

India's Foreign Policy under Modi Regime in a Multi-polar World: Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

India is rising as a global power center in the multi-polar world. The emerging multipolar world has an opportunity as well as challenges to India's foreign policy. The Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has emphasized on 'India first' approach to ensure domestic economic progress, security, and putting India's interest at the different international forums. Modi government has tried to engage with all major powers, promoting and reintegrating India with the global economy, promoting greater cooperation with South Asian countries, the Middle East, Central Asia. India's foreign policy is making a shift from the traditional approach of non-alignment to multi-alignment in the multi-polar world. This research paper has tried to look into recent development in India's foreign policy under the Modi government. Modi government's foreign policy is more pragmatic and puts the 'India first' approach for economic benefits while dealing with a multi-polar world. India is promoting its soft-power through 'public diplomacy', deepening the ties with diaspora, greater emphasis and flexible position on trade and climate change, but putting less energy to deal with Pakistan and China. Therefore, this paper has attempted to understand India's changing foreign policy which is shifting from traditional non-alignment to pragmatic multi-alignments in the multi-polar world.

Key Words : India, Foreign Policy, Modi regime, Multi-polar world, Challenges, Opportunity

INTRODUCTION

India is emerging as a global power in the multi-polar world. India has proven its strength at the various front of the world stage. In the last three decades, India's large and fast-growing economy with demographic dividend and its nuclear power captured international attention and enhanced the image of India with a profound change (Pant, 2009). India's foreign policy has been at the world's center stage due to the growing strength and presence of India at the world level. With the rise of its economic and military capabilities and strategic interests, India has shaped diplomacy that is much more aggressive in the pursuit of those interests in dealing with various stakeholders in a multi-polar world (Kukreja, 2020).

India's foreign policy has shifted its policy from structural confines during Cold War strategies framework to pragmatic while putting India first approach. Economic,

military, and strategic interest has shaped the diplomacy which is more aggressive and pragmatic. Its role in South Asia with its neighbor has been dwindled and failed to develop a mutual relationship among different nations in the region. An analysis of India's feeble foreign policy suggests that within India itself, the foreign policy maker's shied away from any talks of the country's rising power. The absence of grand strategic thinking in India's foreign policy in terms of long-term goals prevented it from spelling out the roles that it aims to play in global affairs (Miller, 2013; Varma, 2013).

India's foreign policy under the Modi government has focused on various pragmatic issues. According to Mohan, a leading commentator on strategic diplomacy, India's new initiative under Modi is to put diplomacy at the service of economic development, deepen the ties with the diaspora, attempt to end Delhi's defensiveness on the world stage, inject greater flexibility into India's

positions on trade and climate change, construct a new framework of pragmatic internationalism and develop a new vocabulary for Indian foreign policy. However, the Prime Minister seems to have been far less prepared in his dealings with Pakistan and China (Mohan, 2015 cited in Kukreja, 2020).

This research paper has been divided into various heading to understand the changing elements of India's foreign policy under the Modi regime. These heading are: changing global power and the multi-polar world; public diplomacy under Modi; India-Pakistan relation during Modi regime; India-USA relation during Modi; Sino-India relation under Modi; Economic development in Modi's foreign policy and finally look-East Policy in Modi's foreign policy have been discussed and analyzed.

Changing Global Power and Multi-polar world:

In the era of information technology and globalization, the world's power is changing at a very fast pace and new world order is emerging and replacing the old one. In literature across various disciplines, some studies like Howorth (2010), McMillan (2009), and Dimirovski *et al.* (2006) indicated that multi-polarity in the world is growing. Most polarities in the world were discussed concerning the power dynamics in international politics (Etzioni, 1965; Hanqin, 2011). The transition in world geopolitics witnessed shifts from a bi-polar world to a unipolar world and then from a unipolar world to a multi-polar world (Howorth, 2010). Researchers like Wasdell (2011, p. 11) gave credit of multi-polarity to changing geopolitics but indicated the presence of other power groups like "multi-national corporations, global industries, and financial institutions" (Rwelamila, 2011).

