

## INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY – AN OVERVIEW

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### ABSTRACT

A country's foreign policy, also called foreign relations or foreign affairs policy, consists of self interest strategies chosen by the state to safeguard its national interests and to achieve goals within its international relations milieu. The objectives of foreign policy in general guide the activities and relationships of one state in its interactions with other states. The development of foreign policy is influenced by domestic considerations, the policies or behaviour of other states, or plans to advance specific geo-political designs. Foreign Policy is a strategy or planned course of action developed by decision makers of a state vis-a-vis other states or international entities, aimed at achieving specific goals defined in terms of national interests. The study of foreign relations is known as foreign policy analysis (FPA) and the work is called diplomacy.

### INTRODUCTION

The foreign policy of any modern state devolves from implied or explicit references to strategic, economic, and ideological considerations, and aims at the preservation and furtherance of the national interest. There are several factors that have influenced, and continue to influence, the shaping of India's foreign policy. Some of these factors are of permanent nature while others change with time.

#### A) External Determinants

- **International Organizations:** These include international law, the United Nations Organisation, and its activities, UNESCO, I.L.O, W.H.O., I.M. F. etc. The nations cannot completely ignore international laws, treaties, and contracts so that their violations may not put in danger the policies. Almost all countries are members of the U. N O. Its decisions and activities affect the foreign policy of many nations.
- **International Economic System:** No country can be absolutely self-sufficient in her economic needs and requirements. Foreign trade and foreign exchange are the barometers to test the country's economy. Critical inputs of development flow through exports and imports. A developing country like India had to depend on international monetary institutions like the World Bank, IMF and other developed nations to meet her developmental inputs.
- **World Public Opinion:** World public opinion provides dynamism to the external environment. It is always changing. It is very difficult to know it unless it becomes very clear and organized. Like a flicker of light, it influences the foreign policy rarely. The characteristic of consistency is absolutely absent in it. Only if the domestic public opinion of many countries combines it becomes an effective world public opinion. Then it also serves as a determinant of foreign policy. No country howsoever powerful can go ever challenging world public opinion.
- **Economic Developmental Needs:** Economic and energy security are also a key determinant of Foreign policy of India. Pakistan and India are bargaining with Iran for the Iran-Pakistan-India (IPI) gas pipeline and with Turkmenistan for the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) gas pipeline project. Besides, a proposal for exporting gas from Qatar is also under consideration. India has received a big boost in this regard with the coming into force of the US India deal on the peaceful nuclear technology. This has virtually legitimized Indian nuclear

programme much to the chagrin of Pakistan which has since been strenuously lobbying for getting the same status.

## B) INTERNAL DETERMINANTS

- **Geography:** The Geography of India, including her soil fertility, climate, location in relation to her land masses, and waterways, etc. also influence her foreign policy. India's strategic location has placed it within easy reach of many sensitive areas including Pakistan, China, South-east Asia, West, and East Africa. A natural frontier in the form of Himalayas in the north and the Indian Ocean, Arabian Sea and Bay of Bengal on the three sides has considerably influenced its foreign policy.
- **Economy:** India's foreign policy largely depends on her economic strength. A nation with a weak economy can never have an effective foreign policy. The stagnant economic condition at the time of independence profoundly affected foreign policy. One reason why Nehru deliberately kept India out of the cold war was his desire to concentrate upon the pressing problems of economic development and to secure technical assistance from superpowers by following the path of non-alignment. India was able to get much-needed assistance from the USSR, the US and the European countries.
- **History and Culture:** India's rich and varied historical and cultural experience has been a conditioning determinant of her foreign policy. The historical links with the British were responsible for India remaining in the Commonwealth of Nations. India's commitment to peace since time immemorial has significantly influenced foreign policy. India's cultural values such as peaceful coexistence, golden mean, mutual respect, means justify ends, tolerance, neutrality, righteous indignation are reflected in India's foreign policy.
- **Principles of the foreign policy of India:** Article 51 under the Directive Principles of State Policy in the Constitution of India, highlights the basic principles of foreign policy of India. These principles are the promotion of international peace and security; friendly relations with other countries; respect for international law and international organizations like the UN; and finally the peaceful settlement of international disputes. Some of the principles that shaped foreign policies of India so far are discussed below:
- **Panchsheel:** Panchsheel, or the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence, were first formally enunciated in the Agreement on Trade and Intercourse between the Tibet region of China and India signed on April 29, 1954, which stated, in its preamble, that the two Governments "have resolved to enter into the present Agreement based on the following principles: - 1. Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, 2. Mutual non-aggression, 3. Mutual non-interference, 4. Equality and mutual benefit, and 5. Peaceful co-existence.
- **Peaceful Settlement of International Disputes:** This principle has been included in the Constitution of India, under the Directive Principles of State Policy as well as in the Charter of the UN. India has played a leading role in the resolution of the Korean conflict and supported negotiated settlement of Palestine issue, Kashmir problem, border problems with neighbouring countries and other such disputes and problems. At present, India is in favour of the resolution of peaceful settlement of Iranian nuclear issue, the problem of the democratic upsurge in the Middle East and so on. India is always against foreign military intervention for resolving international problems. This principle continues to be the cornerstone of India's policy.
- **Opposition to Colonialism and Imperialism:** Being subjected to colonial subjugation for about 200 years, India firmly stands in opposition to any form of colonialism and imperialism. It is

with this line of thinking that India played a major role in liberating the newly independent countries of Asia and Africa from colonial shackles.

