

Indian Foreign Policy And Challenges In Extended Neighborhood

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Abstract

India's neutral position on Russian invasion of Ukraine is still a subject-matter of debate in policy and academic circles. Different political parties and leaders in India stated their position on this policy stance. The opposition parties supported PM Modi but some Congress leaders promptly pointed out that Jawaharlal Nehru's policy of Non-Alignment(NAM) has stood the test of the time. It was during the meeting of Shanghai Cooperation organization(SCO) at Samarkand that PM Modi advised the Russian President Mr Putin "now is not an era of war" thereby emphasizing a sort of shift in Indian policy. Multialignment is becoming the defining feature of Indian foreign policy in a global order in which India is expected to play important role in international relations. Some commentators found in Modi a leader with ideas for building a better regional and global order. The policy stance on Ukraine has only confirmed it. The recent(December 6, 2022) India- Central Asia National Security Advisors meeting in Delhi is an indication of new dynamism in foreign affairs. The framework for this paper is constitutive of two parts .First to explain conceptual understanding of shift in foreign policy of India from cold war times to a much-diffused contemporary global order. This needs to be understood by the shift from "Non-alignment" to Multialignment. The G20 leadership should provide India more leverage to focus on global south and thereby regain the leadership of developing world diluted by weakening of Non-Aligned movement. In the second part the focus shall be on how India -Central Asia connectivity is going to be helpful for regional stability.

Non-Aligned Foreign Policy

The Non-alignment as a principle of foreign policy evolved under India's, first prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru who personally presided over the new establishment in independent India. The first phase of NAM was broadly from 1947 to 1984. In a bipolar world led by two power blocks USA and Soviet Union the Indian state was only navigating independence in its foreign policy thinking. The birth pangs of new India with internal political and economic challenges hindered the autonomy of its external policy and India became a defacto Soviet ally. The shadow of cold war had fallen on the subcontinent and foreign policy establishment missed the opportunity to develop a coherent neighborhood policy after Soviet intervention in Afghanistan. The early militarization of neighborhood with supply of arms from USA to Pakistan created its own complications. This phase coincided with the arrival of late Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi on the political scene and lasted till 2014.

Earlier in 2012 during United Progressive Alliance government (UPA) led by Dr Manmohan Singh some think tanks found Nonalignment movement inadequate in facing the security and other challenges. The Centre for Policy Research(CPR) prepared a policy document titled as " Non-Alignment 2.0 : A Foreign and Strategic policy for India in twenty firstcentury" in 2012 to identify the core values that should anchor the foreign and strategic policy of India in the next decade.NAM 2.0 states that India cannot hope to arrive at a great power status if it is unable to manage relationships within South Asia .India, s top priority must be to deepen economic engagement in the region which is least economically integrated and where its ability to command respect is considerably diminished. The document states that India needs to go extra mile to reassure its neighbors and be prepared for more unilateral concessions on trade, investment and aid. In the specific Pakistan context, the document states that India's approach to Pakistan has periodically swung between the extremes of comprehensive engagement and almost complete disengagement. The main concern of experts as reflected in the NAM 2.0 is to look at Pakistan not as an autonomous entity but as an extension of china's strategic competition with India .The document states that: "Pakistan's all-weather friendship with china shields it against adverse international fall-out from the pursuit of its anti-India policies. Rising china will shield Pakistan in spite of the fact that China has concerns regarding Jihadist fundamentalism in Pakistan. China may at best show annoyance to Pakistan and the latter can even quickly deliver on China's concerns. The policy document aimed at enhancing strategic autonomy of Indian state" (Ref 01)

Multi-Alignment Foreign Policy

The doctrine of NAM under Prime Minister Mr. Modi has passed into the 3rd phase commonly called as NAM 3.0. The present phase of Indian foreign policy is characterized as one reflecting multialignment in international relations. This shift suggests that India needs to forge alignments with all power centers aiming at improving strategic autonomy and security of India's interests(Ref 02) The age-old principle viz, there are neither permanent friends nor permanent enemies but only permanent interests remain fully relevant. The doctrine of multialignment suggests that China as a regional hegemon and leading power is a threat and the USA as a superpower is an economic opportunity. This may sound rational but looks simplistic in a multipolar world. Some well-known experts statistically argue that since 1950 the percentage of wars that seemingly stronger powers win was dropping to less than half. An illustration of this can be seen in the illusion of power both in Afghanistan and Iraq.