Accenture (2010) defined the term "multipolar world" as follows:

".....the diffusion of global economic power across a widening range of regions and countries, with that diffusion accelerated by information technology, greater economic openness, and the growing size and reach of multinational companies."

In information technology, world power is changing. India has also emerged as a global hub for software technology. India is also a big market for various multinational companies. India's foreign policy has recognized these elements of change and making policy accordingly to accommodate this development as an opportunity. India is engaging and looking for an

opportunity in the changing world order and shaping its foreign policy accordingly.

In the post-cold war era, India's foreign policy has shifted from the Non-alignment policy of being neutral to a policy of Multi-alignment as having friendly relations with almost all great powers. A multi-polar world and alignment are the very essence of India's foreign policy to promote economic growth and security. This presents an opportunity for India to become a global mediator and help in developing a framework for global issues and negotiation in the interest of other developing countries.

India's foreign policy is based on the ethos of "*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*" and Good Samaritan. In this context, India's long-standing commitment to United Nations Security Council (UNSC) reform seeks better representation and balance of power. India has taken a lead in many multilateral initiatives such as International Solar Alliance (ISA), proposing CCIT for combating terrorism, Asia-Africa Growth Corridor, etc. India has emerged as the pharmacy to the world and a global player in generic medicines. India can work together closely with a group of countries including developed and developing countries as the 'Alliance for Multilateralism' (an initiative launched by Germany and France) to shape both the alliance itself and the reform agenda at large.

A multipolar world presents many opportunities for India. Both the bipolar Cold War and the unipolar moment or American world order constrained India's ability to shape world order. The waning of Western dominance opens space for emerging powers like India to play an active role in global affairs (Kukreja, 2020). A multipolar world provides an opportunity to shape its national interest and pursue a leadership role of global governance and building a positive regional environment in South Asia and the Asia-Pacific.

Public Diplomacy under Modi:

Soft power is making its presence at the global level in the recent past in various ways. Public diplomacy has been an important tool for this purpose (Mazumdar, 2020). Public diplomacy involves activities usually undertaken by a national government to inform and influence foreign public opinion and attitudes to advance its foreign policy goals. Such activities include 'nation-branding, diaspora outreach, digital engagement, international broadcasting, and international exchange programs, all of which are designed to promote a positive image and reputation of the country to a global audience

(Cowan and Cull, 2008).

Modi's soft-power diplomatic efforts have touched a new height. Soft power, the appeal of a country's culture, history, institutions, and values, is an important element of modern diplomacy. The Indian government knows this. Projecting India's soft power has been the adoption of an 'International Yoga Day by the United Nations. Modi puts special emphasis to make yoga a part of the daily life of every individual in the world and describes it as an "invaluable gift of India's ancient tradition" (Biwas, 2021). Modi's soft-power diplomacy has achieved several milestones at the international level and recognized Modi's effort at the global level. For example, in his first five-year term, he received numerous leadership awards, such as the Seoul Peace Prize, the Gates Foundation's Global Goalkeeper Award, and the Kotler Presidential Awards. The awards and recognition are a sign of the 'rise of Modi as a global leader.

The Economy in Modi's foreign policy:

The emerging patterns of economic growth have shaped Modi's foreign policy in recent years. The policy is based on the BJP's vision of India as a major actor in global affairs based on the strategic influence flowing from strong economic performance. Various policy measures which have been taken by the Modi government deals with domestic economic growth as a priority in all spheres of external engagement, India's external engagement in line with dominant national interest in a pragmatic fashion, make access to energy, engaging in diaspora, and deeper foothold in global and regional forums as the key drivers of growth (Patil, 2015).

Various ambitious programs and policies have been launched to promote economic growth in India. These initiatives are 'Jan Dhan Yojana, a scheme that promotes access to banking services for individual and financial literacy, and 'Digital India', for connecting public service providers (government agencies) digitally to consumers (people) for efficient delivery of services. Skill development, fostering innovation, promoting startups, and entrepreneurship is some special initiative taken to reap the benefits of demographic dividend for promoting economic growth. Modi's liberalized India's foreign direct investment policies, allowing more foreign investment in several industries.

