

# The Genesis Of India's Foreign Policy

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*Abstract: India's journey from 1947 to the present day, in terms of both foreign policy and domestic politics, can be seen as a transition from idealism under Nehru, through a period of 'hard realism' (or realpolitik) lasting roughly from the mid-1960s to the mid-1980s and to economically driven pragmatism today. From independence through the 1950s and 1960s India's foreign policy was framed for international consumption as one of some idealism, while Nehru tackled the tremendous domestic challenges of long-term cohesion and economic revitalization that the British Empire had neglected in the final decades of the Raj. Internationally, Nehru chose the path of non-alignment in the face of the bipolar order of the Cold War, arguing that India would have to 'plough a lonely furrow'. Indian foreign policy of the time seemed moralistic to outsiders, defining the national interest as congruent with 'world co-operation and world peace'. Domestically, it was defended as 'the only honourable and right position' for India. 'Emerging India' is the most popular leitmotif informing a wide array of discourses among academics, policy-makers and the intelligent lay public. Most of these accounts of India's newfound glory in the comity of nations allude to the attendant re-orientation of India's foreign policy in the post liberalization era. The decade of the 1990s is seen as a watershed which not only ushered India into economic reforms but also brought about marked shifts in its foreign policy. India was no longer a prisoner to the historical legacy of non-alignment, socialism, and 'third world solidarity'. In a way, the need for departing from its traditional core values in the domain of foreign policy was as much an outcome of pulls and pressures of the newly emerging global realities as of changes in the internal political dynamic.*

## I. INTRODUCTION

Foreign policy used to be the exclusive domain of the diplomats and soldiers before the rise of representative democracy. It used to be conducted by the elite in a complete secrecy and without taking their respective publics into confidence. The diplomatic policy of a country is not just carved out of the present political situation; their roots go far back in history. They are interlaced with the national character of the people, geographical position and the historical relations with the neighbouring countries. Even before independence, the Government of British India maintained semi-autonomous diplomatic relations. The idea of establishing a separate diplomatic service to handle the external activities of the government of India originated from a note dated 30 September 1944, recorded by Lieutenant-General T. J. Hutton, the Secretary of the Planning and Development Department. When this note was referred to the Department of External Affairs for comments, Olaf Caroe, the Foreign Secretary, recorded his comments in an exhaustive note detailing the

scope, composition and functions of the proposed service. Caroe pointed out that as India emerged as autonomous, it was imperative to build up a system of representation abroad that would be in complete harmony with the objectives of the future government. On 9 October 1946, the Indian government established the Indian Foreign Service for India's diplomatic, consular and commercial representation overseas. With independence, there was a near-complete transition of the Foreign and Political Department into what then became the new Ministry of External Affairs and Commonwealth Relations.

Regarding the diplomatic development in modern India, it is important to mention that India was among the first colonies to win independence after Second World War. For a year before independence, Jawaharlal Nehru led an interim government where he gave particular attention to building the Indian democratic system. A key stone was the cabinet decision of the 26<sup>th</sup> September 1946, forming the Indian Foreign Service. Nehru personally drafted that Cabinet note, visualizing an integrated service. He addressed the parliament:

*"Our conception of the foreign service in an inclusive service.... Obviously that means the consular service; it includes also trade representatives, though obviously the trade representatives would necessarily also deal directly with the commerce department. But demonstrably it will be one service and you cannot separate economic and other matters from the diplomatic matters. The consular work is primarily economic and commercial is very little concerned with visas and the rest."*

Jawaharlal Nehru who was the architect of India's foreign policy constructed an ideal vision and strives to attain that vision with the co-operation of other members of the international community. Nehru claiming a leadership role had stated that the country with the vast resources and population 'will always make differences in the world.....Fate has marked it for big things....' Nehru served concurrently as Prime Minister and Minister of External Affairs; he made all major foreign policy decisions himself after consulting with his advisers and then entrusted the conduct of international affairs to senior members of the Indian Foreign Service. His successors continued to exercise considerable control over India's international dealings, although they generally appointed separate ministers of external affairs. Apart from his careful handling of India's tumultuous domestic situation in the years immediately after the Independence, Nehru's major contribution lies in the field of foreign policies. Nehru's foreign policies were characterized by two major ideological aspects. First, he wanted India to have an identity that would be independent of any form of overt commitment to either power bloc, the USA or the Soviet. Secondly, he had an unshaken faith in goodwill and honesty in matters of international affairs. The first policy led ultimately to the founding of the 'Non-Alignment Movement' (NAM). His second faith was terribly shaken by the Chinese attack of 1962, openly disobeying all the clauses of the 'Panchsheel' or five-point agreement of 1954 between New Delhi and Peking. This breach of faith was a major psychological shock for Nehru, and was partially the reason for his death.

## II. REVIEW OF LITERATURE

There are many books and articles that have dealt with the changing dynamics of India's foreign policy. Here some of them have been reviewed for the purpose.

