

PART VIC

Foreign Policies of Asian States – South and Central Asia



Indian Foreign Policy: The Quest for Greatness

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India is a nation of unfulfilled greatness. Its potential has lain fallow, underused.

Lee Kuan Yew, Senior Minister of Singapore in 2000 (Allison and Blackwill, 2013: 155)

Together we will script a glorious future for India. Let us together dream of a strong, developed and inclusive India that actively engages with the global community to strengthen the cause of world peace and development.

Narendra Modi, Prime Minister of India in 2014 (Baghel, 2017: 81)

INTRODUCTION: THE PROLONGED MARCH TO POWER

For a country with a vast population, landmass and pivotal geographical location, India has been slow to realize expectations of becoming a world power. Seven decades since winning independence from British colonial rule, it remains in the category of predicted future great powers and superpowers whose best time under the sun still lies ahead. The impression that it has the potential to take on a truly prominent role in world affairs but struggles to live up to the billing is writ large in assessments of India by both critics and admirers (Karnad, 2015; Chandler and Zainulbhai, 2013).

Historical scholars have marveled at and taken solace in the ‘miracle’ of India’s mere existence and survival as an unbroken nation-state since 1947 in spite of its sheer diversity and plethora of socioeconomic and political faultlines (IANS, 2017a). Predictions by Western commentators of India’s imminent Balkanization or collapse in the wake of dramatic moments of domestic political upheaval or wars with China and Pakistan (Chandra et al., 2008: 5) have indeed been defied

by an enduring quality of the country as a befitting inheritor of an ancient civilization with continuity for thousands of years.

Contentment about India just existing and being what it is for eons has percolated into the foreign policy realm, where Indian decision makers and intellectuals have taken pride in the fact that the weak post-colonial state managed to stay intact during the hostile period of the Cold War and began to show signs of strength, particularly economic, after 1991. The perception of India's manifest destiny, innate greatness and exceptionalism as a moral force for good in the world has generated a degree of complacency and passivity when it comes to statecraft and long-term strategizing in Indian foreign policy.

Aparna Pande has characterized this problem as follows:

India's history is its asset as well as a great burden. The fact that the country has existed for millennia creates hubris and belief that, in the final analysis, India will go on. Why bother with building a new framework for global engagement and international leadership when the legacy is massive enough to enable muddling through? India's success as a twenty-first century global power might depend on jettisoning that way of thinking. (Pande, 2017: 173)

The baggage of navel-gazing and self-righteousness while neglecting strategic planning and proactive behavior in foreign policy has come at a severe cost. India's voyage to join the ranks of genuine great powers that wield influence in their immediate vicinity and beyond has been prolonged and indefinitely postponed. Manjari Miller has described these lacunae as a strange phenomenon of India resisting its own rise due to a refusal to play the game of geopolitics and geo-economics with the same determination and farsightedness that China has done in recent decades:

The Indian elite fears that the notion of the country's rise is a Western construct, which has unrealistically raised expectations for both Indian economic growth and the country's international commitments. As one senior official with experience in the prime minister's office said, the West's labeling of India as a rising power is 'a rope to hang ourselves'. By contrast, Chinese political leaders and intellectuals pay a great deal of attention to the international hype surrounding their country's emergence, and Chinese think tanks and media outlets regularly try to shape and respond to this discourse. (Miller, 2013: 14)

Pouring cold water on hopes of India assuming more global responsibilities as a provider of military security and economic prosperity, the establishment of the career bureaucracy and the domestically inclined political class has defined India's role in the world narrowly in both geographic and thematic senses. The idea that India's natural sphere of influence should be limited to South Asia owing to civilizational commonalities that made the Indian subcontinent a compact entity, and also due to India's finite material resources, is ingrained in the minds of most Indian thinkers and doers.

For the popular news media as well as in the imagination of lay Indians, the very concept of 'foreign policy' invokes thoughts and memories of how India relates with two neighboring countries – Pakistan and China. The more distant a

country or region is to India, the less interested Indian opinion-makers are about how their nation is interacting with or making inroads in those parts of the world. Shaping the security and economic architecture of the Indo-Pacific, which is the pivotal area for determining the configuration of power in the current world order, is itself seen by conservative Indian politicians and bureaucrats as a stretch that would strain India's capacities and deplete its sparse human and material stocks. Globalization may have affected India in countless ways, but Africa and Latin America are so removed from the average Indian psyche that visualizing India as a prime mover and shaker in these emerging continents is considered fanciful.

A related obstacle which instills procrastination and vacillation in India's march to great power status is the 'developmentalist' orthodoxy that the country has to fix its myriad internal social and economic problems before embarking on an expansive foreign policy. The phrase 'our problems are primarily domestic' is a constant refrain among Indian politicians and thought leaders who reflect a welfare state ideology that prioritizes poverty reduction, infrastructure growth and governance improvement over any grandiose foreign policy. The perception that there is a sequential process wherein a developing country should primarily aim for basic stability and overcoming internal issues, and only later look to increasing its international footprint, is commonplace among many Indians even seventy years after overthrowing colonial rule.