To make India a global hub for manufacturing through its ambitious program of 'make in India' initiatives was launched in 2014. It was designed to encourage

foreign companies to manufacture their products in India and portray it as an attractive destination for investment (Make in India, 2018). Devised to transform India into a global design and manufacturing hub, Make in India was a timely response to a critical situation. It was a powerful, galvanizing call to action to India's citizens and business leaders, and an invitation to potential partners and investors around the world. But Make in India is much more than an inspiring slogan. Most importantly, it represents a complete change of the government's mindsets – a shift from issuing authority to a business partner, in keeping with the Prime Minister's tenet of 'Minimum Government, Maximum Governance.

The Make in India initiative has been built on layers of a collaborative effort. In a short space of time, the obsolete and obstructive frameworks of the past have been dismantled and replaced with a transparent and user-friendly system. This is helping drive investment, fostering innovation, developing skills, protecting Intellectual Property (IP), and building best-in-class manufacturing infrastructure. The most striking indicator of progress is the unprecedented opening of key sectors – including railways, defense, insurance, and medical devices – to substantially higher levels of Foreign Direct Investment (Make in India Report, 2020).

India-Pakistan relation during Modi Regime:

Looking at India's foreign policy since 1964 confirms that it has been characterized more by continuity than by change (Miller, 2014). The changes that had occurred over some time are more incremental than a paradigm shift in its policy perspective in foreign policy. Miller (2014) stated that "*An elephant is not prone to making sharp turns*". For instance, India's top defense relationship continues to be with Russia. No matter what Russia does in its region, it seems, India will not rock the boat. For many years, much talk and initiatives have been taken to resolve the India-Pakistan issue over Kashmir. Kashmir's status is as unresolved today as it was 70 years ago, and relations continue to be overtly hostile, with the ever-present possibility of war (ibid).

Since the early 1990s, India's foreign policy has made an appearance and shown visible changes. In the wake of changing global geo-political, geo-strategic, and security dynamics in the post-Cold War era, India took the path of economic liberalization, the Third-World outlook, and re-posed itself in the world as an important global actor (Ganguly, 2018; Mohan, 2004). A realist

foreign policy places national interests and security above ideology, ethics, and morality *vis-à-vis* the idealist school that posits foreign policy to be reflective of the ethical, moral, and philosophical values of the country (Mehto, 2014).

Three major peace initiatives with Pakistan occurred under BJP prime minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee's watch: "bus diplomacy" in 1999, the Agra summit in 2001, and the Islamabad summit in 2004 (Miller, 2014). These initiatives were taken to bridge the communication gap between these two countries but failed to turn stone over time.

Modi was a hawk when in opposition but taken a sharp U-turn when got into power. He also started peace talk and even visited Pakistan, but a series of attacks saw Modi go back to a hard-line approach. Modi's hawkish policy to dove and then back again to hawk. There is little substantial change in the India-Pakistan relationship since 2014, however, the BJP still dominates the muscular nationalist space in domestic politics. Modi 2.0 government is unlikely to extend an olive branch to Pakistan on terms and timelines that can be set by the Imran Khan government. Three factors, in particular, could play a role in India-Pakistan bilateral relationship in the coming years. First, the PTI government's willingness to show tangible action against individuals and terrorist groups inciting violence against India. Second, whether the U.S. position on India-Pakistan relations continues to align with the Indian rhetoric of calling out Pakistan on supporting terrorist groups against India. Third, the satisfactory transition of Jammu and Kashmir into separate union territories as per the reorganization act of 2019 (Kulkarni, 2019).

India-USA relation under Modi:

India-U.S. ties reached new heights during Indian Prime Minister Modi's first term, cementing India as one of America's most promising strategic partnerships. As the India-U.S. partnership matures, they confront new challenges—substantive differences in trade, e-commerce, and U.S. sanctions against Iran and Russia. Former U. S. President Trump and Prime Minister Modi have taken action to address these differences and put bilateral relations back on a positive trajectory (Smith, 2019).

