
UNIT 6 INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY: AN OVERVIEW

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6.1 INTRODUCTION

We have so far studied policy decision-making at the institutional level in the government as well as shaping of policy at the social and political level. With intense interaction between the government, institutions and socio-political level actors ultimately the Indian foreign policy is made. The outcome of the policy process, "foreign policy" is the concrete policy directed towards a foreign nation or external policy issue.

What has been the outcome of policy process in the last fifty-six years after the independence? In India, from an ordinary citizen to the Prime Minister and in abroad from foreign government officials to informed public have been characterising the Indian foreign policy as Non-Aligned. But even today, in the absence of an alternative policy framework, the Indian political class has been describing Indian foreign policy within the framework of non-alignment. In this unit we will know as to how non-alignment policy began, worked and progressed during the period since independence. This unit will also analyse the ups and downs in India's relations with major world powers as well as neighbours.

6.2 INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY UNDER NEHRU IN THE FORMATIVE YEARS

Indians secured their control over nation's foreign policy only after their independence from the

British colonial rule in 1947. A newly independent India was plunged into the world affairs when the external environment was of the Cold War between the two super powers—the United States (US) and the Soviet Union (USSR)—both were on the winning side in the the Second World War. Even before the independence in August 1947, an interim government under Nehru's leadership had been put in place in September 1946.

The first prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru was in a dilemma. Though western educated, he was personally attracted to the Marxist thought. But any alignment with the one or the other bloc would have meant loss of newly won independence. Loss of India's independence in the decision-making even slightly was an unacceptable proposition to him. Thus, he opted to keep India away from both the power blocs, and follow an independent foreign policy. This came to be known as the policy of non-alignment.

He had formulated the basic policy outlines in a broadcast from New Delhi on 7 September, 1946 in which he laid out certain foreign policy goals. He was then only an interim prime minister, as independence had not even been announced. These goals included: end of colonialism and racism, independence from power blocs and close ties with China and Asian neighbours. In his own words: "We shall take full part in international conferences as a free nation with our own policy and not merely as a satellite of another nation.... We are particularly interested in the emancipation of colonial and dependent countries and peoples, and in the recognition in theory and practice of equal opportunities for all races."

Thus, non-alignment with either of the military blocs was Nehru's answer to the dilemma he and the nation faced. Non-alignment was an intellectual coup on the part of Nehru. It was in a sense learning from history. Soon after the independence the first American president George Washington had asked his countrymen while laying down his office in 1796: "It is our true policy to steer clear of permanent alliances with any portion of the foreign world....". Instead, he advocated that the new Republic should cultivate "just and amicable feelings toward all" nations.

Primarily by non-alignment Nehru meant not getting entangled with any military alliances. Soon after the end of the Second World War, there were military alliances floated by the United States and the Soviet Union. The US promoted North Atlantic Treaty Organisation (NATO) and the Soviet Union had to counter it by Warsaw Pact. While these were the competing military alliances at the global level, these two super powers also promoted regional alliances to attract the newly independent nations in Asia and Africa.

Second, non-alignment did not mean neutrality in world politics. Neutrality has a meaning that is truly relevant during the times of war. But non-alignment is a positive thought; it meant that India retained the independence of decision making on an issue that affected her interests. There was no *a priori* commitment to support one or the other nation involved in a crisis.

Thus, in India's neighbourhood the US promoted South East Asia Treaty Organisation (SEATO) and Central Treaty Organisation (CENTO) in the 1950s. Both these organisations were ostensibly meant to fight against communism exported by the Soviet Union. But India's neighbour, Pakistan joined the treaty organisations primarily to get military aid from the US to fight against India. The membership of Pakistan of these treaties brought the Cold War to the doors of India aggravating tensions between India and Pakistan. The American weapons and support generated because of their membership of military alliances also complicated the India-US relations.

This was brought out very clearly over the question of Kashmir issue raised in the United Nations (UN) Security Council (SC). Nehru had great faith in the international organisations and their sense of justice. It was Nehru who had taken to the UN the crisis created by Pakistan's war against Jammu and Kashmir in 1948. He never imagined that the Kashmir question would become a matter seen through the prism of Cold War.

The UN ordered a cease-fire and asked Pakistan to withdraw its forces. The Indian PM had then given an assurance to hold a plebiscite to decide as to whether Kashmiris desired to join India or join Pakistan. This brings out the faith Nehru had in the fairness of the UN.