India's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, was a rare exponent of a hyper-active global peacemaking diplomacy in the 1950s and 1960s. But he never advocated power politics and running the race for dominant player in the world in a materialistic way. Claiming that 'we have little time to spare, and little energy to give, to international affairs', he laid down a foundational principle that 'the first thing we kept in view was to build our own country on solid foundations and not to get entangled in matters which do not directly affect us' (Hoyt, 1992: 164). Much has changed since Nehru was the sole helmsman of Indian foreign policy during the heated Cold War era, but avoiding a robust *realpolitik* approach and eschewing any tendencies of 'hegemonic' intent still resonates in New Delhi.

India's inward demeanor, coyness for alignments with great or middle powers, failure to assemble a military with power projection abilities and willingness to use force outside South Asia, and lackluster efforts to champion and promote the Indian private sector to capture overseas markets are factors that have acted as brakes on its journey to major power status. Indians fondly recall that their country was nearly equal to China in economic condition and international prestige until 1980 or so. They go on to lament that a 'strategic gap' has opened up since then and has been widening to the point where Asia's number one power is now five times as big as its number two power in economy and military, not to mention relative influence in various continents of the world (Mohan, 2017).

China's leapfrogging growth that left India behind since the opening up by Deng Xiaoping is widely interpreted as solely an economic feat. But if one analyzes how China grew from an East Asian power into a pan-Asian and extra-regional

great power, it is obvious that it displayed an affinity for geostrategic and geo-economic maneuvering and positioning unlike India. For example, the 'Global Going Out' strategy unveiled by the Chinese government in 1999 to promote its corporations abroad for trade and investment made China a household name and paved the way for it to supplant the United States and European powers in numerous corners of the globe (Yueh, 2013).

As David Shambaugh explains, 'China's global expansion did not occur by happenstance. It grew directly out of Communist Party and government policies' and from learning 'one key lesson from studying the experiences of other previous powers: genuine global powers possess multidimensional strength' (Shambaugh, 2013: 5). In India, by contrast, it has been a widely held maxim that simply registering impressive GDP growth year after year and slowly accumulating military sinews will automatically take it to its destined place in the comity of nations whenever providence allows. There has been less of a willful state-guided, targeted and time-bound foreign policy mission, at least until 2014, to envisage India as a top gun and to carve out a long-term strategy to reach that milestone.

The strategy deficit and myopic lenses which have driven Indian foreign policy for decades are not only functions of bureaucratic conservatism and politicians' preoccupation with domestic matters but possibly also of regime type. India's raucous multi-party democracy, which is the embodiment of a quasi-federal polity, diffuses power to states, limits governments to five-year terms, regularizes relentless turnover of power from one hand to another, and places short time horizons in front of political elites who find themselves hemmed in to pursue a farsighted foreign policy.

From 1989 to 2014, India had a series of coalition governments involving a variety of national and regional parties coming together in shaky setups marred by internecine conflict, bargaining and even blackmail. Governments fell or had to undergo frequent reshuffles without completing their five-year tenures and policies were in non-stop flux. Arijit Mazumdar has analyzed the negative effects of this domestic political structure on Indian foreign policy during the 1990s as follows:

In a situation where leaders were more concerned about staying in office, attention to international affairs was not a priority. Weak minority governments, lacking popular support, were hesitant to make radical changes to the broad contours of India's foreign policy ... the chaotic nature of Indian democracy and the country's federal polity makes it difficult for India's policymakers to come up with a grand strategy. (Mazumdar, 2011: 172, 178)

Even after coalition governments mastered the tricks of the trade for lasting a full term or two successive terms from 1999 to 2014, the predominance of divergent parochial and ideological forces within them stonewalled formulation and implementation of a coherent strategic blueprint that could give momentum to India's aspirations in the international arena. Harsh Pant aptly summed up the pathetic

state of affairs during two terms of the stable coalition government led by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh from 2004 to 2014:

Indian policymakers seem to have come to believe that just because their nation was experiencing robust economic growth, they didn't really need a serious foreign policy, that they could afford to get by with ad hoc responses or grand finger-wagging. And once economic growth faltered, there was hardly anything with which they could anchor the nation's foreign policy. (Pant, 2014)

Whether or not an excessively deliberative and fragmented democracy like India is at a disadvantage vis-à-vis a unitary and resilient authoritarian nation like China, which has less contestation and maximum forward planning in foreign policymaking, is an open question. Writing in 1992, the American scholar George Tanham felt that India historically lacked a monolithic political entity and feeling of 'India as a whole' or 'greater India' when it came to defining strategic interests clearly and aggressively (Tanham, 1992: 51). The former Indian foreign and defense minister Jaswant Singh has concurred that India had a strong moral, civilizational and cultural basis but a loose 'national concept' as a single state with strategic intent. He quotes an ancient truism contrasting China and India to drive home the point. 'India has always existed without a state, but China cannot exist without one' (Singh, 1999: 10). The Chinese scholar Sui Xinmin has also observed that India's diverse and fissiparous political entities negate the prospect of a unitary strategic actor in world affairs (Xinmin, 2014).

