

India Foreign Policy and Its Neighbourhood

Dr. Hemlata

Assistant Professor, Dr. B. R. Ambedkar Government Degree College Maharajganj

Abstract

The foreign policy of the government concerns the policy initiatives made towards other states. The Ministry of External Affairs is responsible for carrying out the foreign policy of India. Foreign policy is currently focused on improving relations with neighboring countries in South Asia, engaging the extended neighborhood in Southeast Asia and the major global powers. India has formal diplomatic relations with most nations; it is the world's second most populous country. India is a vast country and is connected to lots of countries for economy, the world's most-populous democracy and the fastest growing major economy. India is a newly industrialised country, has a history of collaboration with several countries, and is a component of the BRICS and a major part of developing world. India was one of the founding members of several international organisations—the United Nations, the Asian Development Bank, New Development BRICS Bank, and G-20—and the founder of the Non-Aligned Movement.

Keywords: Foreign policy, Development, United Nations, BRICS, G-20, Economy.

Introduction

Even before independence, the Government of India maintained semi-autonomous diplomatic relations. After India gained independence from the United Kingdom in 1947, it soon joined the Commonwealth of Nations and strongly supported independence movements in other colonies, like the Indonesian National Revolution. India's foreign policy has always regarded the concept of neighbourhood as one of widening concentric circles, around a central axis of historical and cultural commonalities. An important role of India's foreign policy has been to ensure their welfare and wellbeing within the framework of the laws of the country where they live.

Look East Policy of India

During the cold war, India's relations with its South East Asian neighbours was not very strong. After the end of the cold war, the government of India particularly realised the importance of redressing this

imbalance in India's foreign policy. Consequently, the Narsimha Rao government in the early nineties of the last century unveiled the look east policy. Look-east policy was launched in 1992 just after the end of the cold war, following the dissolution of the Soviet Union. After the start of liberalisation, it was a very strategic policy decision taken by the government in the foreign policy. India's international influence varied over the years after independence. Indian prestige and moral authority were high in the 1950s and facilitated the acquisition of developmental assistance from both East and West. At present, under the Look East Policy, the Government of India is giving special emphasis on the economic development of backward north eastern region of India taking advantage of huge market of ASEAN as well as of the energy resources available in some of the member countries of ASEAN like Burma. Since the beginning of this century, India has given a big push to this policy by becoming a summit level partner of ASEAN (2002) and getting involved in some regional initiatives such as the BIMSTEC and the Ganga–Mekong

Cooperation and now becoming a member of the East Asia Summit (EAS) in December 2005.

India and its neighbourhood

SAARC

Certain aspects of India's relations within the subcontinent are conducted through the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Other than India, its members are Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan and Sri Lanka. Established in 1985, SAARC encourages co-operation in agriculture, rural development, science and technology, culture, health, population control, narcotics control and anti-terrorism.

Afghanistan

The new democratically elected Afghan government strengthened its ties with India in wake of persisting tensions and problems with Pakistan, which is continuing to shelter and support the Taliban. India pursues a policy of close co-operation to bolster its standing as a regional power and contain its rival Pakistan, which it maintains is supporting Islamic militants in Kashmir and other parts of India.

Bangladesh

Indo-Bangladesh relations have been somewhat less friendly since the fall of Mujib government in August 1975. Over the years over issues such as South Talpatti Island, the Tin Bigha Corridor and access to Nepal, the Farakka Barrage and water sharing, border conflicts near Tripura and the construction of a fence along most of the border which India explains as security provision against migrants, insurgents and terrorists. Many Bangladeshis feel India likes to play "big brother" to smaller neighbours, including Bangladesh.

Bhutan

Historically, there have been close ties with India. Both countries signed a friendship treaty in 1949, where India would assist Bhutan in foreign relations. On 8 February 2007, the Indo-Bhutan Friendship Treaty was substantially revised under the Bhutanese King, Jigme Khesar Namgyel Wangchuck. Whereas in the Treaty of 1949 Article 2 read

as "The Government of India undertakes to exercise no interference in the internal administration of Bhutan. On its part the Government of Bhutan agrees to be guided by the advice of the Government of India in regard to its external relations.

Burma/Myanmar

However, due to geo-political concerns, India revived its relations and recognised the military junta ruling Burma in 1993, overcoming strains over drug trafficking, the suppression of democracy and the rule of the military junta in Burma. Burma is situated to the south of the states of Mizoram, Manipur, Nagaland and Arunachal Pradesh in Northeast India. and the proximity of the People's Republic of China gives strategic importance to Indo-Burmese relations.

