CONTEMPORARY CHALLENGES TO INDIA’S FOREIGN POLICY

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ABSTRACT

Promoting national interest is the basic objective of foreign policy. From this perspective this paper tries to analyze the India’s foreign policy. In 21st century, world’s scenario has been changed to a great extent. What changes and challenges come in the way of India’s foreign policy, this paper discusses upon them.

KEYWORDS: Foreign Policy, Perspective, Analysis.

INTRODUCTION

The world in twenty first century is remarkably different from the cold war period. The end of ideological clash and strategic competition between the superpowers, which had tremendous role in accentuating conflicts across the world generated new hope for building a peaceful and cooperative world order. Instead there is a great deal of uncertainty in the emerging global order. New conflicts and issues have surfaced in the form of ethnic conflicts, refugee problem, environmental degradation, terrorism; etc. Foreign policy of a country is determined by the times in which it is conducted. In twenty-first century, foreign policy of India is going to be very different from what it was when country became independent. At that time there were well-known two blocs, the USA and the USSR. India’s foreign policy rightly did not wish to become a part of either of two blocs and evolved what is known as a non-aligned group of nations. The world politics after 1991 emphasizes the need for a fundamental rethinking in India’s foreign policy.

India in the early twenty-first century has become a focus of international attention more than ever before. “In the pyramid of world powers in 1947, India was perhaps at the rock bottom. However, within a short span of three or four decades India had pushed forward its position and became a most developed country among the developing countries.” India is the seventh largest country and next to china having the highest population in the world. It is well marked off from the rest of Asia by mountains and seas, which give the country a distinct geographical identity.

“Foreign policy is an instrument at the disposal of a country to protect and promote its national interests. The core of the national interest is constant — defend the territorial integrity and sovereignty, enhance the economic and social well-being of the people, promote opportunities for profitable trading relations with other countries, and exploit the ‘soft power’ through propagation of the cultural assets. While the national interest would be forever, its content will vary with time and circumstances. It follows that the policy has to be flexible and
must keep in tune with changing international, as well as national, environment”. This paper is a modest attempt to analyze India’s foreign policy as an instrument for protecting national interest, what success it has got and what challenges it is facing in the 21st century.

HISTORICAL BACKGROUND

When India became free the world scenario was quite changed. It was the time of cold war. World politics was divided in two blocs; the first one was led by USA under the capitalist ideology and another was by USSR under the communist ideology. India, under Nehru, did not wish to become a part of any bloc and adopted a new policy, which is known as non-alignment policy. Non-alignment has been regarded as the most important feature of India’s foreign policy. Non-alignment aimed at maintaining national independence in foreign affairs by not joining any military alliance formed by the USA and USSR in the aftermath of the Second World War. Non-alignment was neither neutrality nor non-involvement nor isolationism. It was a dynamic concept which meant not commitment to any military bloc but taking an independent stand on international issues according to the merits of each case. The policy of non-alignment won many supporters among the developing countries as it provided an opportunity to them for protecting their sovereignty as also retaining their freedom of action during the tension ridden cold war period. Under this policy India had chosen an independent path for foreign policy and became a natural leader of newly independent Afro-Asian countries in the surcharged atmosphere of cold war bloc politics between USA and USSR. In justifying this policy Nehru observed, “India is too big a country. India is going to be and is bound to be a country that wants in world affairs...... while remaining quite apart from power blocs. We in better position to cast our weight at the right moment in favour of peace and meanwhile our relation can become as close as possible in the economic or other domain with such countries with which we can easily develop them.”

India has always opposed colonialism, imperialism and racism. Whenever any injustice happened, India raised her voice, for instance in favour of Indonesia’s nationality fighting against the Dutch colonialism in 1947, against South Africa’s illegal occupation of Namibia and the infamous apartheid policy in South Africa. India fully supported inclusion of communist China in the United Nations. India had a lot of experiences of British colonialism so India always opposes this evil naturally. On this behalf India supported to the freedom struggles of Libya, Algeria, Tunisia, Malaya and other third world countries.

