

# Modi's Foreign Policy: Priorities and Challenges



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## Abstract

By providing new energy in India's foreign policy, prime minister Narendra Modi has been playing very significant and influential role in international politics. Moreover, keeping in mind the objective to make India "Vishwaguru," Mr. Modi restlessly striving to achieve its national interest. And therefore, Mr. Modi has been since coming in power in May 2014, establishing cordial bilateral as well as multilateral partnership with the different countries of the different regions around the globe. This paper mainly focuses on main features of Modi's foreign policy and the challenges Mr. Modi is facing in achieving its objectives.

**Keywords:** Foreign Policy, National Interest, Neighbourhood, Security, Peace, China and Pakistan.

## Introduction

Foreign Policy is a medium through which one nation establishes the relationship with other nations aiming to achieve national interest. Each and Every Country's foreign policy is based on national interest. Lord Palmerstone has defined that, a nation neither have "eternal allies" nor "perpetual enemies", it only has "eternal and perpetual" interests.<sup>1</sup> Ruthnaswamy has also defined that "Foreign Policy is now the bundle of principles and practices that regulates the intercourse of a state with others states."<sup>2</sup> Foreign Policy is mainly based on peace, cooperation and security with other nations. In this context, the first Indian Prime Minister Nehru had said that: "Every Nation places its own interests first in developing foreign policy. Fortunately, India's interests coincide with peaceful foreign policy and cooperation with all progressive nations."<sup>3</sup> In international politics, there are many theories like Idealism, Realism and liberalism etc, however the Realism has dominated the international politics. Idealism is based on peace & imagination and Realism is based on reality<sup>4</sup>. Chanakya or Kautilya was the first Indian political Realist and his Realism reflected in "Arthashastra (4<sup>th</sup> century BC)". Kautilya was able to make the world aware of reality. In Arthashastra, Kautilya's foreign policy is mainly based on Mandala's Theory & Sixfold Policy<sup>5</sup>. Chinese military strategist Sun Tzu's work "The art of war" (5th century BC) is the study on Chinese military strategy", which based on Realism, Machiavelli's "The Prince" (1532) is based on Reality. In "Politics Among Nations" (1948) Morgenthau described "International politics as the struggle for power". On emphasizing Realism, Morgenthau believes that realism is the response to time and situations.<sup>6</sup> The first Indian Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru was the architect of India's foreign policy. So far, the base of Indian foreign policy has been Nehru's vision and way of thinking. After the Independence of India, Nehru's foreign policy followed the principle of NAM. In this context, Amitabh Mattoo stated that "the two main pillars of Nehru's strategy are NAM and Self Reliance, these are mutually related".<sup>7</sup> Moreover, Nehru also emphasizes on idealism in India's foreign Policy, and he said, "Idealism is tomorrow's Realism". Nehru tried to unite Idealism and Realism, while looking at India's relation with the world. NAM and Panchsheel are the main pillars of Indian Foreign Policy.<sup>8</sup> Therefore, Nehru's Foreign policy has been a mixture of both idealistic and realistic dictumes. Raymond Aron stated that he was idealist abroad but operated within logic of realism when it came to matters within the South Asian Region.<sup>9</sup> After Nehru, Indira Gandhi as a prime minister adopted the realistic approach in Indian Foreign policy.

Furthermore, experts of India's foreign policy have also contributed to the ideological framework for it. M. S. Rajan was the part of the series of India in World Affairs and he covered the era of 1954 to 1956. Attempting to decipher the Indian proclivity to 'moderation' in International Affairs, Rajan seeks to demonstrate the interplay of International and

domestic politics to determine a particular stance in International Affairs<sup>10</sup>. Arora and Appadorai also said that Nehru's foreign policy's main motive had been to promote National Interest.<sup>11</sup> Kanti Vajpayee, C. Raja Mohan, S. D Munni, J. N. Dixit, Muchkund Dubey also contribution in theorization of Indian foreign policy. Foreign Policy of India is mainly based on the Values like Vasudeva Kutumbakam, Unity in Diversity, Universal Brotherhood etc.