What India has lacked for years is something that China has boasted for a while, i.e. a well-articulated foreign policy agenda with definite goals and objectives that lead to rapid and irreversible accumulation of power in the international system. India has been alien to China's methodical strategy and vision spanning one hundred years or more to supplant the West as the next global economic, military and political power (Pillsbury, 2015). One comparative study of Chinese and Indian strategic behavior since both countries became independent nation-states asserts that both countries have shown similar propensity to use force, modernize their militaries and move towards offensive military doctrines (Gilboy and Heginbotham, 2012). But the gap between the two in comprehensive national power and global influence that piled up in the last three decades suggests otherwise. It is a fait accompli that China has emerged 'as the most astute and effective geopolitical player of the 21st century' (Mahbubani, 2009: 210), while India has just started its catchup effort under a dynamic political leadership since 2014.

EVOLUTION OF AN UNDERPERFORMER

The true worth of transformation is only apparent when it is juxtaposed with stasis. Appreciating the metamorphic impact of Prime Minister Narendra Modi on Indian foreign policy from 2014 onward necessitates a *tour d'horizon*

of how leaders since independence approached the outside world. If one were to periodize the pre-Modi foreign policy of India into discernible stages, there are three such time brackets, viz. 1947 to 1964 under Nehru; 1964 to 1991 under a variety of political personalities, most notably Indira Gandhi; and 1991 to 2014, again with a range of governments under multiple prime ministers belonging to different parties.

The *first phase* was marked by a heavy dose of idealism and moralism. In the wake of winning freedom from British rule through laborious nationalist struggle, the post-colonial Indian state was imbued with an anti-imperial mindset. Nehru, who spent his youth in the vanguard of the independence movement, took charge in 1947 with a zeal to oppose remnants of Western hegemony and to position India as a fulcrum for building an anti-colonial block of newly liberated nations under the rubric of Afro-Asian solidarity (Berger, 2013).

For Nehru, the principle of non-alignment, or maintaining equidistance from both the West and the East in the Cold War, was at once a pragmatic defensive shield to protect weak, poor and vulnerable India from being destabilized by greedy great power interventions, and also a principled stand to create a new world order free from *Machtpolitik*. The notion that non-alignment 'is a means to combat the entire system of "traditional" world politics' (Power, 1964: 272) spoke of Nehru's grandiose vision to see India as a system-changing actor that had the will to revise the very foundations of international relations. In soft power terms, this phase was marked by the high visibility of India in the international arena due to Nehru's personal diplomatic endeavors for global peace and his pedantic admonition of big powers about their misdeeds. His role of 'half saint and half statesman' (Mohite, 1992: 28) irritated the West and aroused suspicion in the Soviet Union, but also gave India a sense of disproportionately punching above its weight in world affairs.

The main disappointment of the Nehru phase sprang from the naivety about geopolitics and neglect of hard power. While sermonizing about the evils of hegemonic behavior in the international realm, India failed to realistically assess national security threats and prepare for them. Two debacles mar Nehru's foreign policy legacy. India suffered a territorial loss in the first war with Pakistan over Kashmir (October 1947 to January 1948) and endured a traumatic defeat in the war with China (October to November 1962).

At a formative stage of the Indian nation-state, Nehru refrained from pressing the Indian Army to assertively flush out Pakistan-sponsored invaders from the whole of Kashmir and instead resorted to an appeal to the United Nations for justice. Nehru's belief that international institutions and law, rather than brute force, could restore what was rightfully India's cost the country a large sliver of land in Kashmir which remains under Pakistani control to this day. While being 'decidedly optimistic' about the UN as a fair player, Nehru 'did not dwell on the possibility that the United Nations deliberations would constrain India's freedom of action' to forcibly evict the Pakistani intruders (Kennedy, 2012: 181).

With Mao Tse Tung's China, Nehru was ideologically predisposed to deny that it could pose an existential threat to India. Having forfeited independent Tibet as a buffer that had hitherto protected British-ruled India from China, New Delhi has never managed to recover strategically against Beijing (Arpi, 2013). Chronic under-investment in India's defenses along the disputed border with China and Nehru's Pollyannaish hope that the two Asian neighbors would follow a model code of conduct called 'Panchsheel' (Five Principles of Peaceful Coexistence) proved no match to Mao's ruthless power play. An aggressive China caught India sleeping at the wheel in the brief 1962 war (Lintner, 2018) and shattered Nehru's construct of pan-Asian brotherhood of decolonized countries against Western capitalist exploitation.

The *second phase* of Indian foreign policy had to involve changes following the blunders of the Nehruvian era. Especially under Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, India realized the centrality of building a strong military and of shedding the overly preachy diplomacy of the past in favor of a *realpolitik* approach to the world. The decisive military intervention that Mrs Gandhi took in 1971 to carve up Pakistan and create an independent Bangladesh showed an India that had learnt its lessons from the past. Although rhetorically still wedded to non-alignment, she had no qualms about exploiting the Sino-Soviet split and forging a *de facto* alliance with the Soviet Union in the lead-up to the 1971 war. Had New Delhi not drawn strategically close to Moscow at that time and thereby deterred Beijing from entering on Islamabad's side, the likelihood of India winning the war and becoming the undisputed regional power in South Asia would have been low (Gaikwad, 1990: 129).