India has always viewed UN as a vehicle for peace and for peaceful change in world politics. Apart from this, India has always expected UN to actively involve countries to moderate their differences through talks or negotiations. Further, India has advocated active role for UN in development effort of Third World countries. India has pleaded for a common united front of the third world countries in the UN. It believes that the non-aligned group of nations, by virtue of its massive number, could play a constructive and meaningful role in the UN by stopping the superpowers from using this world body for their own designs. As early as 1950 India linked the reduction of armaments with the larger goal of development. The UN has in fact played a key role in preserving world peace by helping in the decolonization process, by providing humanitarian and developmental assistance and through peacekeeping. Decolonization – refers to achievement of independence from colonial rule. After the Second World War many colonies
achieved freedom in Asia and Africa. India’s role in UN is to make this organization more effective.

Many scholars believe that these all determinants of India’s foreign policy are supporting the idealistic view of international politics, which ignores the hard realities of international relations. So they think that India’s foreign policy not succeeded to achieve the realistic goal. But it is one sided truth. Above all idealistic determinants of India’s foreign policy made her an important figure in world politics. Through the non-alignment policy India received benefits by both side of bipolar world and succeed at balancing the relations. Through this policy India span her politics in entire world and gathered the newly independent countries under the one umbrella. Non-alignment group of nations gave tough resistance to monopolistic economic policies of west. They strongly opposed to Bretton Woods system and provided a very strong platform to new international economic order. Due to opposing the colonialism, imperialism and racism India become natural leader of third world countries, for instance G77 other groups are headed by India.

CHANGING PARADIGMS

Changes which took place in 1989-91 were clearly looking at the global level. World was passing through the age of ideological, militarily and economical changes. It was time to the end of cold war and the collapse of USSR. In such circumstances it was a major challenge to India to make coordination with international situation. Economic liberalization became compulsion rather than necessity for India. In context of foreign policy, the major challenge for India, to list out the new subjects according to new world circumstances because those subjects which were key determinant to India’s foreign policy in post independent period, became irrelevant after the end of cold war. The end of the Cold War saw India replace the idealism in its foreign policy with a pragmatic approach as it sought to develop new and meaningful relationships that would aid its global ascendancy. In post cold war period India adopt realistic aim and objective based, result oriented and positive foreign policy. India’s economic liberalization, initiated in the early 1990s, allowed it to build its new foreign policy on the thrusts of economic diplomacy. The 1990s also saw India shedding its non-aligned image and pursuing the membership of other multilateral forums such as the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN).

The end of cold war generated new challenges and created many options for foreign policy makers of India. In a unipolar world, there were so many challenges came in the way of policy makers in terms of foreign policy. The challenges included balancing the relations with global powers, building a new partnership with regional organization, expanding the influence in Asia, Africa and Latin America, making NAM more relevant according to new conditions, enhance India’s economic and energy security, to deal with environmental and human security threats, UN reforms and permanent membership of Security Council and active pursuit for multipolar world.

INDIA AND ITS RELATION WITH POWER BLOCKS

The collapse of the USSR, this was close ally to India during cold war; one of the greatest challenges that India faced to make a balance relation with super powers. India needed to
determine its policies towards the other global powers like America, China, Russia, Japan and European Union. India’s main foreign policy objective is to achieve global power status. It will however, depend greatly on its relationship with the US, and the other global powers, to attain this. The dynamics of India’s relations with each of the other five powers will determine its global power status.

It was a major challenge for India in the 21st century to keep the United States (US) as the focal point of its new foreign policy. The Indian delegation pointed out that, after the end of cold war, India was willing to diversify, and also to expand economic, technological, cultural and educational relations with US.vii The main reason for this is that close relations with the US will help to convince the international community that India is truly a global player. India and the US have been cooperating recently in several areas including in defence and the technology. The highlight of their cooperation in recent times has been the civil nuclear energy cooperation deal that has been signed between both countries. The civilian nuclear deal is a positive development in Indo-US bilateral relations, there is still a need for India to carefully manoeuvre its foreign policy to manage ties with US. The Indo-US bilateral relationship progress through the next step in strategic partnership initiative (NSSA) is also notable, as it is believed to lead towards significant economic benefits for both countries and improve regional and global security. America and India agreed to expend co-operation in three specific areas viz. Civilian nuclear activities, civilian space program and high technology trade. The 123 nuclear treaty was historical event in confidence building for both countries.