#### **Modi's Foreign Policy: Main Features**

Bhartiya Janata Party has emerged as the largest party of India and its leader Narendra Modi also emerged as the charismatic leader in India. The Vision of Foreign Policy of BJP government was mentioned in the Election Manifesto 2014. According to that Vision, "to fundamentally reboot and reorient the foreign policy goals, content and process, in a manner that locates India's global strategic engagement in a new paradigm and on a wider canvass, that is not just limited to political diplomacy, but also includes our economic, scientific, culture, political and security interest, both regional and global, on the principles of equality and mutuality, so that it leads to an economically strong India, and it's voice was heard in the International fora."<sup>12</sup> According to this manifesto, new energy is to be provided to the India's foreign policy and to emphasize on economic and security interests on regional and global level. In the 2014 Election Manifesto, the Bharatiya Janata Party has described the main principles of Indian foreign policy, which had promised to follow upon after coming in power that are;

1. In India's neighbourhood, to find friendly relations, and will not hesitate to take a strong side and step wherever necessary.
2. To work in the process of strengthening regional forums such as SAARC and ASEAN.
3. To adhere to the uniform international opinion on the issues of Global Warming and Terrorism.<sup>13</sup> After the Lok Sabha elections, BJP won the elections and Mr. Modi the prime minister of became the BJP – led the National Democratic Alliance Government.

As a 15<sup>th</sup> Prime minister of India, Mr. Modi brought paradigm shift in India's foreign policy. Elaborating foreign policy in his own words, Mr. Modi said, "Media, asked me before the polls – Modi ji what will be your foreign policy? They thought I am not experienced I assured them, we will not lower our eyes, nor will we show them eyes. We will meet their eyes and talk with the world."<sup>14</sup> Mr. Modi wants to make India as a Vishwaguru, which inspired by Swami Vivekananda, and in this context, addressing the Indian diaspora in Sydney. He said that "Swami Vivekananda's words have come true, I see it here. His dream was for India to become Vishwaguru. I am seeing it here. Mother India has actually become Vishwaguru."<sup>15</sup> According to Christophe Jaffrelot, India's economic development and bolstering security in India's immediate neighbourhood are the two highlights of Modi's Foreign policy.<sup>16</sup> Mr. Modi's foreign policy has been playing proactive role in international politics. Mr. Modi has been following the policies of former prime ministers, but he has also

done so many changes in their policies as well. Some of the main features of Modi's foreign policy are discussed in this paper.

#### **The Neighborhood First**

According to C. Raja Mohan, "without enduring primacy in one's own neighbourhood, no nation can become a credible power on the global stage."<sup>17</sup> Mr. Modi addressed the 18<sup>th</sup> SAARC Summit (2014) in Kathmandu and emphasizing on neighborhood relationship. He said, "In the life of an individual or a nation, a good neighborhood is a universal aspiration." This is the reason why Mr. Modi has been trying to improve relations with neighboring countries.<sup>18</sup> The Neighborhood First is the key feature of Modi's foreign policy and he is emphasizing the settlement of problems with the neighboring countries for India's development and security. This is the reason that Modi invited neighboring nations on the occasion of his oath ceremony on 26 May 2014, when he became P.M. for the first time. Further, Mr. Modi has taken up an important role in making the SAARC successful. Therefore, he visited SAARC nations and said on November 25, 2014 during his visit to Kathmandu, that "Development of close relations with our neighbors is a key priority for my government" etc.<sup>19</sup>

He has been aiming to have a cordial sense of peace between India and neighboring countries, that is indispensable for the development for them and through this, India will be able to fulfill its national interests. It has believed that Mr. Modi emphasizing Neighbourhood First policy to counter Chinese influence in South Asian region. Mr. Modi, while addressing the 69<sup>th</sup> general debate of the United Nations General Assembly, in context of neighbourhood, he stated, "A nation's destiny is linked to its neighbourhood. That is why my government has placed the highest priority on advancing friendship and cooperation with her neighbours".<sup>20</sup>