Stephen P. Cohen in his book "India: Emerging Power", analyses India's strategic and political power when it became a declared nuclear weapon state in 1998, and fought the Kargil War in 1999. This book provides a comprehensive assessment of India's strategic ambitions, the way in which it formulates and conducts its policies and the interplay between domestic forces and security policy.

The book "India's Foreign Policy in The New Millennium: The Role of Power", written by Vatsala Shukla, is a comprehensive discourse on India's foreign policy. It chiefly focuses on post Cold War global forces-globalization, nuclearisation, hegemonism, economic diplomacy etc. The book brilliantly examines core values of Indian foreign policy at national, regional and global levels.

The book "Nehru's Foreign Policy 50 Years On", written by Surjit Mansingh presents the basic framework of Nehru's foreign policy. It analyses what is of continued relevance and criticizing where and how Nehru's foreign policy is failed to make relation with other Asian states, and dealing with discord in the Indian sub-continent. It shows the clear line of continuing from Nehru to Gujral in resisting world imperialist forces and working for cordiality, co-operation and peaceful co-existence.

The book "Indian Foreign Policy and Its Neighbours", written by J. N Dixit is a collection of articles on foreign affairs and India's foreign policy orientation, covering the period from 1994 to 2001.

"India's Foreign Policy: The strategy of Non-Alignment", written by H.C Shukul. This book discusses various aspects of India's foreign policy. This is definitely pioneering book making a strong plea for creating a discipline of foreign policy studies in this country, which could solidly contribute to the strengthening of its capability in dealing with international relations.

"India's Foreign Policy in The 21<sup>st</sup> Century", edited by V.D Chopra critically examines the new tendencies in India's political and economic relations with all the countries on the basis of commonality of interest. If these trends in India's foreign policy in the beginning of the present century continue, they will have a far-reaching impact on the foreign policy.

V.P Dutt's, "India's Foreign Policy in a Changing world", analyses the present international situation and domestic interaction with it. The book also focuses on India's relation with major countries of the world.

## III. OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY

- ✓ To find out how India's foreign policy had confronted with the domestic and external challenges after independence.
- ✓ To find out the factors responsible for the transition of Indian foreign policy from idealism to realism.

## IV. METHODOLOGY

The study is both historical and analytical in nature. Historical method delineates the historical background of India's foreign policy. Analytical method seeks to draw an analysis of the various historical events which forced the Indian foreign policy makers to review its foreign policy orientation. The study is mainly based on primary and secondary sources which will include governmental reports, parliamentary debates, books, articles, news papers etc.

## V. THE FOUNDING PRINCIPLES OF NEHRU'S FOREIGN POLICY

It was Pt. Jawaharlal Nehru, who defined the broad framework of India's foreign policy. In the internal field, he built primarily on an existing framework and in the external

arena; he had to lay the very foundations of the foreign policy edifice. In the domestic sphere, Nehru re-draw the administrative map of India, extend democracy, and to plan economic development. While formulating the foreign policy of India, Nehru tried to guide India in such a way, so as to steer clear from any form of violence and militarism. He believed that a newly decolonized nation must invest all its economic and logistic resources towards development and not defense and armament. Just like his economic policies, which were non-committal towards any ideological position, Nehru wanted to bring in a healthy level of pragmatism in his dealings of India's foreign affairs as well. Developing a broad national consensus on foreign policy apart, the impact of Nehru's personality on India's foreign policy can be seen three aspects of its foreign policy during its formative phase, namely, 'non-alignment', 'panchsheel', and the continuance of India's connection with the 'Commonwealth'. While tailoring India's policy of non-alignment, Nehru was undoubtedly influenced by a variety of factors such the politics of the Cold War and India's domestic milieu, but it was his vision and perception that India could follow a policy that was dictated by these imperatives. It was, for instance, who clearly understood the logic of military alliance that could only erode the hard earned independence of newly liberated post-colonial states. Nehru, who articulated with clarity that non-alignment, was neutrality; it was not a negative policy, but a positive one; and that it would contribute to peace in so far as the area of peace built up the non-aligned countries would speak the language of peace, no of war. Moreover, the greatest success of Jawaharlal Nehru's non-committal international politics was the formation of the 'Non-Alignment Movement' (NAM). Nehru found allies in Tito, Nasser, Soekarno, U- Nu and Nkrumah at a later stage in his formation of this new alliance. An alliance of newly independent and long colonized nations was not taken seriously in the beginning, either by the Eastern or the Western bloc. However, the importance of the alliance was soon felt, and initially led to a great degree of international pressure from both parts of the globe. However, Nehru proceeded with his mission undaunted. It was great test for his courage and it was soon found out that the NAM was not merely a passive platform of neutral and inactive nations. It had clear objectives that included the gradual decolonization of the world, and a strong statement that the member countries were not party to the ever escalating tension of the Cold War.