Mrs Gandhi also took India into the nuclear weapons power club by testing its first atomic device in 1974. It was the moment of arrival of the first non P-5 (permanent members of the UN Security Council) nuclear nation. The bold move sent a signal that India, which had been associated with Mahatma Gandhi's pacifism and Nehru's idealism, cannot sit by idly as hostile China's nuclear arsenal was accumulating (Chakma, 2005: 217).

Mrs Gandhi's tenure as prime minister is associated with an 'Indira Doctrine' of foreign policy that was never formally announced but seen as operating in South Asia as a reflection of India's objective of excluding extra-regional powers from meddling in its backyard. Critics of India's role in South Asia have portrayed this Doctrine as a hegemonic blueprint wherein Mrs Gandhi meddled covertly and blatantly in small South Asian neighbors' internal affairs through the Indian intelligence and security apparatus to tilt these smaller countries against the West and China and keep them firmly in India's orbit (Crossette, 2008).

But given India's snailish economic growth during this phase, such a Doctrine could not fully achieve its purported goal of shooing away competing outsider powers and winning over hearts and minds of small South Asian countries. Persistent economic woes owing to ideological rigidity and centralized planning meant that India lacked the resources to outbid China in the developing

world and could not move up the ladder from being a subcontinental power into a pan-Asian force. The Indian economy was largely closed to foreign investment and technology in this phase and New Delhi was unable to expand its influence in its extended neighborhood of the Asia-Pacific, where China as well as Western-allied Japan, South Asia and the Southeast Asian 'Tiger' economies were on the march.

When the Soviet Union collapsed in 1991 and rang in the *third phase* of foreign policy, India was abjectly unready for the US-led new world order and the era of capitalist globalization. The shock of a sudden macroeconomic collapse in 1991 compelled structural domestic policy reforms and gradually pushed open the door for rapprochement with the West. India and the United States, two 'estranged democracies' (Kux, 1994) which had been separated by ideology and history, finally cast aside old mistrust and moved towards partnership. But the lingering Indian antipathy to Western hegemony and concerns about losing much-prized 'strategic autonomy' came to a head when Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee tested a second and far more powerful set of nuclear bombs in 1998.

Like in 1974, fear of being left behind by a fast rising China and resentment of the China–Pakistan military axis, motivated these atomic weapons tests (NYT, 1998). The subsequent Western sanctions on India for proliferation of nukes and painstaking negotiations to remove them demonstrated that there were limits to a quick and easy India–US realignment in the post-Cold War period.

It was only near the end of the first decade of the new millennium, with the United States panicky about China's ascent, that a more lucid strategic vision for a 'defining partnership' emerged (Rajghatta, 2009). Still, this whole phase was riddled with problems such as American pressure on India to conform to an anti-Iran campaign and Washington's expectations that India move away from dependence on Russia for its military modernization.

One net positive that came out of this phase was that India's economic growth hit historic highs (particularly between 2003 and 2008). This turned India into an attractive destination for foreign investors for the first time ever. Commercial diplomacy, which had become so central in conditions of capitalist globalization, was belatedly added to India's foreign policy repertoire and Indian diplomats could leverage their country's cachet as a big consuming market to strengthen relations with key partners. The 'Look East' policy commenced by Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in the early 1990s, began to take shape with more gusto once India entered into free trade agreements with ASEAN (2010) and opened up relations with Japan and South Korea.

Nonetheless, by the time Modi took up the mantle of Indian foreign policy in 2014, a half decade of economic slowdown and incoherent diplomacy burdened by domestic coalition politics had left India in a state of drift. Whatever changes were witnessed in the third phase were incremental rather than seismic and lacked the ballast that could thrust India into a higher league of Asian or global powers.

Although the term ‘non-alignment’ had lost meaning in the post-Cold War years, India seemed satisfied in this phase with attaining the status of a ‘swing state’ that could tilt the global pendulum of power either towards the United States or China (Kliman and Fontaine, 2012).

The thought that India should cease crowning other great powers and work to propel itself into a great power via a long-term roadmap for extended geopolitical influence, strategic flexibility and economic dynamism was missing. Intensive engagement with the outside world was still seen as expensive for a developing country with hundreds of millions of poor citizens and the ambit of India’s leadership was still confined to the South Asian sub-region.

‘MODI-FYING’ THE ELEPHANT

Given the parochial and isolationist tendencies in Indian society and the reluctance in the state apparatus to obtain and wield power with systematic rigorousness (Mattoo, 2012), can India realistically aspire to be a great power, which by very definition demands that a country step out of the confines of its immediate surroundings and have a consequential impact on international affairs far away from its borders? To qualify as major powers, states have to meet the following criteria:

unusual material capabilities, the willingness to pursue a wide range of foreign policy interests across a large geographical area, and recognition by other states that they are major powers (Volgy et al., 2011: 12)

The problematique I have elaborated earlier in this chapter poses stark doubts about India’s suitability to fulfill Volgy’s prerequisite of states ‘extensively pursuing a broad variety of foreign policy activities outside their region’. The metaphor of India as a wobbly elephant that cannot quite get its act together and exert power in a concerted fashion by means of a cogent ‘organizing framework’ in global affairs (Malone, 2012) is not historically inaccurate.