- **Opposition to Racial Discrimination:** From the very beginning India is against all kinds of discrimination based on race and culture. It was pioneer in highlighting the problem of racial discrimination at the International level and severely criticized the policy of racial segregation being pursued by the government of South Africa and Rhodesia (now Zimbabwe). In 1952, India along with twelve other Afro-Asian States raised the question of apartheid at the United Nations (UN) and asserted that its practice not only constituted a flagrant violation of the UN charter and the Declaration of Human Rights but also constituted a serious threat to world peace. In subsequent years, it took up the cause of the Negroes in America and blacks of South Africa. It played its role in the freedom of Zimbabwe and Namibia from white domination. In brief, it can be pointed out that India has always worked against racial discrimination wherever it was being practiced.
- **Links with Commonwealth:** Good relations with Commonwealth have been another important feature of India's foreign policy. India continued with the membership of Commonwealth even after adopting a Republican constitution, because, it thought that the membership of Commonwealth shall be beneficial in the economic and other spheres. India played a leading role at the various Commonwealth Heads of Government Meetings (CHOGMs).

## OBJECTIVES OF FOREIGN POLICY OF INDIA

Indian foreign policy revolves around three concentric circles:

1. The immediate neighbourhood where India has sought to consolidate its position and has attempted, though in a limited manner – to keep the 'outside powers' from direct influence or interference within the region.
2. Extended neighbourhood stretching across Asia and the Indian Ocean littoral, where India has sought to balance the influence of other powers and attempted to prevent them from undercutting its own national interests,
3. Entire globe, India has endeavoured to make its place as one of the great powers – a key player in international peace and security. At present, the country's diplomatic activities, offer a clear picture of India's priorities and strategic objectives.

They are essentially five-fold: I. Prioritizing an integrated neighbourhood; "Neighbourhood First." II. Leveraging international partnerships to promote India's domestic development. III. Ensuring a stable and multipolar balance of power in the Indo-Pacific; "Act East." IV. Dissuading Pakistan from supporting terrorism. V. Advancing Indian representation and leadership on matters of global governance.

## Phases of Foreign Policy of India

The foreign policy of India can be divided into four distinct phases.

**The first phase is the Nehruvian Era (1947 - 1964).** This period was the initial benchmark for India's Foreign Policy. The key characteristics of this period was of high idealism and they were followed by Nehru's binding interest in "Multilateral Institutions" in promoting Global Peace and delegitimizing colonial enterprise through his policy of non-alignment. Nehru's emphasis on low military expenditure during his period was partly because of Bonapartism at home and partly because of economic development.

**The second phase (1964 to 1991)** overlaps with the tenures of Prime Minister Lal Bahadur Shastri, Indira Gandhi and Rajiv Gandhi. In this period structural shifts could be observed in India's Foreign Policy approach. During the course of time, India's foreign policy underwent a dramatic change which brought the realistic phase in India's dealing in international relations. First Nuclear Test in Pokhran in 1974 and India's role in East Pakistan and the creation of Bangladesh and close and friendly relations with the Soviet Union were the highlights of the foreign policy.

**The third phase (1991 to 2000).** This phase began with the end of the cold war. After the collapse of the Soviet Union in 1991, there was a need to redesign the foreign policy. It was necessary for India to avoid the distinct possibility of marginalisation in the emergent global order. During the 1990s the State-led model of socialism was collapsed in India and India changed its policy from closed economy to globalization. India's balancing act of tackling the challenge of global terrorism without alienating its Islamic minority; and India's search for energy security to ensure its current rate of economic growth has been seen on the international relations of India. The look east policy helped in renewing political and economic contacts and the emphasis of historic cultural and ideological links with the countries of East and South-East Asia. During this time India realised the importance of redressing the imbalance in foreign policy and adopted Look East Policy to improve the relations with its South East Asian neighbours for the strategic defence and military cooperation with nations concerned by the expansion of China's economic and strategic influence. India's focus on a strengthened and multi-faceted relationship with ASEAN is an outcome of the significant changes in the world's political and economic scenario since the early 1990s and India's own march towards economic liberalization. India also started negotiations with ASEAN and the partnership has progressed steadily since the launch of Look East Policy in 1991. India became sectoral dialogue partner in 1992 and full dialogue partner in 1996. A lot of efforts in the field of privatization and infrastructure were initiated to attract more and more foreign investments in the country. To establish and maintain good relations with its neighbours, India adopted Bus-Diplomacy with Pakistan. The relations with the People's Republic of China also improved to boost the trade and seeking to resolve the territorial disputes through dialogue. India also established strategic and military cooperation with Israel to fight terrorism. During 1998, India conducted a series of nuclear tests for peaceful energy solutions; however, limited sanctions were imposed by the U.S., UK, Canada and other nations.