#### **Act East Policy**

Mr. Modi has modified the Look East Policy, which was initiated by former Prime Minister Narasimha Rao in 1991. The Act East Policy was officially unveiled by PM Modi in November 2014 at the ASEAN Summit in Naypyidaw, Myanmar.<sup>21</sup> The Act East Policy is one of the main priorities of Modi's foreign policy. This policy aimed to promote India's economic interests and securities through which the growing influence of China can be prevented. India-Japan relations also remain the important factor for India's Act East Policy. According to Prime Minister Modi, "Without Japan, India is incomplete and without India, Japan is incomplete."<sup>22</sup> Japan is technically important for India and India is important with the view of making a big market for Japan. Therefore, Mr. Modi made his first trip to Japan (2014) after traveling to South Asian countries. Japan announced to grant 35 billion to India for the development of its infrastructure. So, the consolidated Indo - Japan relations presented a proof of Act East Policy. The Asia Africa Growth Corridor is an important component of the India - Japan Vision 2025 for the India Pacific region. It furthers India's Act East policy and India's

development cooperation with Africa.<sup>23</sup> In addition to all this, Mr. Modi invited the heads of 10 ASEAN nations which has been the most significant exposition of his Act East Policy. Bangladesh is one of the cornerstone of "Act East Policy". Following this policy, PM Modi visited Bangladesh from 6 to 7 June 2015 and he also delivered lecture in the context of Indo - Bangladesh relations, that "India and Bangladesh are not just Pass Pass but also Sath Sath". PM Modi trying to strengthening India's relations with Bangladesh.<sup>24</sup> The major achievement of Modi's Foreign Policy is the Land Boundary Agreement with Bangladesh. The government of both the countries in 2015 signed the Land Boundary agreement. The historic agreement facilitated the relocation of 111 enclaves, adding up to 17,160.63 acres, from India to Bangladesh. In return, India received 51 enclaves, adding up to 7,110.02 acres, which were in Bangladesh<sup>25</sup>, and Surgical Strike held on 29 September 2016 in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir. These are the biggest achievement of Modi Government. While replying to a question in the Lok Sabha, Minister of State for External Affairs, General Dr V K Singh (Retd.), also said, "India's Act East policy focuses on the extended neighbourhood in the Asia-Pacific region. The policy, which was originally conceived as an economic initiative, has gained political, strategic and cultural dimensions, including [the] establishment of institutional mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation".<sup>26</sup>

#### **Think West Asia Policy**

The Think West Asia policy has been the foremost among others, priority of Modi's foreign policy. Primarily, Former Foreign secretary of India S. Jaishankar used the word "Think West" in his speech at New Delhi. He used the term Think West specifically to strengthen relations with Gulf countries. In this context, he said that, "The interplay among these (Gulf) nations actually offers us new avenues of cooperation. I can confidently predict that 'Act East' would be matched with 'Think West'.<sup>27</sup> West Asia is the most important trading partner for India and it is the best source of oil and energy for every country, and as a result, keeping India's interests in mind, Mr Modi visited West Asian countries to improve relations with them. Israel and the Arab nations are also important part of the Look West policy. West Asian nations are important for India in terms of energy. That is why Modi has adopted a realistic approach towards West Asia in India's foreign policy. Modi was successful in establishing good relations during his visits to these nations. For example, Modi's visit to Israel (July 2017) has a historic and successful journey. And, both the countries agreed in the field of cooperation against terrorism. The Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, coined a special word for Israel with a view to strengthening relations with Israel, "India for Israel and Israel for India", Mr. Netanyahu (PM of Israel) also defined the friendly relations with India by giving the formula, 'I square T square, it equals Israel, India's ties for Tomorrow'.<sup>28</sup> Mr. Modi had visited all the countries (i.e. Riyadh, Tel Aviv, Abu Dhabi, Tehran, and Ramallah) of the region in the last five years, for establishing the good relations with

West Asia. These visits, and Modi's efforts will develop strong bilateral relations.<sup>29</sup> Former External Affairs minister Sushma Swaraj at Hanoi, Vietnam on the occasion of third Indian Ocean Conference, said that, "Apart from the "Act East Policy", India has a new, "Think West" policy towards West Asia and Gulf Region",<sup>30</sup>. India is now successful in balancing good relations with Iran, Saudi Arabia and Israel.