But in practice the issue got entangled in the global Cold War between the US and the Soviet Union. Once the issue became part of Cold War rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union, Pakistan with its military alliance with the US, began to raise the Kashmir issue in the UN SC now and then. The SC instead of declaring Pakistan as an aggressor and seeking to vacate its aggression, kept the issue as an instrument to pressurise India politically.

Nehru had maintained close ties with the British Commonwealth of Nations by enabling the Indian Republic as a member. But Britain was not interested in finding a solution to the Kashmir crisis. Another power that could have helped India in resolving the conflict over J & K was the US. But during his first visit to that country in 1949, Nehru had disappointed Dean Acheson then Secretary of State. Dean Acheson states in his memoirs: "When finally, I urged Pandit Nehru to help me by a frank discussion of a practicable solution of the trouble over Kashmir, I got a curious combination of a public speech and flashes of anger and deep dislike of his opponents.... I was convinced that Nehru and I were not destined to have a pleasant personal relationship."

Acheson's successor in office, John Foster Dulles did not turn out to be friendly to India either. By then Dulles had come under the influence of pactomania in promoting military pacts. He desired that India join the military alliances promoted by the US. Nehru's non-alignment policy was obviously against it. Hence, Dulles said that non-alignment is immoral as it failed to take a firm stand against godless communism.

Under these circumstances the Soviet Union came to India's rescue. It saw an opportunity to befriend non-aligned nations in the predicament faced by India in the UN SC. The US was guided by the British policy of divide and rule; the US, in that early period, went along with Britain on the issues relating to the latter's erstwhile colonies. Thus, when Western powers like the US and UK began to vote on the side of Pakistan on the question of Kashmir, the Soviet Union exercised its veto power to save the Indian interests from Cold War politics.

6.2.1 Tilt in Non-alignment

The Soviet Union helped India to get over the efforts by the western powers to embarrass India. Now you do not embarrass a friend who comes to your rescue. That is a norm in interpersonal affairs; so is that in international affairs. The test of this principle came during the SC discussion on the Soviet military intervention in Hungary in 1956.

There was an uprising against the Soviet domination of Hungary where the people were in favour of democracy. However, the Soviet Union militarily intervened in that country to see that a pro-democracy government was removed and a pro-communist government was installed. The question of the Soviet military intervention came before the UN. The General Assembly discussed

the Hungarian crisis. There was a five-power resolution calling upon the Soviet Union to withdraw its troops. India voted against the resolution. This approach of India was widely disapproved in the country as well as abroad. Was India supporting the Soviet military intervention? Nehru took pains to explain rather unconvincingly that the circumstances and compulsions under which India voted against the resolution. His main ground was that the resolution demanded that “elections should be held in Hungary under the supervision of the United Nations.” That could be later used to demand similar elections in Kashmir. But the fact that India did oppose the military intervention did not miss altogether the world opinion. Thomas A. Bailey in his *A Diplomatic History of the American People* records that “even ‘neutralist’ states like India were moved to protest against the brutality of the Soviets.”

6.2.2 India-China Border War

The strengths and weaknesses of the non-alignment were also brought out during the next major crisis in Indian foreign policy in the background of the Chinese aggression of October 1962. Peace and friendship with China was a cornerstone of the Indian foreign policy as formulated and executed by Nehru with assistance from his friend and Defence Minister, Krishna Menon. As a matter of fact both of them never envisaged a threat from the Communist China. They mainly focussed on Pakistan’s threat to India’s security.

Nehru thought of resolving the territorial crisis by political negotiations rather than by the use of force. He never realised that military strength enhanced the ability to negotiate political settlements amongst nations. This had led him to approach the UN in response to Pakistan’s proxy war in Jammu and Kashmir in 1947-48, when, as a matter of fact, the Indian army was able to throw out invading Pakistani army from the Kashmir.