Yet, there is an abundance of hope for Indian foreign policy since 2014, which has been spearheaded by the unusually strong-willed and visionary Prime Minister Modi. Positing an individual political leader as a *deus ex machina* for a deep-rooted structural malaise in the foreign policy DNA of a country might come across as wishful. But there are plenty of reasons for applauding Modi as a motivator who has put India en route to great power status within a finite timeframe.

If the pulling and hauling of coalition politics and emasculation of central governments to effectively craft foreign policy had been a drawback since the 1990s, Modi’s resounding electoral victory in the 2014 general elections and his commanding political authority as the unchallenged leader and mascot of India have worked wonders for the country’s international image. Unlike the previous seven prime ministers who were trapped in perpetual tightrope-walking with a bewildering assortment of political parties and their regional interests to merely

hold on to power, Modi's landslide electoral wins in 2014 and 2019, and his consolidation of the political space within India have provided ample room for him to be a decisive and bold foreign policy planner and executioner who does not need to warily look over his shoulder and calculate domestic risks of a hyperactive and ambitious foreign policy.

Freed from the crutches of multi-party coalitions that unduly inflate the weight of obstructionist provincial parties, Modi has sought to turn India's quasi-federal polity into a diplomatic asset. His mantra of 'cooperative federalism' has drawn state governments ruled by different political parties closer in an integrated formation that serves India's overall national interests in world affairs. He has tried to 'institutionalize the participation of states in foreign policy', especially by forming a new States Division within the Ministry of External Affairs to coordinate with India's provinces for export promotion and attracting inward foreign direct investment (FDI) (Maini, 2017).

Innovations such as including Chief Ministers of Indian states in prime ministerial visits abroad, using Chief Ministers to go on delegation visits that pave the way for heads-of-government summit meetings, and giving Chief Ministers a platform to address heads of all Indian diplomatic missions abroad have borne fruit under Modi (Tewari, 2017). He has also roped in state governments for resolving outstanding disputes and thickening ties with South Asian neighbors like Bangladesh, Sri Lanka and Nepal to present a picture of India as one when it interacts with the outside world.

The 'national concept' which had been found lacking in Indian strategic practice is gradually being cemented through Modi's slogan of an 'India First' foreign policy where the whole is greater than the sum of its parts and there is a harmonization of provincial interests with the broader national interest. In the Prime Minister's own words:

'India First' is the central point of our foreign policy. It is about protecting India's strategic interest, it is to ensure that India marches forward in achieving economic prosperity by leaps and bounds and reaches the position which it is destined to reach. (PTI, 2016)

The brand of cultural nationalism that Modi represents as the head of the right-wing Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) has infused a much needed national perspective and vim into India's foreign policy. For example, he broke pre-existing communal taboos and domestic vote bank compulsions by becoming the first ever Indian Prime Minister to visit Israel in July 2017 to cement a strategically crucial relationship for India's security. I have commented on the salience of this historic trip as follows:

Banished are the overcautious, hypocritical and domestically poisoned lenses for approaching Israel, and ushered in are bold, dispassionate and objective ways of handling this key West Asian power. Driven by the motto of 'India First', Modi has overcome a huge psychological barrier, and slayed many a mental demon by finally making the journey to Israel. (Chaulia, 2017a)

Israel is just one out of a record-breaking 59 countries that Modi has personally visited from the point of his inauguration in May 2014 up to December 2018. His penchant for foreign travel to countries big and small is unmatched in India's diplomatic history and reveals political will at the top of the nation to immerse earnestly and with full gusto in foreign relations. Notwithstanding detractors within India's opposition parties who have demanded that Modi repeat the same old tradition of devoting his time and attention primarily to domestic affairs (PTI, 2015), the Prime Minister has made it a habit to demonstrate India's presence in far-flung corners of the globe with the realization that India has been missing in action for far too long.

Establishing international omnipresence and visibility, along with interacting with a wide cross-section of foreign stakeholders beyond just government officials and corporate tycoons, has given India's soft power tremendous ballast (Mahapatra, 2016). What Modi has done so far is to transform India from a disinterested and disengaged country to an outreach-centric state that is consolidating past partnerships and forging new ones in sync with the changing global power equations.

Elsewhere, I have reflected at length on how the apathy, lethargy and 'ad-hocism' which stood for Indian foreign policy for decades have been cast aside by the Prime Minister's vision to muster all of India's capabilities and chase the ultimate target of making the country a 'leading power' in the world through a 'full spectrum' and '360-degrees foreign policy' (Chaulia, 2016: *passim*). In a country notorious for the absence of noteworthy foreign policy doctrines, Modi has crafted one through his personal touch as India's *numero uno* diplomat, leading brand manager and strategist-in-chief.