#### **Maritime Policy**

PM Modi has also been emphasizing on strengthening the relations with the Maritime nations. Mr. Modi has reminded the world that, "India is, and has always been, a maritime nation' with a 'glorious maritime tradition' as reflected in ancient Sanskrit texts and the Indus Valley civilization.<sup>31</sup> The Prime Minister of India has set up a new policy in context of the Maritime Strategy, through which India can play an active role in Indian Ocean.<sup>32</sup> The Modi government is viewing the Indian Ocean as India's 'immediate and extended Neighbourhood'. For the security purpose, Indian Ocean Region is the foremost priority of Modi's foreign policy and, the vision of four approaches to the Indian Ocean region was unveiled during Prime Minister Modi's visit to Mauritius (March 2015), like 'defending India's maritime territory and interest, deepening economic and security cooperation with maritime neighbours and island states; promoting collective action for peace and security; and seeking a more integrated and cooperative future for sustainable development'.<sup>33</sup> Modi has also formed the Vision for the Indian Ocean which is known as SAGAR. It stands for "Security and Growth for All in the Region." In Modi's Government, boosting cooperation with the countries in the Indian Ocean has the vital part of India's foreign policy. Former foreign minister Mrs. Sushma Swaraj talked about regional connectivity and emphasized "Sagarmala" project that includes building new ports and modernizing old ones, developing in land water ways and hinterland development aimed at infrastructure. Mrs. Swaraj also said that "nurturing a climate of peace and stability in this (Indian Ocean) region is an important part for our foreign policy".<sup>34</sup> Under the Modi Government, The Gulf of Oman, the Gulf of Aden and their coastal areas, the southwest Indian Ocean, the IOR island country and the east coast of Africa have now become primary interests for India's maritime security. Prime Minister Modi is making significant efforts in this direction.<sup>35</sup> Prime Minister Modi also making significant effort to strengthen the relationship with the maritime neighbors of India to respond to the Expansionist policy of China. At the same time, PM Modi also emphasizing the safety of the sea, through which the maritime interests of the nations can be fulfilled.

#### **Challenges to Modi's Foreign Policy**

In India's foreign policy, many important achievements have been done under the leadership of Modi, but still there are some challenges that has hindered the path of making India a world leader. Matthew Crosston highlights the challenges of Modi's Foreign Policy, especially the Domestic Insurgency and Political Fragmentation, Neighbors dysfunction at role at regional challenge, International Terrorism,

Nuclear Proliferation at global challenges, energy and maritime security etc. are emerging challenges.<sup>36</sup> Besides all these there are many more challenges to Modi's foreign policy such as ;