In 1954 he had conceded the Chinese claim over Tibet by accepting its suzerainty over it, when India signed an agreement for trade with the “Tibetan region of China.” India gave up its rights and privileges in Tibet without gaining any reciprocal concessions from China. The first step toward this direction was taken by China by ousting India’s influence in Tibet completely. The Chinese People’s Liberation Army began raids in Tibet, with China declaring Tibet as an integral part of its territory. In continuation of the policy of Indo-Chinese friendship, India signed the Sino-Tibetan Agreement on May 23, 1951, which sealed Tibet’s fate permanently. Chinese troops from then on were stationed on the borders of India, Burma, Pakistan, Afghanistan, Nepal, and the adjacent areas, whereas India withdrew all her military, postal, commercial, telephonic and telegraphic services and equipment from the northern borders stationed for over a century. To pacify the Chinese, Nehru concluded the *Panchsheel* (Five Principles) Agreement with Chou En-lai in 1954, based on the principles of mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in internal affairs, equality and peaceful co-existence.

The *Panchsheel* agreement was a shoddy attempt to hide India’s inability to oppose China’s expansionist designs, and to lure China into a promise to restrain its territorial ambitions. That China had no intention of abiding by this agreement was evident from the build-up of military detachments in the Aksai-Chin area, construction of roads within the Indian territory along the Sinkiang border, and the shelling of Indian outposts intermittently. The Chinese maps were already showing the entire North East Frontier Agency (a part of India) as Chinese territory.

Despite China's military operations, Nehru informed the Parliament in 1957 that there was "not the remotest chance of India coming in to any kind of military conflict with China or the Soviet Union. India is so situated geographically that it would not be easy to attack her." Within two years, in 1959, Tibet was run over by the Chinese forces and Dalai Lama had to undertake an extremely dangerous and extraordinarily hazardous journey to escape the Chinese assault.

Three years later, in October 1962, the Chinese crushed the Indian forces, occupied strategic outposts, and destroyed India's border defences. The US Ambassador, John Kenneth Galbraith in *Ambassador's Journal* described India's helplessness in resisting Chinese attack:

Their (India) air arm is not highly effective. The cities of the Ganges Plain are accessible from the airfields of Tibet. There is no chance that Indians could retaliate to China and there is nothing in Tibet. And there is no technical chance that we could accord them immediately the protection that Nehru asked.

Nehru could have exercised flexibility in non-alignment in defence of India's national interest. Could he not have taken the help of the US, which was, anti-China then and which came to India's help anyway briefly after October 1962 Sino-Indian war? India took the diplomatic and political help of the Soviet Union over Pakistan's war in J & K even if it was extended without India soliciting it. If India had solicited the US help in 1954 during the Tibetan crisis, the US help in meeting the Chinese challenge in October 1962 could have been substantially bigger and more effective. It would have given a correct image to non-alignment to prove that it allowed a country to seek assistance from any country when its national security is threatened rather than making India always tilt towards one Super Power—the Soviet Union. These are of course big if and but of history. But this showed limitations of the Indian foreign policy in the formative years of the Indian Republic.

Nehru's reliance on the "doctrine of defence by friendship" *vis-a-vis* China was a failure. Indians were all surprised at the failure of Nehru's foreign policy. Nehru himself became a disillusioned man. His Defence Minister, Krishna Menon was forced to resign from the Congress Party. J. Bandopadhyaya in the *Making of India's Foreign Policy* concludes: "It was Nehru's apparently idealistic interpretation of India-China relations that was probably responsible for the absence of... strategic planning."

6.3 FOREIGN POLICY AFTER NEHRU

In the 1960s one major question that was widely discussed was 'After Nehru, Who?' Nehru died in 1964. Lal Bahadur Shastri succeeded him. His tenure was short as he died in Tashkent in January 1966 after signing the Tashkent Agreement with Ayub Khan, military dictator of Pakistan.

In India's foreign policy, Shastri has to be remembered for a major change he brought about in the shifting of emphasis from international events more to the immediate neighbourhood of India. It was Nehru's personality that made him to think in terms of India playing a major role in international affairs. Nehru perceived a larger role for India in international affairs, rather much bigger than then resources permitted. He played a major role in Bandung (Indonesia) Conference in 1955. He was responsible for introducing newly liberated communist China's premier Chou en lai. He was in the forefront of getting communist China seated as the legitimate member of the

UN in place of Nationalist China, which had fled to Taiwan after the communists captured power in Mainland China in October 1949. It was Nehru who again played a role as a go between China and the US during the Korean War.

In contrast Shastri focussed on India's immediate neighbourhood aimed at improving relations within South Asia. However, his perceived weakness led to conflicts and war in 1965 with Pakistan. First it was in the Rann of Kutch where a dispute was created to claim Indian territory. The dispute was referred to arbitration by mutual consent.