So, it is evident now that the US-India relation has progressed remarkably in the post cold war period. 9/11 terrorist attack reinforced a perception of a broader political and strategic similarity of interest pulling India and the US together. Some another pull factors, such as, belief in democracy and democratic values, peace building and co-operate with United Nations are also bring India and the US very close.

Besides the US, China is another superpower and playing an important role in world politics in general and particular in Asia. China’s rise poses challenges to India to achieving its foreign policy objectives. India and China found themselves as a rivalry, competitor and co-operator in twenty first century. They are rivalry about the border issues, competitor in market economy, for influence in Asian politics, not only in ASEAN but also in south and west Asia. There are so many issues in world politics, on which both countries found them in co-operation, such as, in south-south dialogue, for new economic world order, energy security, environmental issues and both are against to protectionism.

Both Japan and Russia are strategic partners of India. Russia has been an important supplier of defence equipment and technology and will grow in importance to India.viii With the current global shortage of oil and gas expected to exacerbate in the coming years, energy security will become an important facet of countries’ foreign policies, including India’s. As such, it is important for India to not only secure access into key energy markets but also to diversify its sources for oil and gas so as to reduce its dependence on a particular supply. Relations with Russia continued to mature and involved a long standing multidimensional approach involving security, military, and economic links.
Another domain of opportunity for the Indian foreign policy is growing interaction with European Union (EU). India has a strategic partnership with EU. The most significant aspect of this partnership is that India is only the fifth country besides the US, Canada, Russia and China with whom the EU has established such equation. This partnership launched in January, 2005 in various areas; such as, trade and investment, protection for intellectual property, co-operation in science and technology, education, terrorism and democratization and decentralization of UN. EU and India should hold continuous dialogue on organizational and institutional restructuring and reform of the United Nations in particular. This quite good relation is consequences of India’s vibrant democratic institutions, emerging economic power and increasing global status.

**CHALLENGES TO FOREIGN POLICY FROM THIRD WORLD COUNTRIES**

India acquired a new face in the beginning of twenty first century with her vibrant economy and geopolitics. India becomes a big trade and strategic partner with superpowers. At the same time India’s position at an economic and strategic nexus in Asia, Africa and Latin America was also gaining significance. India has realized that if it wishes to expand its global influence, then it must continue to diversify its engagement in the international sphere. This realization will propel India to deepen and widen its relations with third world countries.

As Asia consists of several regions, India’s foreign policy is formulated according to the engagement with each region. Although India expands her influence in South Asia but one major challenge remains, that is, to manage the uncertainties with her immediate neighbours. A solution of border disputes between India and its neighbours such as; China, Pakistan and Bangladesh, is major challenge to India’s foreign policy. In the age of liberalization these issues stands a barrier to economic ties. Learning lesson from the past it is very much desirable on the part of India’s foreign policy to concentrate on mending her mutual ties and finding a solution to the territorial disputes. Without a mutual solution of this problem India cannot expand her global status.

Many country of South Asia, such as Afghanistan, Pakistan and Nepal, have recently adopted democracy and the international community looking towards India far help to promote democracy in this region. The future of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) seems increasingly uncertain. Because India is larger economy than the other South Asian countries, and they have a fear that India’s giant economy will grasp their own economic system, and India will play hegemonic role in region. India should have to be more innovative in its foreign policy in South Asia and exercise its economic diplomacy and soft power to engage with these countries. Being larger country in South Asian region India has a significant role of ‘Big Brother’. Gujral doctrine and India’s effort to establishing ‘South Asian Economic Community’ (SAEC) will be mile stone for the economic integration of this region. But, China’s involvement within South Asian countries are posing challenges to India’s ability to engage with the region. China, an observer country in SAARC, is close ally of Pakistan. China has also begun to engage with Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal, on energy cooperation and economic development. China factor will force to India to revise its foreign policy in South Asia.

