



❖ Global and Regional Challenges :

How should India protect and promote its interests in today's world, which is in flux and full of uncertainties? Global power equations are changing. The relative weight of the US has diminished and it is less self-assured and more inward looking. Europe is grappling with Brexit, the rise of right-wing nationalism, and a flood of immigrants. China is the new pretender that relentlessly pursues its 'China Dream' of Asian, and eventually global, domination. Russia has regained much of its self-confidence and seeks to reclaim the Soviet Union's erstwhile global stature. We see a more activist and less inhibited Japan is playing a greater role in Asia matching its economic and technological strength. The entire region from Pakistan to Morocco is in upheaval, with rampaging terrorism, fundamentalism, sharp regional rivalries, as well as many so-called 'failed' and 'failing' states.

In this shifting kaleidoscope, a more self-confident and ambitious India under Narendra Modi is seeking to develop a new paradigm for India's foreign policy where India would not be a mere 'balancer' or 'swing state' but a 'leading state' that seeks a place at the global high table. This will not be easy, since power is never given, always taken. It will have to be ready to take risks and at times pursue conflicting goals. Many other countries will work to keep India down. That is why India must leverage its strengths have diversified foreign policy options, and remain alert and flexible.

Like all previous Indian leaders, Prime Minister Modi too seeks to preserve India's independence of action and autonomy of decision-making in foreign policy. Earlier, the creed was "non-alignment." As a policy option for India, as distinct from the Non-Aligned Movement, this meant resisting pressures to join rival camps during the Cold War and examining foreign policy options on merit. Various factors, including our sense of pride and self-worth based on a rich heritage of civilization and culture, our past achievements, and our multi-faceted successes as an independent nation, impel Indians to cherish strategic autonomy. India is too big, self-respecting, and steeped in the anti-colonial tradition to become anyone's camp follower. India may not have been an aggressive, expansionist power. But it has not been a passive power. India fought against colonialism and apartheid. It resisted pressures to join blocs. It did not accept the iniquitous nuclear regime of the NPT. Today, India has a more positive agenda. It seeks greater influence in global governing structures. Already, it has a much greater voice in the WTO, and is a member of the G-20 and East Asia Summit. Over time, it hopes to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group and become a Permanent Member of the UN.

It has been rightly said that nations have no permanent friends or enemies, only permanent interests. Broadly this holds true for India too. India's relationships and priorities have changed over time. For example, during the Cold War, India's interests were best served through a close relationship with the Soviet Union, which gave India much needed political and diplomatic support on key issues in the UN, as well as valuable economic and defence assistance. Today, the relationship is not as effusive as it used to be. By contrast, India's relations with the US were quite strained throughout the 20th century. Today, however, India and the US have, as PM Modi put it, "overcome the hesitations of history," and there is a much greater congruence of interests. Similarly, India-Japan relations that remained low-key and insubstantial for many decades are now very vibrant and dynamic. On the other hand, "Hindi-Chini bhai-bhai" has given way to a relationship of much greater suspicion and mistrust. Other examples are the Commonwealth, NAM and the G-77, all of which were important for India in the early decades after Independence but no longer today, whereas the Persian Gulf region and ASEAN, which earlier occupied a minor place in India's foreign policy, are now extremely high priority regions.

Resources India needs both human and material resources to achieve its foreign policy goals. The first pre-requisite is to have good leaders – with political will, resolve and vision. Fortunately, Prime Minister Modi is indeed a strong and determined leader who wants change the traditional 'chalta hai' attitude of Indians and has set into motion a long and difficult process to make India a strong, modern country. There is a rise in general public interest in foreign policy issues because foreign policy matters because these affect people's lives as never before. In any case, in a democracy like India, public understanding and



support of foreign policy is essential. Thus, the Government has to take on board multiple stakeholders such as parliamentarians, political parties, businessmen, industrialists, the media, academia, and other sections of the intelligentsia. Many Indian States, particularly those that have land and/or maritime borders with neighbouring countries are deeply interested in what's going on there and how the policies of these countries could affect them.

The most important tool of foreign policy is diplomacy, the traditional method to regularly grease the wheels of relations with other countries. Embassies abroad and the Ministry of External Affairs are principally responsible for this. Other Ministries and Departments of the Government also play a role in matters relating to trade, investments, energy and so on. Soft power, exercised through cultural and people-to-people contacts (be it tourists, students, businessmen) plays an important role too in shaping India's image abroad. The role of the Indian diaspora, from among whom many have gone on to become heads of global corporations, is extremely important and is being systematically leveraged by Prime Minister Modi. India's official technical and economic assistance as well as private sector projects in Asian and African countries, particularly India's neighbours, also send a powerful positive message about India.

It is only when diplomacy fails that a country generally resorts to coercion and use of military means. This too India has done on many occasions. The most notable example is India's assistance in the creation of Bangladesh in 1971. But coercion was certainly used in ensuring the incorporation of Pondicherry, Goa and Sikkim into India, in sending an Indian Peace Keeping Force to Sri Lanka, as well as in relation to Nepal on more than one occasion.

