

Indian Foreign Policy: Emerging Re-Calibrations

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Abstract

India's foreign policy went for a metamorphosis under the stewardship of Prime Minister Narendra Modi Government at the centre. The pillars of Nehruvian ideology as a guiding light in foreign matters held so close to heart by Congress party in most of the sixty- six years of Republic that it had been in power at the centre, went for a toss. The contours of foreign policy were redefined in terms of technological and economical development with a greater focus on pure and simple "India first" ideology. Secondly, Domestic policies are integrated with foreign policy objectives and decisions are based on of cost-benefit analysis, not on ideological considerations like that of non- alignment. Thirdly, a greater emphasis was laid upon overall national power with the recognition of economic power as its foundation and military power as its' pinnacle. Fourthly, breaking the logjam of self- imposed, historical and mental constraints on developing the relationship with any country. Fifth, willingness to boldly attack the aggressor in his safe havens has come as a clear departure from the past. Topping it all, with the shock and awe or Unpredictability doctrine based on more pragmatic and pro- active foreign policy in general and with Pakistan in particular, being unmindful of taking recourse to ideology of- left, right or centre- without giving two hoots to ideological leaning of old. A self-imposed constraints of ideology and misplaced fears of offending other countries are being jettisoned. Overall a much more confident, credible and effective national security and foreign policy is what emerged in recalibration.

KEYWORDS: India first, cost-benefit analysis, self- imposed constraint, unpredictability, recalibration etc

INTRODUCTION

The study of foreign policy is to view the totality of over all behaviour of a state towards other countries in its immediate neighbour and beyond. The ultimate of foreign policy is to make such an adjustment of state's action, around or beyond that accrues maximum benefit to its overtures. It attempts to calibrate the actions of other states to its own ideological moorings and economic-cultural-strategic gains. In his book on Theory of foreign policy, the author **George Modelski (1962)** defines foreign policy as "the system of activities evolved by communities for changing the behaviour of other states and for adjusting their own activities to the international environment". Modelski's view partly expresses the purpose of foreign policy. The keyword word in his definition of foreign policy should be "regulate" instead of "change" in the behaviour of other states. It may also happen that a particular state may not prefer to change the behaviour of other states but simply tweek a little bit or some times opt for no change at all. Thus, even a decision to have no relations with a state is also a foreign policy. The operating word to be emphasised here is to regulate relations as per one's national interest giving paramount

importance to ideological position leading to number of social processes like- co-operation, conflict and neutrality or coexistence.

The book released few months back on India's foreign policy by union external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj, titled *The Modi Doctrine: New Paradigms in India's Foreign Policy* encapsulates the main objectives and emerging thrust areas like: India first, Neighbourhood first, engaging competing global powers, with a focus on the diaspora and on delivery. The purpose of writing present paper is to highlight emerging thrust areas; means adopted to address them and analyse practicability or viability of policy measures undertaken to achieve them.

Four Pronged Strategy

There is a four- pronged dynamics (**Vermani, 2014**) to the emerging thrust areas, namely, the primacy of technologically driven economic development; streamlining of domestic and foreign policy to this objective; the emphasis on national power with the slogan of India first and recourse to military power; and jettisoning of self-imposed constraints on actions that may be considered as inimical by other countries to their interests.

The first dynamic perceives founding all aspects of economic development on technology with initiative like make in India, Digital India, Smart city and Start-up India using appropriate technology promoting the idea of India First. "India First" means specifying roles that other countries have to play in technological driven economic development and expressing with great clarity and specificity the interest of India in various fields, to name a few like terrorism, defense, security and space technology to other countries.

The second change relates to streaming of domestic and foreign policy to achieve the objectives of strengthening of defense, upgrading internal and external security, overall economic development, technological progress in every field of national and international life and achieve self- sufficiency space technology in a cost benefit rational analysis approach as opposed to some discrepant and discredited ideological considerations of being part and parcel of beg gages like SAARC, Non-alignment, Panchsheel of congress era.

The third thrust area is concerned with emphasis on increase in overall national power with strategic and bold plans based on military power. The out of box plans like raising issue of human rights violations and persecution of people of Balochistan by Pakistan; and decision to construct a McMohan highway along Line of Actual Control (LAC) in Arunachal Pradesh have a component of conventional and psychological warfare. Besides, India First, another objective of Indian's Foreign Policy choice as enunciated in Modi Doctrine, has been that of Neighborhood first. It brings into full play the dexterity, sagacity and discretion of Modi Government when the sophistication of dealing with military ideologues neighbour with military might and surgical strike; and severing of track II talks is applied to bring deviant neighbour onto its knees.