DEVELOPMENTAL DIPLOMACY

By wide consensus, Modi has imbued global content into Indian diplomacy and is the most successful leader in generations to convince India's people that his foreign policy is not a vainglorious exercise but an instrument to deliver concrete material benefits to them. As a politician who gets panned by India's churlish news media and opposition parties for spending precious sums of taxpayers' money for globetrotting (Seth, 2015), Modi strives to reiterate the link between his proactive diplomacy and India's economic development. His formulation that the FDI he courts from the world, including the globally spread out Indian diaspora, stands for 'First Develop India' (PTI, 2014) is a folksy method of proving the relevance of foreign economic policy to 'welfarist' skeptics at home.

Modi's success in attracting unprecedented levels of FDI into India through a diplomatic full-court press has settled the debate about whether a poor country can afford to have a global foreign policy. He has unraveled the flawed

sequential logic of ‘first domestic, then international’ which used to constrain previous Indian governments in giving foreign policy its due. Modi’s path-breaking diplomatic agreements by overcoming hurdles with the United States, Australia and Japan for civil nuclear commerce to flow with India to help boost its electricity generation and clean energy goals, his deal for India buying pulses from Mozambique to tackle rising food price inflation in India, and his compact with the United Arab Emirates to set up a Strategic Petroleum Reserve (ISPR) in India are some instances where the Prime Minister has aced developmental diplomacy.

India’s soaring GDP growth itself since Modi took office in 2014 is partly a result of his foreign policy strategy of gathering and retaining the confidence of global investors and trading partners. In the annals of India’s post-Cold War foreign policy, economic diplomacy is not Modi’s invention *per se*, but he has set the bar far higher in this field and generated outcomes much faster.

India is also maturing under Modi as a net giver and a net provider of economic well-being to less developed countries. His conceptualization and timely delivery in May 2017 of the low-cost high-benefit South Asia satellite to economically uplift neighboring countries proved that despite budgetary limitations, Modi is ‘positioning India as a player that transcends narrow self-interests and magnanimously generates public goods for neighbors and the wider international community’ (Chaulia, 2017b).

Likewise, Modi’s founding of the International Solar Alliance (ISA) in 2015 to aggregate multilateral financing, research and technology for developing countries to make green energy transitions reveals how India is giving concrete shape to South–South cooperation with doable and tactile projects whose value is self-evident to its beneficiaries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. India is still slower and far below China in the amounts of foreign aid and loans it disburses in the Global South, but under Modi’s watch, it has ‘quietly transitioned into the role of provider as in the last three years it has given more aid to foreign countries than it has received’ (Sharma, 2017).

Chinks remain in maximizing the utility of India’s human resource potential as part of its global outreach in the developing world. But the renewed emphasis on skill transfer and capacity building emanating from India’s ‘development partnerships’ abroad should eventually situate it as a leader of the Global South – a tag which China already enjoys as an inexorable qualification for new entrants to the high table of great powers.

REVISED POWER EQUILIBRIUM

On the security front, Modi has distinguished his tenure from that of his predecessors through two mentionable additions to sharpen India’s foreign policy toolbox, viz. strategic surprise and strategic resolve.

Since 1989, India has faced a proxy war in its northernmost state of Jammu and Kashmir from jihadist terrorists based in Pakistan. Depending on the rhythm of bilateral relations and Pakistan's internal power dynamics, the armed separatist insurgency in Indian Kashmir has waxed and waned for decades. Spectacular cross-border terrorist strikes by hardline jihadists sheltered and trained by Pakistani intelligence agencies have often brought the two fraught neighbors close to war. But India has yet to find a lasting deterrence mechanism to curb these terrorist attacks, drawing derisive criticism that it is a 'soft state' and an 'easy victim' with a reactive and defensive military that cannot stem a conventionally smaller rival from wreaking mayhem on its soil (Unnithan and Shukla, 2006).

The clamour to 'do something' to raise the costs of terrorism for Pakistan and to prove India's mettle as a rising power that can compel its enemies to alter their behavior had been part of Modi's own rhetoric even before he assumed the post of Prime Minister. In September 2016, following yet another daring attack on an Indian military camp by Pakistan-supported jihadists in Kashmir, he ordered a daring surprise late night raid by the Indian Army inside Pakistani territory to dismantle seven terrorist training camps and kill an estimated fifty jihadists and Pakistani troops (Negi, 2016).

These 'surgical strikes', although denied as having occurred by Pakistan for face-saving purpose, were meant to shake Islamabad from the time-tested assumption that India does not respond in a forceful and calibrated way to counter imminent threats massing across its border. The scale and publicity with which Modi took this calculated risk made him wildly popular in India and inserted a fresh strategic possibility into the India-Pakistan conflict of 'surgical strikes 2.0', i.e. more 'preemptive and measured actions' to check subsequent terrorist attacks in India (Agarwal, 2017). In February 2019, Modi ordered airstrikes on jihadist camps deep inside Pakistani territory in retaliation for a suicide bombing in Kashmir against Indian security forces. Although Pakistan pooh-poohed the venture as a failure, Modi nonetheless signaled that a new deterrence-seeking security paradigm had set in (Chaulia, 2019).