The Rann of Kutch is a marshy land between West Pakistan and Gujarat. It was Pakistan's case that Rann of Kutch was a lake and according to the international law, the boundary should run in the middle of the lake. On the other hand, India claimed that it is a marshy land and the boundaries between Sindh and India were well demarcated. But Pakistan was intruding into the area since 1956. In 1965 hostilities broke out between the two countries in the area. At the intervention of then British PM Harold Wilson, an agreement was reached to refer the dispute to arbitration if both the parties were unable to reach an agreement. Eventually, as the two countries could not agree on a solution, arbitrators awarded 900 square Km to Pakistan—one tenth of their original claim.

The perception of a weak India continued; in the meanwhile China had exploded a nuclear bomb in October 1964 without India reacting to it immediately. Instead the non-aligned conference that met in Cairo in 1964 sent a delegation to Beijing to urge upon China to desist from going nuclear. The Chinese authorities even refused to receive the delegation.

Another major crisis faced by Shastri was the India-Pakistan War of 1965. The *modus operandi* of this war was also similar to the first war in 1947-48. Perceived weakness of India, coupled with the hope of Kashmiris rising in revolt against India, made Ayub Khan bold to launch the War. In this war while Pakistan was able to capture some territory in J & K, Indians opened a second front of its choosing by moving towards Lahore.

The US was then busy with its war in Vietnam. Hence the Johnson administration did not act beyond imposing an arms embargo against both the countries as they were allegedly fighting with American weapons. However, the Soviet Union was keen to use its good offices in resolving the crisis. It had come closer to India by taking a neutral stand over the Sino-Indian border war of 1962. But the Russian leaders were keen that they be perceived as neutral in the Indo-Pak war. The Russian leaders also desired to befriend Pakistan or at least wean it away from the US.

Then Soviet premier Kosygin invited Lal Bahadur Shastri and Ayub Khan to Tashkent to find a solution to the war and both the leaders accepted the offer. After a great deal of bargaining and arms twisting by the Soviet premier, Kosygin, the warring leaders signed the Tashkent agreement. Under the agreement India had to give away the territories captured by the army, which was opposed by the opposition parties.

6.4 MRS. INDIRA GANDHI'S TENURE

Mrs. Indira Gandhi succeeded Lal Bahadur Shastri as the PM. After Pandit Nehru, Indira Gandhi had the longest tenure, as the nation's PM. Indira Gandhi, after the 1970 elections, was able to consolidate her power in the country. By any standard of reckoning, the major foreign policy

event in her term was the Bangladesh war fought with Pakistan in 1971.

To understand this major event in Indian history it is necessary to summarise the background of the crisis. In the only democratic election held in Pakistan in December 1970, Zulfikar Ali Bhutto's Pakistan People's Party (PPP) won a majority (88 out of 144) in West Pakistan while Awami League won an absolute majority in East Pakistan by winning 167 seats. In accordance with the democratic theory, then military dictator in Pakistan Yahya Khan should have invited the leader of Awami League, Sheikh Mujibur Rehman to form the government. But the manipulative Bhutto was unwilling to have a Bengali as the Prime Minister of Pakistan.

Yahya Khan was also unwilling to transfer power to a Bangladeshi. Instead of transferring power, Yahya Khan imposed martial law, appointed Lt. General Tikka Khan as Governor and sent army to quell the movement in East Pakistan in March 1971. Sheikh Mujibur Rehman, popular leader of the Awami Party was arrested and imprisoned in West Pakistan. The enraged population of East Pakistan then came out on the streets to denounce military dictatorship.

The military indulged in one of the worst human rights violations in the world history. The intellectuals and supporters of the party were massacred; women were raped and there was a systematic genocide of Hindus in East Pakistan. It was a sheer war of hatred. According to the *New York Times* the Pakistani army painted "big yellow Hs on the Hindu shops" to be attacked and destroyed. As a result over 12 million Bangladeshis, Muslims and Hindus, came to West Bengal, mainly to Calcutta, as refugees. Feeding such large number was an economic strain on India but added to that was the law and order problem for the government in West Bengal.

