



P.M. Modi's Foreign Policy Objectives

This topic covers the general foreign policy objectives of the new NDA government headed by Narendra Modi, some of the changes in foreign policy and the new policy initiatives towards other states.

General Foreign Policy Objectives of the Modi Government:

The foreign policy outlook revealed by Modi during his election campaign had the following points:

- Priority is to improve the relations with immediate neighbours as peace and tranquillity in South Asia is essential for realizing development agenda.
- The concept of para diplomacy to be introduced in India where each state and city would have the liberty to forge special relations with countries or federal states or even cities of their interest.
- Bilateral trade will dominate the relations with most countries except few important global powers with which India shares a strategic partnership.

Modi invited all the SAARC leaders for his swearing-in ceremony after being elected as the Prime Minister. All the SAARC leaders, along with the leader of Mauritius, which is an observer in SAARC, attended the ceremony. Lobsang Sangay, the Prime Minister of Tibetan Government-in-Exile, was also present in spectator's gallery.

One of the important goals for the Modi government is to put India back on the global stage, from which it had fallen in the recent times, according to all objective analysts and observers. In this process Modi also wanted to convey to the World, the change in foreign-domestic policy emphasis of his government.

The dramatic outreach to SAARC countries, the meetings with leaders of Japan, China and USA, and a flurry of meetings with other countries (eg Australia, UK, France), complemented by a number of foreign trips by the President and the External Affairs Minister, have achieved this goal.

Another goal is to re-establish international investor confidence in Indian economy and polity. The decisive majority of NDA alliance has increased the optimism and has led to increased capital inflows to India. However, this expression of confidence by foreign finance capital, had not been reflected in a similar increase in gross fixed capital formation (GFCF).

It is necessary to communicate directly with the largest foreign direct investors (FDI) and gain their trust in order to reverse the effects of obstructive policies & procedures that resulted in the collapse in growth of GFCF and removing bottlenecks in investment in infrastructure, manufacturing etc.

Changes in Foreign Policy

We can observe some changes in the foreign policy by the newly elected NDA government. Even though these changes are not explicitly articulated by the new government, they are implicit in their actions and view of the world.

Centrality of economic and technological development

- This is not merely a reiteration of the economic development objective that has been India's mantra since independence, but a recognition of the role of "technology" in all aspects of economic development & economic power.
- This involves an implicit benchmarking of the technological capabilities of the Indian economy with respect to the global best practices and/or global technology frontier, a perception of large gaps across much of the economy and the goal of bridging these gaps through domestic and foreign economic policy.

Integrations of domestic and foreign policy

- Another important change is much greater alignment of foreign policy with domestic objectives.
- Modi mentioned both the domestic programs ("Swachh Bharat", Digital India/Smart Cities) in his public statements in USA & Japan. In his meetings with leaders of advanced countries, he has been very explicit about Indian objectives with respect to economic development and technological catch up and in exploring how these countries can help India close these gaps.

Emphasis on national power

- A greater emphasis is being laid on overall national power, with a more realistic assessment of the appropriate role of military power.
- Economic power is the foundation of national power, but above it must be a solid block of military-strategic power, topped by a smaller cone of "soft power".
- The Modi government has a clearer appreciation that economic power/economic relations cannot be a substitute for military power/international security relationships, in deterring the aggressive designs of ideologically driven foes.
- One of the implications of this policy is the increased focus on unconventional threats (cross-border terrorism, use of non-state actors, foreign ideologues-mercenaries). Another implication is a much greater focus on national capability to produce a broad range of defense equipment in India.

Greater emphasis on global socio-politics and soft power

- Another change is a greater emphasis on global socio-politics and "soft power", the third dimension of national power.
- This includes the expansion of common ground based on religious and cultural heritage & history of India (e.g. Hinduism viz. Nepal, Buddhism viz. E & SE Asia, Yoga viz. West, modern Islam viz. Indonesia, democracy viz. Australia, Canada), as well as the Indian diaspora across the World.

Confident pragmatism

- This involves freeing up of self-imposed, historical and mental, constraints on developing the full potential of economic or security relations with any country. Thus India's economic relationships with

potential adversaries can be pursued relatively independently from the security relationship, without one constraining the other or being completely parallel.

- This is most clearly apparent from the meetings PM Modi held with President Xi Jinping of China, the economic agreements reached and the formation of the BRICs Bank and Asian Infrastructure Bank.

Policy Initiatives

Neighbourhood first policy

- The neighbourhood first policy of Modi government actively focuses on improving ties with India's immediate neighbours. It is one of the major policy initiatives of the Modi government to bring back the focus on its immediate neighbourhood in South Asia.
- Modi invited all the SAARC leaders to his swearing-in ceremony and on the subsequent day he held bilateral talk with all of them individually.
- Recently in a launch event at ISRO, Modi asked Indian scientists to take the endeavour to develop a dedicated SAARC satellite to share the fruits of the technology like tele-medicine, e-learning etc. with the people across South Asia to complement the currently operating Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation Programme in the region.

Act East policy

- Look East policy was initiated during the period of Narasimha Rao in 1992 for better engagement with ASEAN and East Asian countries.
- External Affairs minister Sushma Swaraj proposed a new outlook towards these countries with the "Act East Policy" during her visit to Vietnam. The new policy emphasises a more proactive role for India in ASEAN and East Asian countries.

Link West policy

- In an attempt to strengthen ties with India's western neighbours specially the gulf countries Modi proposed this policy to complement his Act East policy concerning East Asia.
- Although it is called 'Link West' (west of India) which gives it a bigger geographical connotation, it is most likely to focus on the middle-east and some of the India's strategic thinkers are calling it as Modi's middle-east policy.

Indian Ocean Outreach

- Through this policy initiative, India started to reach out its maritime neighbours in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) with proposals of enhanced economic and security cooperation.
- This policy was unfolded during the recent visit of Modi to Sri Lanka, Mauritius, and Seychelles.
- With this India can project that it commands a strategic supremacy over the IOR and its relations with its maritime neighbours are far more cordial than that of China's with particular reference to South China sea.

India First

- “India First” means that what India needs/wants from each economic and technology power will be expressed with greater clarity and specificity and these countries have to respond in the way think appropriate.
- India’s decisions will then be based on comparative benefit-cost ratio of dealing with different countries on a defined set of issues, not on philosophical and/or ideological consideration of (non-) alignment.

Fast-track Diplomacy

- The external affairs minister Sushma Swaraj has said that the catchphrase for her tenure was "fast-track diplomacy" and it had three faces - proactive, strong and sensitive.
- On completion of the first 100 days of Modi govt the External Affairs Ministry published a booklet called "Fast Track Diplomacy" show-casing the achievement made in the foreign policy arena.

Para Diplomacy

- Para diplomacy is an innovative idea in India’s foreign diplomacy where each states and cities would be encouraged to forge special relation with countries or federal states of another country or even cities of their interest in order.

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