Nepal

Indian policy towards Nepal is determined by the following considerations: (i) the geopolitics of Nepal make it a landlocked country sandwiched between India and China. Access to Nepal is easier from the Indian side; (ii) historically, both countries have shared a common security perception; (iii) there exists a great deal of cultural affinity between the two countries; Nepal is not only the birth place of Gautam Buddha but is also the only Hindu kingdom in the world. The movement towards restoration of democracy in Nepal began in 1980s. The creation of the new constitution providing for a constitutional monarchy in 1990 was a welcome step in the restoration of democracy. Since 1990 Nepal, like the UK, is a constitutional monarchy with a parliamentary democracy.

Sri Lanka

Bilateral relations between the Democratic Socialist Republic of Sri Lanka and the Republic of India have been generally friendly, but were controversially affected by the Sri Lankan civil war and by the failure of Indian intervention during the war. India is the only neighbour of Sri Lanka, separated by the Palk Strait; both nations occupy a strategic position in South Asia and have sought to build a common security umbrella in the Indian Ocean. Historically and culturally, the

two nations have been considerably close, with 70% of Sri Lankans continuing to follow Theravada Buddhism to this day

Major Concerns in India's Foreign Policy in the Post-Cold War Period

For India, disintegration of the Soviet Union has meant uncertainty on several aspects viz. supply of weapons system, supply of spare parts, diplomatic support on Kashmir and other politico-strategic issues in and outside the United Nations and as a counter weight to US in South Asia. During the last one decade and a half international politics has undergone major changes. The cold war has ended, the world has become unipolar, a number of states have disintegrated, cold war military blocs have lost their significance, some such blocs have dissolved and new regional economic blocs are shaping up. Globalisation has given rise to new set of problems such as terrorism, money laundering, proliferation of weapons, global warming etc. Militancy in Kashmir has emerged as the foremost challenge to our foreign policy. Pakistan and the Western countries blamed India for violating human rights and denial of rights to self-determination. Gradually, India brought the situation under control.

Spread of terrorism to corners beyond Kashmir is a challenge as well as opportunity for our foreign policy now a day. India is interested in forging anti-terrorism coalition with as many countries as possible.

Relations at the End of the Cold War

Although there was a relaxation in the Cold War since the mid-1980s with the rise of Gorbachev to power in the former Soviet Union, the Cold War practically came to an end with the disintegration of the Soviet Union in December 1991. India's relations with the US had considerably improved during the relaxation of Cold War, but the collapse of the Soviet Union brought in unprecedented uncertainties to international relations, including Indo-US relations. The only strategic comfort for India was that both Pakistan and China had lost their strategic relevance to the US in the aftermath of the Cold War.

India and association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN)

India-ASEAN relations reached a new high on 20-21 December 2012 during the commemorative summit celebrating twenty years of dialogue partnership and ten years of summit partnership. There is growing acknowledgement on the part of ASEAN that India has a much larger responsibility and much greater role to play in Southeast Asia in the second decade of the 21st century. New Delhi cannot shy away from its responsibilities as a regional stakeholder. Perhaps, the most important contribution from India can come in the form of (a) acting as a positive force for regional peace and stability, (b) rallying its strength – material, diplomatic, and normative – behind the ASEAN cooperative architectures, and (c) engaging in capacity-building in the CLMV (Cambodia, Lao PDR, Burma, and Vietnam) countries.

India and the United Nations

The United Nations which came into being on Oct. 24, 1945 has been the most important international organisation since the Second World War. The formal basis for UN activities is the UN charter. The UN has a vital role in world affairs. For more than fifty years UN has helped to manage relations between states and regulate a broad range of international activities.

India has contributed to UN significantly on disarmament in terms of ideas, resolutions, initiatives and bridging differences through action plans. In 1948, India had proposed limiting the use of atomic energy to peaceful purposes and elimination of nuclear weapons from national arsenals. In 1950, India suggested formation of a UN Peace Fund created through peaceful reduction of arms and directing the amount thus released towards development purposes. In 1964, India took the initiative to place the item 'non-proliferation of weapons' on UN agenda. However, the purpose was defeated by the (1968) carried that a large numbering of counties from going nuclear, without firm restrictions on the few nuclear weapon countries activities Nuclear

Non-proliferation Treaty Although our country alleged to the oppose to problem.

Conclusion

The Indian policy towards the smaller powers of South Asia has been more explicitly seen since the Indira Gandhi days. India supports and encourages regional democracies and has sought to tie up its regional primacy through series of regional, and bilateral arrangements, covering a wide range of agreements in the areas of defence, trade and science and technology. Yet difficulties continue to remain in coming to an understanding with India. Divisions and mistrust continues to dominate the region. The commonality of the region leads the small powers to continue to assert their differences so as to regain a sense of identity and independence. India's relations with the European Union during the Cold War days were largely economic in nature, since that organisation had little role to play in international political issues. India has taken note of the EU's desire to play larger political role in world affairs since the end of the Cold War.

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