Indira Gandhi, adept in political gamble, went on a tour of Western countries to inform the leaders of the human tragedy in East Pakistan. The US was then secretly engaged in opening up relations with China in which Pakistan had played a crucial role as a go between. At the same time she had also asked the army to prepare for military intervention. The army wanted the intervention to take place in the winter, as the passes in the Himalayas would be snowbound and Pakistan's ally China could not militarily intervene in the crisis.

Pakistan, to pre-empt India and force her to divert troops to west, attacked on 3 December 1971. India intervened in the East in a massive way. The resulting war ended in the liberation of East Pakistan and the birth of Bangladesh as an independent country. The Indian forces were at their best when they accepted the surrender of over 90,000 Pakistani troops in the war.

The friends of Pakistan, especially the US, were upset over the Indian victory in the war as it considered the Indian victory as that of the Soviet Union. Nixon, according to his memoirs, was keen to save West Pakistan from destruction by India. Thus, to save West Pakistan, he asked nuclear powered warship *Enterprise* to move to Bay of Bengal. In a well-coordinated move, Soviet Union sent its nuclear powered ship to follow the US warship. The Soviet Union was the main supporter of India in the War often using its veto power in the UN Security Council to nullify the US resolutions condemning India and asking her to withdraw armed forces from East Pakistan.

6.4.1 Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace and Friendship, 1971

A pro-Soviet tilt had already set in during the Nehru period in the practice of non-alignment. The 1970s were such that globally non-alignment movement had become a force sympathetic to the

Soviet Union. Cuba, as a member of the non-aligned movement, even introduced the idea that the Soviet Union is a 'natural ally' of the non-aligned nations. This he did at the 1979 NAM Summit held at Havana. The tilt became evident in the Indo-Soviet relations during the period.

Before the Bangladesh war of 1971, India signed a Treaty of Peace and Friendship with the Soviet Union. Under the treaty, the two countries agreed on "immediate mutual consultations" in the event of either country facing a military threat and adopt appropriate effective measures.

The treaty expressed the Soviet Union's acceptance of India's policy of non-alignment. However, the treaty was criticised by the US as an end of India's non-alignment. But the treaty was India's answer to then changing global scene. Since 1962 Pakistan and China had befriended each other against India on the theory that enemy's enemy is a friend. The US was already close to Pakistan with the military alliances binding their relations. Richard Nixon, the US President, was actively working to establish relations with China aimed at balancing the perceived power of the Soviet Union.

6.4.2 Simla Agreement, 1972

The Indo-Pakistan war of 1971 was brought to an end by signing the Simla Agreement between Gandhi and Bhutto. Under the agreement both the countries "resolved to settle their differences by peaceful means through bilateral negotiations." They also agreed to respect each other's national unity and territorial integrity and not to assist or encourage any acts, which could affect the maintenance of peace in the region. Apart from these expressions of idealistic thought in concrete terms, Pakistan regained all its territories lost in West Pakistan in the War and also secured freedom for Prisoners of War taken in Bangladesh. POWs were actually released in 1973 after India obtained consent of Bangladesh. India gained assurances of good behaviour, which Pakistan was incapable of in practice.

The opposition party, particularly then Jan Sangh-predecessor of the present Bharatiya Janata Party, was very critical of the terms of the Simla agreement. Atal Behari Vajpayee who became the External Affairs Minister in the subsequent Janata Party government under Morarji Desai hinted in April 1978 that the agreement became possible only after "secret and midnight" understanding between Gandhi and Bhutto.

6.4.3 Nuclear Test of 1974

Mrs. Gandhi will also be remembered by the nation for her determination to take nation on the path of a major power. Nehru had an idealistic approach to power. But Mrs. Gandhi was realistic to a great extent. Nehru said in 1954 in the Lok Sabha: "If you peep in the future and if nothing goes wrong—wars and like—the obvious fourth country in the world (after US, Soviet Union and China) is India." But Gandhi translated his idealism in action. One such act was her conducting nuclear test in May 1974 in Pokharan.

Ever since China conducted its nuclear tests in October 1964, there was domestic pressure on the Indian government to conduct nuclear tests. However, Lal Bahadur Shastri was silent on the demand. But his External Affairs Minister, Swaran Singh had said in the Lok Sabha in May 1966 that India had the capability to acquire nuclear capability in a reasonably short time. Apparently, Shastri as the PM in late 1964 had authorised Atomic Energy Commission to work on the bomb

design.

