
UNIT 2 APPROACHES TO THE STUDY OF INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

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2.1 INTRODUCTION

Literature on Indian foreign policy offers a range of approaches to the study of the subject. They range from traditional approaches based on the theories of realism and neo-realism, interdependence and complex interdependence to approaches that are rooted in the domestic cultural and socio-political ethos centred on the historical experiences and of Indian freedom movement as well as the ideals and aspirations of the leaders such as Mahatma Gandhi and Jawaharlal Nehru of India's freedom struggle.

At the outset two points need to be stressed. In the first place, while each one of the approaches helps us in an understanding, India's foreign policy can, and need, better be studied from an eclectic perspective. No single approach would suffice for an understanding of the complexities of the making and conduct of India's foreign policy. Besides, in the available literature there obtains a quality, which is native to the country. Nor for that matter, policy-makers and practitioners have and would ever fit their practices into rigid theoretical framework.

A perusal of the varieties of approaches nevertheless offers useful insights to the principles and ideals, mechanisms and instruments, and the actors and forces that have come to frame the objectives and devise appropriate instruments for the formulation and implementation of the country's foreign policy.

It also needs to be borne in mind that India's foreign policy is not a simple amalgam of responses to the exigencies of international relations. For whatever reasons—size of area, population, economy, leadership, etc.—India has consistently sought to influence the course of international relations in an independent and energetic manner, conscious of its responsibilities and commensurate to its status and capacities in the international system.

2.2 POLITICAL REALIST AND 'COMPLEX NEO-REALIST'

APPROACHES TO INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

There is some evidence in the argument that, barring perhaps the United States, realism has had its over-riding influence on what could be described as the 'foreign policy establishment' or the 'strategic community' of India. Echelons of at least six identifiable groups viz., the military, diplomatic corps, bureaucracy including the foreign service, political class, policy experts from the academia and the media, and the community of scientists and technologists of the so called foreign policy establishment, it can be said, help shape India's thinking on foreign policy matters.

The 'strategic community' is intertwined closely and shares state power more than others; for example, the business community—although the influence of the business is on the rise in the wake of the economic liberalisation and is evident in the formation of various government-business consultative mechanisms. Also, sectors in the middle echelons of the afore-mentioned six identifiable groups while do not influences they, at best, legitimise policy at the popular level. This should not be surprising. For, foreign policy and diplomacy invariably remain the handiwork of the elite.

India's 'strategic community' operates, more or less, within the parameters of political realism or simply realism. The 'strategic community' perceives itself as being pragmatic, responsible and experienced, and is oriented to practical problem-solving. The 'strategic community' does not function in an *ad hoc* fashion nor are its responses *ad hoc* or "knee-jerk" responses. To the contrary, the 'strategic community' is conscious of the fundamental goals and means at its disposal for the realisation of foreign policy objectives.

Political realism entails the view of power as the basis of inter-state relations, which are seen normally in conflictual modes, with each state seeking to pursue egoistically its own interests. Neo-realism recognises the primacy of politics but concedes that international order based on the convergence of interests among actors, and not conflict alone, is the basis of international relations. With the above in view, at least, three goals can be identified with paramount importance attached to the goal of external national security and internal national unity. The two other goals are leadership at least within the region and at a larger Third World level; and a place in the comity of nation-states appropriate to India's size, stature and capabilities.

Two assumptions underlie the approach: one, security of Indian state is paramount and is, best subsumed, as 'national interest'. All other elements and goals are subordinate to this basic national interest. It is the *leitmotif* or the guiding factor of all political and strategic thinking and planning. It is to be noted that the term security is defined essentially in political-military terms. The assumption is that a physically and militarily secure nation-state is a *Sine qua non* of the well-being and unity of the society.

Underlying the supremacy of national security goal is also the belief and the experience of colonialism and foreign domination. Historically, as and when India had a weak or a fissiparous state structure, the country had been prone to foreign domination and rule. The second assumption, and which is related to the first, is that international system is essentially an inter-state system. Non-state and trans-state actors are present but there is no denying the centrality of states in the international system. Legal and ethical norms of international system are and must be followed by all states; but, in the end, it is the great powers that shape the world because they have the power.