In the coming times India is going to take up leadership of G 20 and Shanghai Cooperation Organization which means more responsibility at regional and global level. The doctrine of multialignment as a core operative principle of external relations has multiple benefits regionally and in the global setting. The multialignment theory demands to avert threat from China and remove overdependence on USA. Already there are voices calling for de-Russification of Indian armed forces and indigenization of India's technical/industrial base. It is aptly said "when the wind of change blows some build walls while others build windmills". In this context the Modi government needs to keep lines of communication open with all neighboring countries to enhance its strategic weight in the neighborhood. This will help in checkmating Chinese intrusion in India-Pakistan relations and also limiting its influence in

India's periphery. The Indian foreign policy establishment needs to appreciate that there is no war to end all wars and there is no full stop to diplomacy in reaching out to neighboring countries. In 1962 Mao told Zhou Enlai that India and China should practice not peaceful co-existence but armed co-existence. Even otherwise for China diplomacy is art of deception and PM Modi did recognize it when he said that China has expansionist mindset. What needs to be done ?

G 20 Leadership

The leading strategic expert C Raja Mohan is of the opinion that India after taking over the G20 leadership has the material power and political will to lead the Global South .However, he suggests a tailored policy to address the concerns of different regions and messy regional politics within the developing world(Ref 0 3)There are some who feel enthusiastic about India going back to Champaign the policy of Non-alignment but the fact of the matter is that Global order is altogether in an altered setting .Many of the old things from second half of the 20th century-framed around the axes of west versus east and the North versus South- do not correspond with global realities. Why India needs to build on G20 is due to great power ambition of China and the way it looks at Global South as an economic and geopolitical opportunity. China has already through its Belt and Road initiative influenced course of geopolitics in different regions of the world. President Xi Jinping is eager to exploit the setbacks to USA policies in the Middle east and has forcefully reached out to Central Asian countries. For India what is desirable is to focus more intensely in both neighborhood and the extended neighborhood to reap better dividends Three tenets of Modi,s foreign policy are going to be critically important for India to navigate its way in a conflictual world order to further strengthen the policy of multialignment: First, how India under Modi is going to bring greater focus on economic objectives to enhance national development goals and national power. second, how foreign policy is deployed to change thinking of the world about India as a democracy and an inclusive society. Third, how Modi is going to give more regional push to his foreign policy to have a more secure and better-connected environment for all round development. We need double peace which means peace at home and also peace in the region which can be taken to extended neighborhood.

Connect Central Asia Policy

The connect Central Asia policy of Indian state has assumed more significance in present circumstances. Modi Government hosted first virtual India-Central Asia Summit on January 27,2022 (CAR leaders had earlier similar virtual summit with Xi Jinping of China).Significantly the summit meetings shall now be held in an institutionalized format after every two years. India was first to accord recognition to Central Asian republics after breakup of Soviet Union. Notwithstanding this India is marginal to the region. India and CAR,s is separated by hot-spots and natural routes are closed due to India -Pakistan rivalry. Meanwhile great power rivalry and "Sphere of influence" theory have come under new spotlight due to conflict in Ukraine. The strategic priority for policy circles in Delhi is to deepen cooperation with Central Asian region through the natural routes and obtain more strategic space to checkmate greater turbulence in regional and global politics. The victory of Modi government in recent elections should induce some realism in Delhi. The recent meeting

at the level of National security Advisors is suggestive of a more positive push to this very important engagement .On December 6, 2022 the NSAs of India and Central Asian countries met for the first time in Delhi. The meeting hosted by Indian NSA Shri Ajit Doval happened at an extraordinary moment in the life of region and the extended region. The meeting took place as a result of the First India -Central Asia summit in January 2022.

The joint communiqué issued following NSA,s meeting focused on regional security issues like Afghanistan and counterterrorism(Ref 04) The security advisors denounced all manifestations and forms of terrorism and stressed the need for international cooperation in the fight against the threat posed by terrorism. The participants stressed the need for joint action to combat terrorism and terror financing as well as the fact that nations like Afghanistan shouldn't be used to harbor or train terrorists. The Indian NSA Ajit Doval also discussed the significance and applicability of Resolution 2593 of the United Nations Security Council which aims to prevent the Taliban -led Afghanistan from turning into a sanctuary for terrorists. The above resolution was passed in August 2021 after the Taliban seized power in Afghanistan following the American withdrawal from war-torn country

Historically, developments in the North-western frontier area have influenced the security environment of the Indian sub-continent. This geopolitical logic shaped the nature of Mughal empire, the British empire and also the post-colonial security landscape. The security experts still refer to " Pannikar Thesis" to re-emphasize the fact that Kabul valley does impact the Gangetic plains. The international and regional order is not settled .We are moving to a more messy multipolar system which is yet to take a shape. The conflict in Ukraine has further exacerbated it. Vladimir Lenin stated "there are decades when nothing happens and weeks when decades happen". In this context India-Central Asia summit holds great significance . As a follow-up to this virtual summit an India-Central Asia Secretariat shall be established in Delhi to support the process. The leaders discussed other proposals viz, connectivity, security and cultural contacts to further cement the relationships. Happily, Kazakhstan is home to around 5000 and Kyrgyzstan 15000 Indian students .But all this may not result in any major push to relationship unless Indian leadership recognizes the full picture of connectivity.