The test conducted by Indira Gandhi was to demonstrate the Indian nuclear capability though it was claimed to be a peaceful nuclear explosion (PNE). Her logic ran like this. During the Bangladesh war in 1971 the US had used its nuclear powered enterprise to blackmail India to desist from attacking West Pakistan. Earlier, when Henry Kissinger, President Nixon's National Security Adviser was in India, he had informed the Indian policy makers that India should not bank on the US if China intervenes in the likely conflict between India and Pakistan. This was contrary to the prevailing Nixon Doctrine which had promised the US protection if any non-nuclear nation was threatened by a nuclear weapons state, in this case China. Thus Gandhi desired to make India self reliant in her security.

6.4.4 Indira Gandhi's Second Tenure

Mrs. Gandhi was briefly out of power when the first ever non-Congress government came to power in 1977 under Morarji Desai as the PM. Charan Singh succeeded him for a six-month term in 1979. Mrs. Gandhi replaced him again in January 1980. These two non-Congress governments under the Janata Party had nothing much to contribute to the evolution of the nation's foreign policy. Though they had promised to correct the tilt towards Soviet Union in the Indian non-alignment and make it a genuine non-alignment, nothing significant happened.

A major foreign policy challenge was unfolding while the nation was going through the election process in December 1979 when the Soviet Union militarily intervened in Afghanistan, a non-aligned country on Soviet Union's southern borders. Then Indian PM, Charan Singh called upon the Soviet Union to withdraw its troops as early as possible and preserve the non-aligned character of Afghanistan. But when the matter came before the UN for discussion on 12 January 1980, Brajesh Mishra who was then India's Permanent Representative said that India is opposed to the presence of foreign troops or bases in any state. He also made an interesting statement that the Soviet Union in the case of Afghanistan, had assured India that it would withdraw the troops when the government in Kabul asked for it. He added: "We have no reason to doubt the assurances, particularly from a friendly country like the Soviet Union, with whom we have close ties." This was totally going along with the Soviet Union amounting to alignment by a non-aligned country. The statement was to trouble the Indian non-alignment policy even after the disintegration of the Soviet Union.

This was more in tune with what Gandhi would have said than reflecting the approach of the Janata Party government then in power. She, while campaigning, had said in an interview to France's Europe Radio Station that the Soviet intervention in Afghanistan was "a danger to India." Brajesh Mishra's statement also did not reflect Charan Singh's earlier position on the issue.

This literally brought the US-Soviet Union Cold War to the Indian northwestern borders. The US asked India to help it in getting the Russians out of Afghanistan. The US was interested in performing a Vietnam in reverse in Afghanistan to the Russians. As America was forced to withdraw dishonourably from Vietnam in 1974, the US wanted to force Russians to experience what that dishonour means in a nation's life. Russians had that experience in 1988.

Since India did not agree to cooperate with the US against the Soviets, Americans turned to Pakistan for support. Pakistan readily agreed to be a conduit to transfer weapons to Afghan guerrillas (*Mujahidins*) at a total military and economic aid package of \$7.4 billion. This transformed the region into a terrorist hub-terrorism strengthened by religious fanaticism in the name of Jihad ever since then.

6.5 RAJIV GANDHI AND THE INDIAN PEACE KEEPING FORCE IN SRI LANKA

As Indira Gandhi inherited Afghan crisis from previous government, her successor Rajiv Gandhi inherited so to say an ethnic crisis in Sri Lanka, which began in a big way in 1983. But Mrs. Gandhi had handled the crisis as a disinterested mediator between Sri Lanka and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) who were demanding a separate Tamil state in the north-eastern Sri Lanka.

But under Rajiv Gandhi the crisis took a turn for the worse. Earlier Rajiv Gandhi had asserted the Indian interest in extending humanitarian aid to the beleaguered Tamils in Jaffna in the North as the Sri Lankan government had imposed an economic blockade on the area. He had sent the food grains by 20 boats but the Sri Lankans did not permit the supply to reach the needy. In June 1987, Indian air force dropped the supply for the people. This made it clear to the President Jayawardane that he needed to understand the seriousness of the purpose exhibited by India.