The Fourth emphasis is on jettisoning off the ideological baggage of self-imposed, historical and mental constraint on activities that may be offensive to other countries. It also meant bifurcation of security related issues from economic activities i.e., the security

consideration with one country is not to cast its shadow on its economic relations. Both aspects are to be divorced from each other in persuing national interest. In spite of security concerns with China, India signed trade pact during Chinese president Xi Jinping's visit, formed the BRICS bank and launched Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). Further, the hostility with Pakistan has not adversely affected India's relations with its partner China in One Belt, One Road project; neither co-operation with China is to affect relation with Japan- a known Chinese adversary. It is a clear departure from congress era foreign policy mechanism that factored in such relational binaries of foes and friends in dealing with countries say Arab countries and Israel in middle-east.

Pragmatic Implications

To begin with, it could be argued with fair deal of conviction that Modi Doctrine is nothing new so far as objectives are concerned. The shift from Non Alignment towards U.S partnership was made during the first tenure of NDA under former PM Bajpai. During UPA tenure the civil nuclear agreement, the U.S relations were further pronounced. Subsequent developments in international relations demanded such a shift given china-Russian alliance and possibility of renewal of new cold war. The fact remains that U.S is the sole superpower and stands head and shoulder above others in the depth and extent of its strategic and defence technology. Indian trade, capital and technology in private sector are largely dependent on its good favour. Further co-operation is desirable in areas like counter- terrorism and maritime security in and around Indian Ocean.

The distinctive feature of Modi Doctrine in the words of its union defence minister Manohar Parrikar is the need for "unpredictability" in defence, nuclear and strategic postures. The shock and awe tactic has been the major contribution in Mr. Modi as a tool to achieve long and short term foreign policy goals. Right from the day one, whether it was inviting south-asian countries to his swearing in ceremony in May, 2014 or his surprise visit to Kabul and Lahore on his return from Moscow last Christmas, a strand of surprise, shock and awe element is perceptible. After Pathankot attack, all dialogue and talks with Pakistan were suspended, but Mr Modi paid a surprise visit to Lahore, shocking security establishment and putting his foreign policy office in quandary. Taking his policy of "unpredictability" to a new height with regard to Pakistan, Mr Modi thrice crossed the Rubicon of traditional foreign policy principles. Firstly he called in question Pakistan's policy towards Baluchistan's freedom aspirations. Secondly, making military operations across border termed "surgical strike" an open secret- to be narrated it to gain political millage and displayed it as a trophy. Thirdly, announcing along with its neighbour countries of a boycott of the SAARC summit in Pakistan.

It must be accepted that these moves have brought much needed applause at home and abroad with its advantage of "First mover", however, there are certain dangers that must be watched out. The doctrine of unpredictability as a foreign policy measure runs counter to theory of deterrence (**Haider, 2016a.**) - used successfully during cold war era between rivalry of super powers. Deterrence theory rests on the principle of prospective response- whether nuclear or conventional- in event of aggression. It reduces the response option of country practicing it, as it expects every subsequent response to aggression to be stronger in degree and intensity than the previous one. Here it means that the response to a uri-

style attack would have to be something similar to surgical strike undertaken on previous occasion across Indian boarder into Pakistan or stronger, leaving a very few non-war options. Secondly, the doctrine of unpredictability is invariably linked with law of diminishing returns (**Haidar, 2016b.**), as shock and awe has a tendency to wear-out soon, preparing both friends and foes to expect the unexpected. Thirdly, there is always increase in cross boarder skirmishes and attacks, as other country always tries to make the country practicing unpredictability, to run out of options to retaliate in a conventional manner leading to loss of face or being guilty of starting a nuclear war. The Pakistani provocations have exceedingly increased over the period of time. Since the beginning of this year, several attacks have occurred, starting with Papore in February to Uri in September, 2016 and now Nagrota. Pakistan has resorted to even greater provocations by mutilating the bodies of Indian soldiers killed in terror attacks (**Narayanan, 2016**). Fourthly, it is argued that the policy of unpredictability works well in an otherwise predictable global scenario. The present international scenario is highly dynamic and changing with faster pace. The world has moved from one extreme to another in the last two and half years since Mr. Modi assumed office. The prices of oil are surging upwards once having touched the lowest point in a decade. The stability of dollar as a currency of the world is in fluid. The European unity is breached with Brexit becoming a reality and an impending change of guard in U.S is to bring Mr. Donald Trump who has often expressed his desire to be unpredictable on Syria crisis, North Korean question etc. This leaves very little room for Indian Government to remain for long in a present state of unpredictability. It will be more sagacious to be on a firmer ground.

CONCLUSION

The contemporary world is in a grip of unprecedented level of tumult, turbulence and a cluster of crisis with ascendancy of right-wing forces on the pretext of failed neo-liberal reforms as a cause of world's evil. The problem gets intensified when these forces manipulate people's legitimate anxieties to generate politically and ideologically useful xenophobia and hatred. Today when achieving coherence in foreign policy is proving difficult for most countries, India faces even more difficult obstacles. It cannot afford flip-flop in policy, shock and awe as a measure to implement policy; and indulge in knee-jerk reaction to crisis situations. As a dominant power in south-asia and one of the world's leading democracies, India must find a proper answer to what could otherwise become a serious existential crisis of monumental proportions.

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