Another related basic idea to which Nehru was committed—and which he propagated with enthusiasm was 'Panchsheel', the five principles of peaceful co-existence. These are-

- ✓ Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty.
- ✓ Mutual non-aggression.
- ✓ Mutual non-interference in each other's internal affairs.
- ✓ Equality and cooperation for mutual benefit.
- ✓ Peaceful co-existence.

These principles, which first found mention in the 'India-China Agreement on Trade and Intercourse' between Tibet Regions of China and India (1954) was based on Nehru's belief in India's grand tradition of tolerance that there may be different ways of progress, possibly different outlooks, but

broadly, the ultimate objectives are the same. Though this invited sharp criticisms from Indian leaders after India's debacle by the Chinese in 1962, but what is relevant to is that these principles appealed to a large number of nations as widely different in their foreign policies as the USA, the USSR and China. The third aspect of foreign policy in which Nehru's influence is seen is India's continued association with Commonwealth—a decision, which was ratified by the Constituent Assembly on 17 May 1949. The Prime Minister, as membership of India in the Commonwealth of Nations at the Conference of Commonwealth the representative of India, had agreed to the declaration on the continued Prime Ministers in London on 19 April 1949. While answering to critics of this policy, Nehru explained that in agreeing to India's continuance in the Commonwealth, they were not breaking any pledge they had taken in earlier years to achieve 'Purna Swaraj' or complete independence; the commonwealth did not take away an iota of Indian independence. Rather, it would be to India's advantage to continue her association with a group of nations to further certain causes, peace for instance, in which India was interested. Nehru's unshaken belief in the force of international brotherhood was attested with his decision to continue with India's Commonwealth status.

## VI. STRUCTURAL CHANGES IN INDIA'S WORLD VIEW

The guiding principles of India's Foreign Policy have been founded on Panchsheel, pragmatism and pursuit of national interest. In a period of rapid and continuing change, foreign policy must be capable of responding optimally to new challenges and opportunities. It has to be an integral part of the larger effort of building the nation's capabilities through economic development, strengthening social fabric and well-being of the people and protecting India's sovereignty and territorial integrity. India's foreign policy is a forward-looking engagement with the rest of the world, based on a rigorous, realistic and contemporary assessment of the bilateral, regional and global geo-political and economic milieu.

The global order did not recognize moral values and authority; without many real allies and with major regional issues unresolved and in the absence of adequate military might, moral authority of India proved of little consequence. The India-China border conflict of 1962 virtually destroyed the moral authority-based foreign policy course of non-alignment and the influence that India had acquired in world affairs since independence. After the Sino-India war of 1962 and the Indo-Pakistan War of 1965, India made considerable changes to its foreign policy. The transition in Indian foreign policy in the 1990s was from idealism to realism is an example in this regard. Idealism came naturally to the Indian elite that won independence from the British by arguing against colonialism on the basis of first principles of Enlightenment. The new leaders of India had contempt for "power politics". They believed it was a negative but lingering legacy from 19th century Europe that had no relevance to the new times of the mid 20th century. India tended to see its role in world politics as the harbinger of a new set of principles of peaceful coexistence and multilateralism which if applied properly would transform the world.

Developments in global system in the last two decades have been of a very significant nature which has affected not only the very characteristic of it, but rather had serious bearing on India as well. They provided numerous challenges and opportunities for the policy makers in the country. Changed context has not only transformed the very structure and geo political setting of the global system but also influenced the operational dynamics in a significant manner. The degree of departure made from geo-politics to geo-economics has made the global milieu qualitatively different from the one which used to be witnessed during Cold War era. Consequently, foreign policies of states are bound to reorient and readjust themselves to these new realities. Three important factors have influenced the making of India's foreign policy in the post 1991 era. First, in the changed character of the world order in the post cold war era, India no longer has to constrain itself to South Asia. It has to interact with new actors who have acquired importance, in the transformed world order. Second, the introduction of structural reform and steadily performing economy has not only changed India's perception towards the world, but it has changed the status of Indian economy to a large extent. Its performance in soft infrastructure, with its exceptional growth in information technology sector, has changed the status of Indian economy to a large extent. India is now seeking 'Foreign Direct Investment' (FDI), and access to markets in the developed world. The slow but successful economic reforms unleashed the potential of the nation, generated rapid economic growth and provided a basis to transform its relations with great powers, regional rivals Pakistan and China, and the neighbourhood as a whole.

Finally, its nuclear test in 1998 has further enhanced its status as a major power. It has boosted its image from a developing state to that of a power to be reckoned with. The overall image of India in strategic, economic and political terms has led to a qualitative transformation of its status in the world. Thus, the Indian foreign policy has made a paradigm shift from cold war to post cold war period. The changed international scenario has changed the very structure and geopolitical setting and also influenced the operational dynamics in a significant manner.

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