However, as Sri Lanka was facing leftist, JVP threat on the South, Jayawardane requested help from India in maintaining peace in the north. India and Sri Lanka signed an accord in July 1987. Under the accord signed between Rajiv Gandhi and Jayawardane, the Indian troops were to be sent to Sri Lanka to maintain peace in the North and East and also to accept arms laid down by the LTTE. In return, for the militants accepting to return to peaceful life, the accord provided for the merger of Tamil dominant areas in the North and East, holding of provincial elections, and devolution of the powers.

But the distrust between the parties did not help in the smooth implementation of the agreement. The Tamils perceived the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) as “Innocent People Killing Force”. There was a demand for the withdrawal of the IPKF from Sri Lanka from both sides: Tamils as well as the new president of Sri Lanka, Premadasa. Rajiv Gandhi’s successor, V. P. Singh withdrew the IPKF; India not only lost face but also over 1000 Indian soldiers. There was bad blood between all sides to dispute. As a result, LTTE plotted and a human bomb assassinated Rajiv Gandhi on 21 May 1991. Later the same forces were also responsible for assassinating President Premadasa.

6.6 NARASIMHA RAO (1991-1996)

It goes to the credit of Narasimha Rao to survive as the Prime Minister of a minority government and carry on with the foreign policy for a complete term of five years. He is the first Congress Party PM outside the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty to do so. There were major foreign policy problems faced by Rao government.

By any account one major problem was of economic readjustment from a mixed economy to a global one. This was not done as a conscious policy decision to move economy by following liberalisation, privatisation and globalisation (LPG). By the time Rao government assumed power, India had an adverse balance of payments under which there was foreign exchange worth only Rs 2000 to Rs. 2400 crores, enough to pay for imports of only 7 days.

6.7 INDIA–US RELATIONS

An economically weak government is always prone to foreign pressure. This situation was taken maximum advantage by the only super power—the United States. The US did arms twisting in pressurising Rao to economically open up the Indian market to the American penetration in areas of computers, IT, and Telecommunications etc. India came under the American pressure to rollback and cap its nuclear programme. India was compelled, under the US pressure, to abandon the nuclear testing planned for 1995.

India has been stating that it wanted to retain its nuclear option, which became increasingly difficult since the end of the Cold War. India joined the US in co-sponsoring the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and Fissile Material Control Treaty (FMCT). India, under Rao, did try in 1995 to conduct tests in Pokharan but could not succeed as it was detected by the US. And Rao had to shelve the programme.

6.8 FOREIGN POLICY DEVELOPMENTS AND THE NDA GOVERNMENT

Atal Behari Vajpayee became the PM in 1998 leading a coalition government consisting of 13 political parties. But the government could not last beyond ten months. In the elections held in October 1999, the BJP-led National Democratic Alliance was elected again to power. This is the first ever coalition government to hold on to power for nearly four years.

6.8.1 Nuclear Weapons

During these ten months, its main foreign policy push came in the area of developing nuclear weapons capability and trying to improve relations with Pakistan. The BJP has been a great exponent of India going for nuclear weapons. Once it came to power, it planned for nuclear weapons tests so that India can declare its status as a nuclear weapons state. On 11 May 1998 India surprised the world by conducting three nuclear tests. Two more tests were conducted on 13 May. Prime Minister Vajpayee declared that India is a nuclear weapons state, and also declared that it would not conduct any more tests as all the necessary data had been collected. India, Vajpayee said, would maintain only minimum nuclear deterrent.

It turned out that India was trying to test nuclear weapons in 1982 during Gandhi's tenure and later in 1995 when Narasimha Rao was the PM. But each time the preparations were made to conduct the tests, the US intelligence was able to detect the Indian plans. Hence, it goes to the credit of the BJP to have planned the nuclear tests and conducting them undetected.

6.8.2 Attempts to Improve Relations

In 1999 the Indian PM set himself to improve the relations with Pakistan. The first step he took was with a Bus trip to Lahore to meet Nawaz Sharif, PM of Pakistan. During this trip PM Vajpayee made a visit to Minar-e- Pakistan symbolising the Indian acceptance of the creation of Pakistan based on Mohammad Ali Jinnah's "two nations" theory.

As a matter of fact there was no such confirmation ever needed. Because after initial opposition to the creation of Pakistan, the Hindu Mahasabha has become defunct and the Bharatiya Janata Party, as the main ruling party in the National Democratic Alliance (NDA), never spoke in terms of undoing the partition.