It bears reminder here that Modi had earlier authorized comparable preventive attacks by the Indian Army on Northeast-focused separatist insurgents hiding in the jungles of Myanmar in June 2015. Surgical strikes are not one-off events and will likely to be launched iteratively at a time and location of India's choosing to keep its foes off balance and to fulfill Modi's promise of an 'India free from terrorism' by 2022 (PTI, 2017a).

If Pakistan is now on notice due to India's political will to spring a strategic surprise, then China has had to reckon with Modi's India that is not going to step back from defending its interests with resolve. During a two-months-long standoff in 2017 between the militaries of China and India over 34 square miles of disputed Himalayan land at the tri-junction with Bhutan known as the Doklam plateau, India faced a barrage of threats and warnings from Chinese state-owned

media about ‘the PLA’s overwhelming firepower and logistics’ and capability of ‘annihilating all Indian troops in the border region’ (GT, 2017).

Despite China’s conventional superiority over India, Modi did not succumb to this psychological warfare and maintained a stoic strategic resolve not to pull out the Indian Army until the Chinese agreed to halt road construction and simultaneously withdrew the People’s Liberation Army (PLA) presence from the tri-junction. In response to menacing Chinese references to India’s humiliating defeat in the 1962 war to China, the Modi government stressed that times have changed and called China’s bluff by quietly but firmly insisting that ‘the situation in 1962 was different and India of 2017 is different’ (IANS, 2017b).

In the end, armed hostilities did not break out and the row was settled through mutually agreed troop withdrawals and assurances. The American security analyst Bonnie Glaser noted during the Doklam faceoff that China had found in Modi ‘a leader who is willing to stand up for Indian interests and work together with other countries in the region that are looking to impose constraints on China ... and that’s something Beijing is worried about’ (PTI, 2017b).

Modi is far from vanquishing Pakistan-sponsored terrorism for good or averting all future threats from China on India’s land or maritime frontiers. But by taking up the gauntlet with a strategy, he is treading new terrain in Indian foreign policy and trying to install a revised power equilibrium in Asia.

Modi does not underestimate the continuing strategic challenge posed by the two ‘all-weather allies’ China and Pakistan, whose military and economic strategies have for decades been interwoven to counter India’s power. The China–Pakistan axis is even more pressing today because India’s ‘rise as a potential competitor to Beijing has further reinforced the original rationale for its partnership with Pakistan’ (Small, 2015: 4). China’s decision to invest \$46 billion in the China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) and attach it *ex post facto* to its global Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) as a ‘flagship project of great importance’ (Dasgupta, 2017) is not lost upon India, which needs to come up with its own regional connectivity roadmap to stay geo-economically and geopolitically relevant.

If the China–Pakistan–India strategic triangle has a persistent pattern in which India is the antagonist of the other two, it is a logical strategy for Indian foreign policy to bring in fourth parties that can balance this two-sided threat. Elsewhere, I have charted out the nature of the challenge and the remedy thereof:

The spectre of Chinese hegemony and the threat it poses to India’s ambitions in Asia and beyond has magnified. China will seek to bolster Pakistan with more financial aid and military support to try and keep India bogged down in South Asia ... Indian national strategy under Modi should be to ensure that major external powers like Russia and the USA stay on its corner or are at least wary of China to ward off the possibility of a two-front war by China and Pakistan against India. (Chaulia, 2017c)

Modi’s unapologetic and uninhibited strategic partnership with the United States, a departure from wary and guarded Indian governments of earlier periods,

is in no small measure motored by qualms about China's looming shadow. Invocations from Washington and New Delhi that they share a 'joint strategic vision for the Asia-Pacific and the Indian Ocean' (Parashar and Dasgupta, 2015) and that they will 'elevate their strategic consultations' to 'enhance peace and stability across the Indo-Pacific region' (PTI, 2017c) are telltale signs that India is now practicing more hardnosed realpolitik, keeping in sight its own ambition to be a 'leading power' and an independent power center in the international system rather than a 'swing state' opportunistically oscillating between China and the United States or remaining equidistant from both of these preeminent powers (Chaulia, 2016). Nonetheless, since the Donald Trump administration took charge in Washington in 2017, Modi had to adjust and dial down confrontation with China because he saw that the United States was no longer intent on counterbalancing China through strategic alliance building in Asia.

INWARD TO OUTWARD

Besides forging new equations with great powers, Modi's India has also ramped up defense diplomacy by conducting wide-ranging joint military exercises with Western and Asian partners. It has extended a more stridently protective role as a 'net provider of security' to smaller countries in the Indian Ocean Region and is also promoting co-production and co-development of hi-tech weaponry with trusted partners like Russia and Israel. In hard power capabilities, how far India can accomplish Modi's accelerated vision of defense modernization through the 'Make in India' campaign will determine its long-term ambitions to be acknowledged as a great power.