India-U.S. bilateral relations have developed into a "global strategic partnership" (MEA, 2021), based on shared democratic values and increasing convergence

of interests on bilateral, regional, and global issues. The emphasis placed by the Government in India on development and good governance has created an opportunity to reinvigorate bilateral ties and enhance cooperation under the motto — "*Chalein Saath Saath: Forward Together We Go*", and "*Sanjha Prayas, Sab ka Vikas*" (Shared Effort, Progress for All) adopted during the first two summits of Prime Minister Modi and President Obama in September 2014 and January 2015 respectively. The summit level joint statement issued in June 2016 called the India-U.S. relationship an "Enduring Global Partners in the 21st Century".

Sino-India Relation under Modi:

China is another neighbour that is a thorn in India's side. Before 1960, India and China were good friends. Popular slogans such as "*Hindi-Chini Bhai-Bhai*" (Indians and Chinese are brothers) encapsulated their joint opposition to imperialism and colonial powers. But the 1962 war between the two over their shared Himalayan border irrevocably damaged Sino-Indian relations and led to a border conflict that is still unresolved today (Miller, 2014). The sweeping changes in the foreign policy of Narendra Modi's government in India reflect several departures from the previous year. These shifts have ramifications on bilateral relations of India and China and carry a substantial impact on future trends of engagements between the two (Jha, 2017). Addressing UNSC members as the council president for August (IE 2021), Modi also made a veiled reference to China's Belt and Road Initiative, saying while creating structures for "maritime connectivity", countries should keep "financial sustainability" and absorption capacity of the host countries — a clear reference to Beijing's debt-trap diplomacy in recent years.

The border tension between the India and China is not a demarcated line. It is still a bone of contestation between the two countries. Modi's foreign policy is countering China's policy of 'Belt and Road Initiative' through approaching its bilateral relation with southeast Asian countries, countries in the Indian Ocean, and the Pacific ocean. USA, Japan, and Australia are the major strategic partner countries in this regard.

Look East Policy to Act East Policy:

India's foreign policy "Look East" policy in the early 1990s was part of a concerted effort to elevate the strategic importance of Southeast Asia in the country's

foreign policy agenda. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has culminated in a more recent policy change from ‘Look East’ to ‘Act East’ policy to signify a more pro-active and action-oriented approach towards the region (Bajpayee, 2017).

Through the “Act East Policy,” India is not only striving to engage the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN) member countries but also the countries of the Asia-Pacific region in political, strategic, cultural, and economic domains (Mishra, 2018). India’s strong economic performance and strategic footprints in the South-East Asia region and its implicit potential to balance China, ASEAN members, and other countries started making India their natural partner.

Modi’s shift from look east policy to act east policy has made an eastern bias, and this world view draws him closer to Japan and Singapore, Vietnam, and Indonesia. Modi has forged a special relationship with Japan and built a personal relationship with its Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. The Look and ‘Act’ East Policy of India have greatly emphasized strengthening economic and strategic cooperation with countries of East and Southeast Asia (Mehta, 2014).

Conclusion:

India’s foreign policy under the Modi government has become more pragmatic and promoting its economic and security interest through its soft-power, public diplomacy, engaging with diaspora for investment and economic development. India is also emerging as a global leader in various fronts such as International Solar Alliance, UNSC reform, better alliance with ASEAN countries, balancing approach in west Asia. India has strengthened its bilateral and multilateral alliance for promoting economic growth and energy security with many countries. Modi’s foreign policy does not reflect a fundamental departure from the previous government. It has made changes like rebranding/ repackaging in dealing with economic, energy, and security issues.

India’s relation with its neighbor in South Asia requires more attention to develop confidence among the countries to deal with various issues and seek cooperation at an international forum for a mutual solution. India needs to deal with its neighbor especially Pakistan over violence issues in Jammu and Kashmir, dealing with non-state actors, terrorism, infiltration, etc. India’s relation with China requires a more pragmatic solution and dialogue to resolve the border dispute. India is moving close to the

USA as a strategic partner in the Asia-Pacific region. It is strengthening its ties with many countries as bilateral and multilateral cooperation in multi-polar world.

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