**The Fourth Phase (2001 to at Present):** During this period, issues like the persistent threat of Kashmir issue, India's politics of anti-terrorism are shaping its foreign policy to a greater extent. The Indo-US civil nuclear deal put India on the map of nuclear states recognizing its potential and immense capabilities. Recently India joins the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR) after clearing final hurdles is a win for its leadership. The Look East Policy changed into Act East Policy and focuses on the extended neighbour hood in the Asia-Pacific region. During the last decade, India's multilateral relations with countries around the world have gained tremendous momentum. India has become a member of a wide array of multilateral bodies in economic and other spheres. India's participation is visible in a number of such bodies like G-20, BRICS, IBSA, as well as with those for with a pronounced thrust towards economic cooperation like ASEAN, EAS, WTO, BIMSTEC etc. India's foreign policy has acquired a new sense of direction. It is pragmatic. Moreover, it is imbued with a serious dose of realism seeking to make multi-directional engagements in global politics. However, there seems to be an unfinished agenda when it comes to India's relations with Asia. Likewise, the issue of Pakistan and the 'deficit of thrust' related to it continue to plague India-China relations. Strengthening relations with Africa, South America, and Central Asia must be undertaken with similar vigour. The agenda and themes are much better defined than before and with a sense of strategic planning. With the change in government in 2014, the foreign policy of India changes to a more economy-centric direction. The focus is on improving relations with neighbouring countries in South Asia, an extended neighbour hood in Southeast Asia and major global powers with a vision, enthusiasm and energy with which India is

shaping its international relations. With the change in government in 2014, the foreign policy of India changes to a more economy-centric direction. The government has adopted “Neighbour hood First” approach in Foreign policy of the country. In considerable measure, the present-day government appears cognizant of the significance of foreign policy. The world is dynamic where frames of reference are shifting rapidly. In Modi’s foreign policy approach, a sense of a broader shift in ideas is seen. Modi’s various trips to a number of key states in East Asia suggest that he grasps the significance of attracting foreign investment and building a set of key strategic partnerships, especially at a time when India’s relations with China remains fraught with uncertainty. India has also sought to improve ties with India’s smaller neighbours. The most significant of these, of course, has been his successful conclusion of a border accord with Bangladesh. If India truly intends to make foreign policy one of its legacy issues, she will need to sustain the various initiatives that have been undertaken during recent time.

### **CHALLENGES FACED**

India faces a lot of challenges at this point of time. Some of the challenges are discussed below.

- One of the key foreign policy challenges that India faces in the year ahead is juggling its relationship with the US and the west on one hand and Russia and China on the other.
- Other challenges mostly involve economic diplomacy, which includes India’s push to revive the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership or RCEP, and the BTI, a Broad-Based trading and investment agreement which involves the EU, and its refusal to join China’s Belt and Road Initiative.
- The biggest challenge for India will be how to deal with Beijing and its growing assertiveness.
- Other challenges are the extended neighbour hood in South Asia demands New Delhi’s attention as China has been rapidly making inroads into what New Delhi has traditionally seen as its own backyard.
- New Delhi will be called upon to take a decision on key international issues. It cannot afford to be a fence-sitter on such issues, especially as it is trying to become a permanent member of the United Nations Security Council. This will test New Delhi’s diplomatic acumen, particularly on issues like Syria.

### **CRITICISMS OF THE POLICY**

The foreign policy of India has been attacked on several grounds, some of them are as follows: -

- I. It is contended that it is too much idealistic. India did not follow the pragmatic approach to secure its interest e.g. Nehru moved to the UN for the solution of Kashmir issue while India had the potential to solve it through military action.
- II. Another criticism against Indian foreign policy is that it is dictatorial in its nature. It has been evolved only by one man and he is Pandit Nehru.
- III. It is contended that the policy of non-alignment is dangerous. When the world is divided into camps, we have to join one camp or the other. If we do not join any camp, there is every likelihood of our being left alone. If India is attacked, there may be none to come to help her.
- IV. Indian association with the Commonwealth has also been attacked on many grounds. It is argued that maintenance of the commonwealth links curtails the sovereignty of India. Our association with the Commonwealth has not helped us to help the Indian in the Union of South Africa.

- V. We have not been able to solve the Kashmir problem, even after 70 years of Independence. Our relations with Pakistan are as bad as they were before. In recent years our friendly countries such as Russia and Nepal are drifting away from us.
- VI. It is also pointed out that we do not have a large number of experienced diplomats to carry out the foreign policy of the country. Efforts should be made to train them otherwise money spent on them is all waste.

## CONCLUSION

The multifarious objectives of India's foreign policy achieve a blend of national and international interests. India has sought to achieve its security and socio-economic advancement while at the same time working for peace, freedom, progress and justice to all nations and peoples. Nonalignment, adherence to peaceful procedures for the settlement of differences, support to the initiatives for disarmament, and active participation in international bodies constituted notable principles that flow from the objectives of the country's foreign policy.

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