Increased budgetary outlays for the Indian Navy are vital pathways for India to project power in the high seas and extend its zone of influence. Joint naval exercises by India with the United States, Japan, Singapore and Indonesia have traversed the eastern rim of the Indian Ocean, the South China Sea and the East China Sea. Albeit inferior to the Chinese or American navies, the Indian Navy has professed intent to defend Indian companies drilling for oil off the coast of Vietnam in maritime space contested by China and sent stealth warships there to signify 'operational reach and commitment to India's "Act East" policy' (HT, 2016). India's heavy investment in the Chabahar port of Iran has given its navy greater leeway in the Arabian Sea and off the west coast of Africa. With both China and India fixated on American naval strategist Alfred Thayer Mahan's concept of 'sea power' as *the* medium for achieving national greatness (Mohan, 2009), the maritime race in Asia is a central variable to watch in the future.

The Modi government has undertaken extensive restructuring of the Indian Army's 'tooth to tail ratio' by shifting thousands of personnel into combat preparedness mode in 'the first such exercise in Independent India's military history' (Singh, 2017). India is also raising two divisions of its high-altitude Mountain

Strike Corps ‘to accrue quick-reaction ground offensive capabilities for the first time against China’ so that it could take any future war into Chinese territory (Pandit, 2017).

However, India is still reluctant to negotiate with foreign governments to set up overseas military bases and has avoided boots on the ground in Afghanistan even though its national security is intrinsically tied to stabilizing that country (Destradi, 2014). The art of connecting India’s military with its foreign economic policy and regional connectivity endeavors is still not sophisticated. Turf battles among the ministries of defense, external affairs and commerce make a mockery of Modi’s exhortations for a coordinated ‘whole of government’ model of foreign policymaking (Rana, 2016).

High-profile rescue diplomacy by the Indian Air Force and Army in Nepal after its devastating earthquake and in Yemen after the onset of war illustrate the Modi government’s undertaking ‘to shoulder greater global responsibilities’ (IISS, 2015). The Indian Navy has been escorting thousands of commercial vessels in the high seas, the majority of which are ‘foreign bottoms’ or non-Indian owned, an expensive undertaking that is justified for furthering ‘the linkage with the country’s economic interests and regional credibility’ (Bhaskar, 2016: 49).

The adoption of a generous stance and tone in foreign policy where India gives to the world rather than asks from it is a marker of great power-like ethos. The comfort with which the United States, and lately China, fan out their militaries to distant shores in the name of humanitarian, peacekeeping and stabilizing missions to ‘provide public goods for global security’ (Jianshu, 2017) must be studied by India for lessons as it attempts to design its own outward strategic posture.

CONCLUSION: FUTURE CHALLENGES

The Modi effect on Indian foreign policy has yielded multiple positives. He has overturned ossifying traditions and brought in doctrinal and long-horizon perspectives that had been direly lacking. But again, in the context of a country like India where policymaking is personalized rather than institutionalized, the challenge is for the Modi diplomatic momentum to be implanted and elevated in the decades to come. Reversion to non-strategic and reactive ways in the governance of India’s foreign policy after Modi departs from the political scene cannot be ruled out since the bureaucracy remains entrenched and unreformed. The task of diversifying and training the next generation of young foreign policy leaders who are bolder and more creative is incumbent upon Indian educational institutions and think tanks which are presently managed by elderly figures.

On the substantive policy side, India has a laundry list of unfinished tasks such as devising a befitting strategy to parry China’s gargantuan BRI by speedily giving

flesh to intercontinental connectivity ideas like the Asia Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC) in tandem with Japan (Chaulia, 2017d), taking the lead in evolving new security structures with likeminded nations as a hedge against the isolationist and strategy-devoid foreign policy of President Trump's United States (Roche, 2017), extending the country's currently weak political presence in the Middle East and Latin America, adroitly entering into and shaping the direction of regional preferential trade blocs, and shepherding a variant of 'globalization 2.0' that privileges Indian-style democratic and pluralistic values.

But the aforementioned tactical policy imperatives can only be met if the macro-level psychological baggage of the past I outlined in the initial portion of this chapter is permanently laid to rest. In 2013, *The Economist* legitimately complained that India lacked 'the culture to pursue an active security policy', had 'little interest in grand strategy' and was uncertain 'whether it wants to' become a great power (*TE*, 2013). The will to lead and to transpose one's national preferences onto the international system and remake it is an essential mental quality for any nation to climb into the A-list of the global power distribution. Fervent desire and ambition to be a leading power has to be complemented with strategic acuity and tactical dexterity to convert latent power into concrete power.

Expecting a single energizing foreign policy entrepreneur like Narendra Modi to accomplish such a monumental transformation of attitudes in a typically argumentative and heterogeneous country is impractical. As a politician, there are limits to how far and how long he alone can be the steward of India's upward path in the world. Unless India awakens with a socially embedded movement, consciousness and discourse in favor of activist and muscular foreign policy, its sclerotic 'system' will find alibis to continue to delay ascent into the league of great powers. A sustainable foreign policy metamorphosis awaits India.

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