India’s relation with South-East Asian countries is consequence of Look East Policy, which was adopted in 1991. The Look East Policy now provides the direction for India’s foreign
policy towards East Asia. The Look East Policy focusing on India’s engagement with ASEAN countries to include economic, security and political cooperation.\textsuperscript{xi} This policy has been considerably successful from India’s perspective, but once again China’s economic, security and political clout in these regions possesses strong challenges to India’s foreign policy in 21\textsuperscript{st} century.\textsuperscript{xii}

After successful exercise of the Look East Policy, India adopts the Look West Policy for engagement with West Asian countries. West Asia has big storage of petroleum and natural gases. The Look West Policy is an instrument for India’s energy security. India extended its influence into the distant neighbourhoods of Southeast Asia and the Middle East. The tenure of Prime Minister Rao witnessed burgeoning economic and political relations.

For engage with African continent, India adopted Focus Africa Policy. In Africa, India will continue to leverage on the economic development aid it provides to these countries to gain access into key oil and gas sources. In Latin America as well, India will look into sourcing key resources from the regions it seeks to develop economic ties with Brazil.

**INDIA’S EFFORTS TO BE A PERMANENT MEMBER OF SC AND UN REFORMS**

“The founding fathers of the United Nations established the organization with the purpose of maintaining international peace and security, of developing friendly relations among nations and of taking other appropriate measures to strengthen universal peace”.\textsuperscript{xiii} India one of among the founding fathers of UN. “The UN has become the most universal international organization in the world, embracing under its aegis the activities of governments from 184 states (at present 192 states)……”\textsuperscript{xiv}

Since 1945 to present days, years to pass, but there is no any structural change taking place in UN. When it came in existence five nations were permanent member of Security Council out of fifty one members of UN, and those five nations are still permanent member of Security Council while the number of member nations reached 192. UN, also, not works like an independent international organization. There are so many examples which are proofing that this organization becomes a pocket organization of US.

It’s a challenge to nations that UN can work as an independent organization. India made an effort to do so. Organizational and institutional restructuring and reform of the UN is core objective of India’s foreign policy in 21\textsuperscript{st} century. India convinces to other countries including P5 nations since post cold war period for decentralization and democratization of UN. Another challenge to India’s foreign policy, that is to achieve the permanent membership in UN Security Council. “India formed a group with Germany, Japan and Brazil called G-4, who were equally strong contenders for permanent membership of the Council and vociferously campaigned for more representation to developing countries”.\textsuperscript{xv}

**CHALLENGE TO KEEP NAM RELEVANT**

Non–alignment is the doctrinal foundation of India’s foreign policy. It was adopted by Pt. Nehru to keep away India from cold war bloc politics. Being cardinal base of India’s foreign policy the non-alignment served her interest in post Nehruvian period. But the end of cold war
and emergence of unipolar world politics has forced India to bring changes in her foreign policy. The end of bipolarity made the very foundation of non-alignment movement irrelevant. Scholars argued that NAM was the consequence of bipolar world order and now world is unipolar so non-alignment with whom? With the end of bipolar world order the policy of non-alignment have lost their relevance and significance. It is challenge to India’s foreign policy planer to make NAM more relevant than it was ever before.

In fact NAM is not relevant in the context of bipolar world, but there are local power centres within unipolar world order. Besides this, NAM still relevant in other sense, such as opposing the neo-imperialism and neo-colonialism, peaceful settlement of disputes, restructuring and democratization of UN, establishing new international economic order, demand for the North-South dialogue based on the mutuality of interests and benefits, South-South cooperation and nuclear, chemical and biological disarmament. NAM is second largest organization of the world and India realized that it can play a creative role in international politics. NAM facing fundamental problem and challenges but by redefining and modifying the objectives of the movement and its role it can overcome these challenges.

THREE E-CONCERNS OF INDIA’S FOREIGN POLICY

Three E-concerns mean India’s efforts to economic, energy and environmental security. These securities are the demand of the age to become global power. These are, in 21st century, those component which will help to expanding India’s global status and to achieve these security are another challenge to its foreign policy.