1. To Keep good relations with China, in Modi era, there are some incidences which are the barriers for Indian Foreign Policy like Cumar Crisis and Doklam Crisis. The main reasons of these crisis are China's Expansionist Policy and aggressive behavior that generates such problems. At present, China's "String of Pearls policy and Belt and Road initiatives" are creating problems for India. This policy of China is detrimental for India's sovereignty and security. This is a major challenge for India's foreign policy. Therefore, Modi Government is trying to improve relations with China by resorting negotiations and dialogues. Mr. Modi also want to resolve the boundary disputes with China, In this regards, Prime Minister Modi said, "I am Keen to work closely with the Chinese leadership to push the relationship forward and deal with all issues in our bilateral relations by proceeding from the strategic perspective of our development goals."<sup>37</sup> But, "Construction of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor as a part of the "Belt and Road Initiative" is one of the biggest challenge in front of Modi's Foreign Policy. India was not happy with this Chinese initiative and that is the reason why India boycotted the "Belt and Road Forum" in Beijing in May 2017."<sup>38</sup>
2. India should maintain good relations with Russia with its natural ally, which is also challenging for India's foreign policy at present. Russia has been India's most trusted ally, but growing cooperation in the military sector of Russia with Pakistan may create several problems to India. The main reason behind this is that of India's growing cooperation in the military sector with the US, due to which Russia is enhancing, the initiatives to coordinate with Pakistan. Thus, to maintain solid good relations with Russia is a matter of concern for India. Russia and Pakistan are indulged in Military exercises that are also the biggest challenge for Modi's foreign policy. In this context, C. Raja Mohan stated, "As Russia conducts its first over military exercise with Pakistan's army, Delhi has to reckon with the prospect that Russia might not necessarily remain India's best friend forever."<sup>39</sup>
3. Pakistan has an important place in India's foreign policy. We have made significant efforts to improve relations with Pakistan. But Pakistan indirectly carried out terrorist attacks in India such as the URI attack and the Pathankot Attack, which has raised many problems to India's security. Mr. Modi has always opposed Terrorism, he also said in context of Terrorism that "Terrorism is a major threat to humanity. I have full confidence that India-SCO cooperation will give a new direction and strength to fight against terrorism."<sup>40</sup> Therefore, maintaining peace with Pakistan is also important for the security purpose of India. This is the reason, why

Pakistan is an important part of India's Neighborhood First policy. In this context, S.D. Muni has said, "The real challenge of India's neighborhood Policy has always been dealing with China and Pakistan. Both these relationships look confused, uncertain and daunting as ever."<sup>41</sup>

4. There are some challenges at the international level under Modi's leadership in which India cannot fulfill its national interest; like, claim for permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council and membership of the Nuclear Suppliers Group. Getting the membership of these are the key goals of India's foreign policy, but China has challenged India. China believes that India is not eligible for membership. Swaraj had said, while playing an important role in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization meeting that "India firmly believes in the efficacy of Multilateralism and adherence to the principle of the United Nations Charter. It is Imperative to have comprehensive reforms of the United Nations and its security council to make it more representative and effective."<sup>42</sup> However, Prime Minister Modi playing an important role for attaining permanent membership in the United Nations. Mr. Modi highlighted the positive attitude of China towards India and said that, "China's support for India's permanent membership of a reformed UNSC and for India's membership of export control regimes like Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG) will do more than just strengthen our international cooperation. It will give our relationship to a new level. It will give Asia a stronger voice in the world."<sup>43</sup>
5. For strengthening and improving the defense sector, India needs to take necessary steps for the expansion of modernization in the Navy, through which the Indian Ocean region can achieve safe security interests. Besides, India should make the defense sector stronger so that, it can secure itself from China and Pakistan. India must have good management and transparency in the military sector through which foreign military companies can invest in India.
6. The Trump's Administration is also a challenge to Modi's foreign policy. India's relationship with America remained high in the reign of Obama, but it is skeptical for India to come into the power by US President Donald Trump. Although Trump has tried to convince India by rejecting India on several issues internationally, but the recent incident has negatively impacted India by Rejected the offer to come as the chief guest on Republic Day of India (26 January 2019). In this regards, the US spokes person said that, "President Trump was honored by Prime Minister Modi's invitation to be the Chief Guest of Republic Day of India on January 26, 2019 but he was unable to accept that invitation due to his busy scheduling constraints."<sup>44</sup> However, it has believed that America's double attitude towards India can create a problem in future. Moreover, the US, sanctioned on Iran has also marginalized

India's relations with Iran and Afghanistan. It seems India has succumbed to the US pressure in world politics. India failed to retain independent and its foreign policy towards the countries like Iran.

### Conclusion

Looking at the history of the Great Powers, it has shown that Rome was not built in a day. Therefore, India also has been surging forward gradually to join the elite group of the world leaders. And however, despite multiple constraints and challenges, PM Narendra Modi engaged proactively in cleaning various barriers coming in the way of making India "Vishwaguru." However, Mr. Modi's success in this direction hinges, in greater extent, on his Pakistan and China relations with.

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