Difficult Road

There are many irritants in the path to develop smooth relationship between India and the Central Asian countries .First, lack of access to land routes and instability in Afghanistan pose big challenges .Second, there is the issue of moving trade- a minuscule \$2 billion contrary to China's trade with CAR,s having exceeded \$41 billion -which can double by 2030. Third, routing trade through Chabahar port means more investment and India may not go for that in the face of US sanctions on Iran .In the recent National Security Advisors meeting in Delhi on December 6, 2022 connectivity between India and CAR was discussed in which discussions on Chabahar and the International North-South Corridor (INSTC) came up for discussion. In the meeting the members agreed that connectivity initiatives should adhere to all countries territorial integrity and sovereignty be open to broad participation and be financially viable. This surely made reference to China's belt and Road initiative(BRI). Fourth, some analysts suggest the alternative viz, Russia-Iran international North-South Transport Corridor via Bandar Abbas Port but the same is not operational. Finally, the

(TAPI) Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India gas pipeline plans have also gone into oblivion. While as India is weighing the way forward to connect with CAR,s time and tide wait for none. China is the biggest development and infrastructure partner of the Republics. Russia is not far behind and Pakistan too is increasing its outreach to the CAR,s offering trade access to the Indian ocean at Gwadar and Karachi. The Central Asian region cannot be the cul-de-sac for successive Indian governments and hence we need to find out the reliable entry points for India to overcome its deficit in CAR,s policy.

Tumultuous Context

The Russian action in Ukraine has created more uncertainty in great power politics. Some analysts hold the view that China may be tempted to exploit the opportunities provided by the western entanglement with Russia. China may not remain principal villain in the eyes of western world. Speaking at Primakov National Research institute of world Economy and International Relations in Moscow in July, 2001 Indian Foreign Minister Dr Jaishankar said " China's rise impacts India's immediate neighbors .Its rise also impacts Russia". Earlier former Indian Naval chief Arun Prakash cogently stated " China having amply demonstrated its penchant for "salami- slicing" territory as well as its disdain for international law leaves India with little room for complacency or for vainly hoping that so called legacy issues will resolve themselves with time. It is therefore vital to deconstruct China's elaborate Charade and to halt the covert but steady hemorrhaging of Indian territory". This builds-up the case for reviving the immediate neighborhood to step into the extended regional space for attainment of foreign policy objectives. There are three key issues which need close scrutiny:

First, diplomacy and diplomats in our part of the world In spite of wars and territorial disputes are sophisticated and well- versed in the art of diplomacy . This writer has firsthand experience of knowing some of them after their superannuation when they positively invested in peace in the region Unfortunately the softer side of diplomacy is changing into hardwired format .Diplomatic tools viz, tact ,skilful persuasion ,adjustment, choice of words etc are backseat. The diplomacy has moved from 'secrecy to brazenness' .In the beginning of this year a rude missive from the Chinese embassy to a member of Indian parliament who had attended a function of the 'Tibetan parliament' in exile is a case in point .Diplomacy as a tool needs to be respected and restored in the region beset with multiple problems.

Second , the decision to abandon SAARC in favor of Bay of Bengal initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation(BMSTEC), Bangladesh ,Bhutan ,India, Nepal initiative(BBIN) and Indian Ocean Rim Association(IORA) may have provided some comfort to Indian state in isolating Pakistan. But the same hasn't helped it in Afghanistan or more importantly in connecting to Central Asia. The above alignments have not reaped any tangible benefits to Delhi.

Third , China is taking advantage of Indian myopic policy and is increasing its footprints in CAR,s through Shanghai cooperation organization(SCO).Foreign policy pundits opine that China will vigorously contest the vision of Central Asia and South Asia as part of Delhi's sphere of influence. The great power status doesn't come from blue sky .It can be harvested incrementally by investing in immediate neighborhood Modi

governments neighborhood policy is adhoc and reactive. The prime Minister after emerging stronger from recent state elections needs to revisit his speech to Afghan parliament made in 2015. He said " In the achievements of Maurayan Empire and that of Sher Shah Suri we see connectivity we now aspire to achieve and rebuild .Pakistan he said will become the bridge between South Asia and Central Asia ". All this sounds sweet but the other truth is that Indian leadership needs to keep all channels of communication open. Additionally, the Pakistani state has equal responsibility to contribute to this otherwise difficult process .Meanwhile the security situation in South and Southern Asia has provided fresh impetus to India's, connect Central Asia policy. .

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