Due to the shift in priority from military competition to economic competition, strong economic ties become necessity of states. India, with the superpowers and also with third world countries, has turned to a primarily trade-driven relationship. India has big economic ties with US, Britain, Russia, France, China, Japan and EU. India has free trade agreement (FTA) with ASEAN and other regional forums. India’s economic strategy should be make closer linkages with developing countries and work on common agenda at international platforms like WTO talks, IMF and the World Bank.

Planning Commission’s Integrated Energy Policy document asserts that India would need to sustain an economic growth rate of 8-10% over the next 25 years, in order to eradicate poverty and meet its human development needs. This would require augmentation of primary energy supplies by nearly 4 times, and an increase in power generation from current level of 1, 60,000 megawatts to about 8,00,000 megawatts by 2030-31. Economic growth is based on energy; so energy security is another factor which clearly influences India’s foreign policy. India should be rethinking and close to deepen its engagement with oil and gas rich countries for energy security point of view. Recant 123 treaty with America and other civilian nuclear energy treaties with several countries like France and Russia will be fulfil India’s energy requirement in future. But India should deepen its relationship with West Asian and Gulf countries for her energy security and also diversify her own traditional sources of energy like solar energy.

Another area of critical importance in foreign policy in 21st century is environmental security. The environmental degradation is questioned to human existence. India is aware about
the environmental issues. Global warming and climate change requires all societies to work together. While the major responsibility for the accumulation of green house gasses in the atmosphere lies with the developed countries, its adverse affects are felt most severely by developing countries like India. On the issue of climate change and global environmental degradation, India adopted the principle of “common but differentiated responsibilities” enshrined in the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change. Differentiated responsibilities on climate change include the international community’s shared responsibility to de-carbonization with ensuring the right to development of the developing countries. In Shivshankar Menon’s view, “this issue cannot be viewed in isolation and must be seen in the context of the developmental needs of developing countries”

DISARMAMENT, CTBT, NPT AND INDIA’S FOREIGN POLICY

India’s foreign policy, in its early years, was shaped by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru’s idealistic world view. He opposed any kind of nuclear programme in India. Global disarmament was his dream. But, after China’s war in 1962 and China’s nuclear test in 1964, set the stage for India’s nuclear weapons programme. Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri gave the green signal for a peaceful nuclear explosion in 1964, yet, in his speech in Parliament he also maintained that India would never make the bomb. India conducted its first nuclear test in May 1974, it was India’s attempt to obtain minimum security guarantee from the nuclear power holders. Following Pokhran-I, India continued to defend its goal of nuclear disarmament. In 1998, Pokhran-2, India tested its own nuclear capability and justified this on the basis of threats to national security. After the second nuclear test India show her commitment to nuclear disarmament which was subsequently included as India’s principle objective in her nuclear policy.

India is one of the four countries to have never signed the NPT. It tested nuclear Weapons twice (in May 1974 and May 1998), but makes a distinction between vertical and horizontal proliferation. Simply put, it regards itself as a domestic but not an international proliferator. India has opposed the NPT and CTBT for their discriminatory structures which (a) favour the nuclear haves over the have-nots, and (b) focus on disarming/de-proliferating the have-nots at the cost of reducing nuclear weapons capabilities and stockpiles of the nuclear haves.

India opposes CTBT because it allows subcritical and sub-kiloton tests in the name of stockpile stewardship. "India's refusal to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) was, in part, a reaction to (fusion) research by the nuclear weapons states. In turn, its subsequent decision to conduct underground nuclear tests was partly related to its conclusion that the CTBT had changed from a non-discriminatory instrument designed to promote both non-proliferation and disarmament into a tool for non-proliferation alone." India believes that the objective of CTBT was not merely to end test explosions but to end the qualitative development and refinement of nuclear weapons whether through explosive or other means. Yet, CTBT leaves the door open for building leaner and meaner warheads – to compensate for quantitative cuts in P-5 arsenal.