After the meeting in Lahore, the Pakistani PM said that it would be the year of decision on Kashmir. The Indian External Affairs Minister, Jaswant Singh had said that after fifty years of independence "the time for map-making in the region is over" indicating that there is no question of changing of geography in the region.

The month of May 1999 saw the Kargil war between the two nations. As the two PMs were discussing the future of their bilateral relations, the Pakistani Army was preparing for the war. The war is significant as it was the first military conflict between the two nations after they acquired nuclear weapons in May 1998. This was an effort by the Pakistani armed forces to alter the status quo on the Line of Control so that whenever negotiations take place, the Pakistanis could use it as a bargaining chip with India.

However, Pakistani Army Chief of Staff, General Pervez Musharraf in a bloodless coup in October 1999, deposed PM Nawaz Sharif. This sent into limbo all efforts to normalise relations with Pakistan. India reacted to the military takeover in its traditional way. India then boycotted the meeting of the SAARC and also saw to it that Pakistan was suspended from the Commonwealth of Nations. India made another attempt at peace when Vajpayee invited Pervez Musharraf for talks at Agra in early 2001. The talks collapsed as General Musharraf was adamant on his terms to discuss the so called core issue of Kashmir.

The armed forces of Pakistan have dominated all institutions of the government in that country. The cross border terrorism that has been the bane of the India-Pakistan relations since 1989 has been only aggravated by the military dictatorship. The Indo-Pak relations were further spoilt when on 13 December 2001, Pakistani terrorists tried to attack the Indian Parliament and eliminate our top leadership. Fortunately our alert security forces engaged the terrorists in a forced gun battle just outside the Parliament House, and killed all the five Pakistanis. India withdrew its High Commissioner from Islamabad and snapped air, rail and bus links with Pakistan. The Indian government has perforce moved closer to the only surviving Super Power in the world—the US. Hence the question of the relevance of the Indian Non-alignment is now and then raised. Meanwhile, Pakistan had once again moved very close to the US by promising full cooperation in the American fight against the Taliban regime and *Al Qaeda* in Afghanistan.

As we have seen, non-alignment was the child of a bipolar world in which two poles were intensely contesting for supremacy at all levels—ideological, economic, and political. But with the end of one pole, the relevance of rival military alliances and competition to enrol every nation on one side or the other is over. However, another facet of non-alignment is the fact that a non-aligned country retains its independence of decision making unlike a nation aligned with a bloc normally toes the line of the leader nation. In this sense India still retains her independence of

decision-making.

In another sense, Indian non-alignment tilted towards the Soviet Union during the Cold War. But now that Russia itself has moved closer to its former rival, there is nothing wrong in India moving closer to the US. Earlier, during the Cold War, it used to be normal response of the policy makers that it is not so much that India is leaning towards the Soviet Union but it is the other way round. Similarly, if the US can be of help to promote the Indian national interest, there is nothing wrong in India working in close cooperation with the US. However, India with other major powers like the EU, and Russia is working towards bringing about a multipolar world. Meanwhile, India adopted the “Look East” policy and swiftly moved to have closer relationship with the ASEAN countries. India also moved closer to the European Union, Japan and Australia. By 2003, Sino-Indian relations had begun improving in a big way.

6.9 SUMMARY

The Indian foreign policy has undergone many radical changes in the last fifty-six years after independence on account of many factors. One is the change in the international environment with the end of the Cold War, and the emergence of the US as the only super power. Second, domestic changes have occurred replacing one party government by a coalition government in the 21st Century. Third, personality of the PMs has also changed as a consequence.

Yet, Indian foreign policy is woven within the framework of non-alignment. Though there is, looking at the origin of non-alignment in the bipolar world, reason to question the relevance of non-alignment, its relevance lies in the fact that India claims to retain its right to judge every policy independently and formulate its own policy response. But India works to usher in a multipolar world wherein she can emerge as an independent player along with others.

6.10 EXERCISES

- 1) Discuss Nehru’s contribution to the foreign policy of India.
- 2) How did Pakistan try to exploit the perceived weakness of Lal Bahadur Shastri? What was the outcome?
- 3) “Indira Gandhi laid the foundation to make India a major power.” Justify this statement with concrete examples.
- 4) Examine Rajiv Gandhi’s achievements and failures in foreign affairs.
- 5) Discuss the main achievements of India’s foreign policy during the initial years of the 21st Century.