This edition is an updated version of the previous strategy document, Freedom to Use the Seas: India's Maritime Military Strategy, which came out in 2007. The new document anticipates a renewed assertion at both cognitive and pragmatic levels about India's evolving maritime security considerations within and outside the region. India's interests in the maritime domain have increasingly come to incorporate security risks in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) vis-à-vis the sea lines of communication (SLOCs) and, more importantly, the choke points of the IOR. India also seeks to further strengthen its resolve regionally apropos pressing issues like maritime terrorism and piracy (Mishra, 2017).

Notwithstanding with this, a grandiose initiative in the Indian Ocean region was launched by the government of Prime Minister Narendra Modi, that is encapsulated in the acronym SAGAR, i.e., security and growth for all in the region. This vision also spells out that maritime security is the primary responsibility of the littoral states, while stressing cooperation and collaboration. It also highlights aspects of the Blue Economy and suggests that SAGAR is non-assertive, seeks peaceful resolution of disputes and calls for a commitment by all countries to adhere to international maritime laws (Padmaja, 2015).

Moreover, the other significant policy initiative launched by India in the Indo-Pacific region is the Project Mausam. It was considered as India's response to One Belt One Road policy of China in the Indo Pacific region. Unlike string of pearls, under project Mausam India try to harness its cultural linkages with countries along the Monsoon routes for effective and fruitful foreign policy. In addition to this the Project Mausam aims for "Indian Ocean maritime routes" to attain transnational nomination under world heritage, increasing scope for visibility, research, Sustainable development, heritage development and promoting other cultural conventions across the Indian Ocean region (Ranjan, 2017). Besides all this, India proactive engagement in various bilateral and multilateral Naval exercise in the regions and other forums in the Indian Ocean region explicit India's proactive policy stance in the Indian Ocean region.

CONCLUSION

India foreign policy under Modi has undoubtedly launched numerous initiatives which has its role in shaping India's image in the global politics and to achieve its national interests as well. However, it can't be said that India has achieved all through these policy stances as the emergence of China not only threatened India territory but also major constraints to India in achieving its endeavour in the Indian Ocean region. Moreover, the growing Russia Ukraine conflict itself pose a perplexed situation in front of India's foreign policy makers, though India tactically handles the situation by remaining neutral to the conflict but being a responsible player in the global politics India can't remain neutral for long. Furthermore, the rise of Taliban in the middle east is the foremost challenge as India always emphasis on the Afghan led government. Despite all these challenges, India under Modi cater into the region which was earlier ignored in the foreign policy discourse of the country and definitely has its role in shaping India's image and to achieve its desirable objectives as well. However, to achieve its long-term objectives of global power India need to perpetuate the same proactiveness by keeping all the constraints into the due consideration.

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