Thus an effective foreign policy needs credible military capabilities to buttress diplomatic influence. This requires both economic strength and a self-reliant defence industry. We must recognize that much work remains to be done in both areas. It will take time to build India's infrastructure, create indigenous defence capabilities, and create a healthier and skilled work force. India's own resources may not be enough. They will have to be supplemented by foreign investments and technology. Prime Minister Modi's extensive interactions with leaders and investors across the world, particularly from developed capital-surplus countries, have certainly created a new interest in India. These will translate into concrete results only if there are proper policies in place. Implementation of stated policies is the key to success. One cannot underestimate the constraints on resources for defence and security, since the demands of development are enormous. In the early years after Independence, Nehru focused more on economic growth than defence. The result of this neglect was the humiliating outcome of the 1962 border war with China. The choices are difficult. In the traditional argument of guns versus butter, a judicious balance will have to be found.

➤ Issues

- a) Some of the global issues that necessitate multilateral cooperation are: tackling terrorism, combating climate change, preserving biodiversity, exploitation of deep sea resources, ensuring that there is a fair global trading system, keeping open the sea lines of communication and air space for civilian aircraft. With advances in science and technology, there is need for international cooperation in space, cyberspace, and extra-terrestrial bodies. One should perhaps also include things like access to fresh water, knowledge and culture.
- b) However, the more pressing problems relate to handling relations with individual countries and various regions. India needs stability in neighbouring states. There also has to be a degree of mutual trust as well as economic interdependence. As India grows, it must take along its neighbours, otherwise the development gap between India and its neighbours will create problems. India will not be able to stop the flow of people across its porous and poorly policed borders looking for jobs in India. With them will come terrorists and fundamentalists as well. India must have a dominant role in a peaceful South Asia, so that it doesn't remain bogged down in managing relationships in



its neighbourhood. It should have the time and freedom to engage strategically with the rest of the world. To prevent its neighbours from straying away in undesirable directions, India will need to deploy considerable resources, attention and imagination. All countries know that India is South Asia's natural leader, but this leadership and respect has to be earned, not taken for granted by India.

- c) India has to keep a close eye on developments in the currently turbulent and unstable Arab world where it has huge stakes. Most of India's imported oil comes from here. Over seven million Indian workers live and work here. Israel too is important to India particularly in the defence field. From a long-term geopolitical perspective, Iran cannot be ignored. It is a strong and cohesive state with growing regional influence, and currently India's only route to access Afghanistan and Central Asia. India will have to intensely engage, and delicately steer its way through the mutual regional rivalries of the Arab countries, Iran and Israel.
- d) The East and Southeast Asia has many dynamic and large economies that offer promising opportunities for trade and investment. The development of India's own Northeast Region requires greater connectivity with ASEAN countries. Fortunately, ASEAN and East Asian countries reciprocate India's desire for closer relations. Many regional frameworks supplement bilateral contacts. In addition to economic ties, of late security and defence cooperation has become an extremely important component of relations, the more so following China's aggressive behaviour in the South China Sea. It would be unwise to let China hold unchallenged sway over this region.
- e) Despite its relative decline, the US is the most powerful country in the world having unmatched comprehensive power. There is little doubt that India needs at least a benign, and preferably a cooperative, US for ensuring India's economic growth and defence modernization. India also needs US cooperation to tackle the growing challenge of China. Of course, many differences remain, and at least some of them will not go away. The important point is that both countries are in a pragmatic partnership. We are cooperating in areas where interests coincide, without letting differences derail the relationship. There is some uncertainty about the attitude of the new US President. However, early signs are that this relationship will retain its importance for the Trump Administration and the US Congress, but India will have to be watchful and alert.
- f) Russia has traditionally been a very close and time-tested friend. Today, some of the warmth is missing. For various reasons, this relationship occupies a somewhat lower priority in the foreign policy priorities of both countries. Russia has also become uncomfortably close to China. Even though Russia no longer occupies an unchallenged top spot among India's defence suppliers, it is a critically important defence partner. It has also given India unique defence platforms like nuclear submarines and an aircraft carrier, which no other country has been willing to give. India has to nurture this relationship, try to give it greater economic content, and take steps to check the recent drift in relations.
- g) Europe, Africa and Latin America are important for India primarily from an economic perspective. Even though India's economic ties with Europe are vibrant and significant, much more can be done, particularly to get needed investments and technology. Africa and Latin America play a relatively marginal role in India's foreign policy priorities, but the scope for enhancing economic ties is considerable. In all these relationships there are no vital security issues, other than cooperation to combat terrorism.



➤ Challenges

The principal challenges to India's national security emanate from China and Pakistan. Their strategic collaboration has deepened. A virtual combined China-Pakistan front has emerged. Pakistan's dependence on China has increased. In this way the threats and challenges have become more serious. Here are some illustrative developments:

- Chinese soldiers are present in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir and Gilgit-Baltistan in the guise of workers;
- China-Pakistan defence, nuclear and missile cooperation has strengthened;
- China gives open support to Pakistan on Kashmir;
- China is giving cover to Pakistani terrorist activity and terrorists like Masood Azhar.
- The China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which is the most prominent and geopolitically significant project of Xi Jinping's One-Belt-One-Road (OBOR) scheme, makes it abundantly clear that Pakistan will remain pivotal in China's strategy for Asia.

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