According to India Non- Proliferation Treaty (NPT) attempts to maintain the post-second world war power structure unto perpetuity by privileging the P-5 and continues to focus on strengthening ever more intrusive measures against the non-P-5 without any attempt to rein in
the P-5 arsenals or even to move toward eventual disarmament. India is not a party to the NPT, but its conduct "has always been consistent with the key provisions of the Treaty as they apply to nuclear weapon states. Article I of the NPT obliges a nuclear weapon state not to transfer nuclear weapons to any other country or to assist any other country to acquire them. India's record in this regard is impeccable and a matter of public knowledge. This is in contrast to the poor record of some of the nuclear weapon states who have been active collaborators in, or silent spectators to, continuing clandestine and illegal proliferation, including export of nuclear weapon components and technology. Article VI commits the parties to the Treaty to pursue negotiations to bring about eventual global nuclear disarmament. India is not only committed to commencing negotiations for a Nuclear Weapons Convention, it is also the only nuclear weapon state ready to do so."

HUMAN SECURITY FRAMEWORK AND INDIA’S FOREIGN POLICY

The concept of human security emerged with the end of the cold war. The end of cold war is often seen as the moment where human security gained real recognition because of the belief that, with the relaxation of ideological hostilities between the US and USSR in the early 1990s, real progress could be made to address the root causes of global insecurity.

The first major statement concerning human security appeared in the 1994 Human Development Report, an annual publication of United Nations Development Programme. Human security is not just protecting people from various threats but also empowering people and enhance individual’s capabilities and capabilities are people’s freedom to do so what he like valuable. It focuses on individual’s security to defend their human dignity, culture and faith, fundamental freedoms, human rights and human capabilities beyond nation border.

India has taken, not theoretically but traditionally, human security as the paradigm for its foreign policy and has taken a leadership role in operationalizing it. India’s foreign policy framework has maintained a distinctive focus on peace, security, development, international cooperation and peaceful co-existence since her independence. The human security agenda has offered a chance for India to contribute a leading role on the international platform.

CONCLUSION

Foreign policy is changeable; it changes with time and circumstances. With the end of cold war, world politics became totally change and many challenges emerged in front of nation-states in terms of their foreign relations. India’s policy planner brought changes in foreign policy according to changed world scenario. With her long-term and short-term national interest, India’s foreign policy becomes closer to realistic approach. But it is hard to say that, the idealistic components of India’s foreign policy are just irrelevant. In the new form, colonialism and imperialism are exist in the world, pseudo war, drug trafficking, nuclear armaments and other threats to human security are incredibly grown. To eliminate these problems, the idealistic components of India’s foreign policy are relevant.

Since the end of cold war, India has been deepening its relations with super powers. US become focal point of India’s foreign policy. Although it is necessity of age that, to make closer
relation with super powers but India’s tend to US is questioned to its independent foreign policy. For instance, while India has historical relation with Iran, it has voted against Iran in IAEA. Due to this the Indo-Iran gas pipeline project has been failed. Such kind of diplomatic failure will be stands the barrier in the way of India’s energy security process.

In the process of making close relations with super powers, India is ignoring her immediate neighbours and also third world countries. Some scholars project India as an Asian power, but it is matter of rethinking. There is no clear policy about Nepal and Bangladesh. India’s foreign policy is not clear about the Nepalese Maoist and Bangladeshi refugee problem. Sri Lanka is also a major concern of India’s foreign policy but India’s influence is going down in Sri Lanka. China’s influence is continuously growing in South Asian region. India needs to look back and redefine its foreign policy for Asian region. It is time for India to work with third world countries on economic, energy and environmental issues. India can play an important role at international platform like WTO, World Bank, Copenhagen conference, Kyoto Protocol and in UN reforms with developing countries.

The end of the Cold War and the growing impacts of globalisation are also making India redefine its position and role both at the regional and at the global level. Since the economic liberalisation of the 1990s, which lead to current growth rates of 8-9 percent annual, India’s global presence has been steadily visible. Economic development would require energy security. Improving energy security and energy conservation should be top priorities of India with addressing environmental safety net.

So, there are so many foreign policy challenges for India and many changes are viewing in its foreign policy since the end of cold war period. But main challenge is to attain global power status and make India a major player in international affairs. Foreign policy designers brought many changes to attain this goal. In this process we can see naturally clashes between foreign policies and necessities, because it is transitional period, which will be build coordination with time and circumstances. India needs to adopt a pragmatic foreign policy; it will help to attain global power status.

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