It is a contentious point but power is unambiguously defined as state power. India, it is argued, is potentially a world power. Therefore, it should try to fulfill this potential and its foreign policy should reflect this aspiration and promote its achievement. India's nuclear and missile development programmes, its space research and its scientific and technological achievements, large and highly professional defence forces under civilian control, a highly competent bureaucracy, and a large pool of highly skilled professionals, and no less a visionary political leadership and Indian democracy—with its national consensus on the above meaning of national interest—are all seen as vital elements in the realisation of national security and a great power status.

Skillful diplomacy which was the hallmark of foreign policy under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, military prowess that India began systematically building under Indira Gandhi, and political astuteness to engage all significant powers in political and strategic dialogues that characterises Indian foreign policy since the 1990s are vital capabilities of a great power that India has so consistently demonstrated.

It is in such a vein that political pronouncements and analyses often describe India as a great power or potentially a great power. Description of India as a “great” power, an “emergent” power and, at times, as “super” power—some time still with an interrogation mark—have become more frequent in the aftermath of the nuclearisation and the significant achievements made in the field of missile technology since 1998.

Is some kind of a *pax-Indica* possible? Since independence and well up to the 1960s, India's ‘strategic community’ saw the country as destined to be a future great power of Asia rivalled only by two other Asian powers namely, Russia and China. By the 1980s, Indian realists had a more ambitious view, but argued realistically for India's regional pre-eminence to be acknowledged by the rest of the world. In other words, the view was to project the country as the leader, if not the *hegemon*, of South Asia. With the collapse of Soviet Union and the ensuing uncertainties of the post-Cold War era, the idea to view the country as a great power, and that it be so recognised by the international community, has gained firmer grounds.

To the idea of regional pre-eminence is appended the desire of a strong and responsible global player. In ‘complex neo-realism’, periods of transition in international relations—such as the one witnessed in the wake of the collapse of Soviet Union—offer significant opportunities for upward mobility to certain intermediate powers. Indian foreign policy in the 1990s including India's successes in the development of nuclear weapons and long-range missile delivery system is seen as a time-tested approach to enter the concert of great powers on the basis of its military strength.

There are certain themes that recur in the Indian realist view of foreign policy. Foremost, and it is seen more or less regularly, is to view China as an actual or a potential strategic rival or competitor of India. The India-China conflict of 1962 and the border dispute have strengthened the view that the two big and strong neighbours are destined to be rivals, at least periodically. Pakistan's hostility including the dispute over Jammu & Kashmir, tilt towards Soviet Union during Cold War including the 1971 Treaty of Friendship with that country, and the entire gamut of Indo-US relations have always had and continue to have a Chinese dimension. Emergence of China as a great military and economic power would have major repercussions for the security of Asia and the Pacific including the Indian Ocean region. The resulting dis-balancing and re-

balancing of regional equations would surely impinge on Indian sovereignty and security. A large sized India, second in terms of population, its large GNP and skilled manpower, and with its more than a million strong defence forces has to stand up and possibly emerge stronger in the wake of destabilising effects of China. The view that China is India's 'enemy number one' which the Indian political leadership enunciated just prior to the nuclear experiments of 1998 are a piece of such a realist thinking.

The afore-mentioned proposition is precisely the kind of historical notion of inter-state relations and geo-political thinking realists, in general, entertain. (It is also true that many Indian realists do not preclude the possibility of a strong India and a strong China turning into strategic allies or friends at some future date.) It is to counter pointedly the Chinese strategic challenge and put India in the "big power" league that much of the justifications for nuclearisation have been proffered. Often thus, it has been argued that India's decision to go nuclear has been independent of its relationship with Pakistan.

In such a perception, China-Pakistan relations are viewed as an anti-India strategic alliance. 'Our rival's greater insecurity is our security' is the *dictum* of competitive security approach, which is sometimes promoted by the realists. Relations with Pakistan consume a good deal of the time and energy of Indian foreign policy planners and analysts. A stable, secure and preferably a democratic Pakistan is in India's greater national interest than a Pakistan which is *jingoistic*, authoritarian and on a collusion course with India. There are several problem areas, which are identified in Indo-Pakistan relations. Pakistan's membership in the Western alliance system had brought Cold War to the doorsteps of India; India had to resort to highly skillful diplomacy to ward off the threat of 'consummation' of such an alliance relationship. Since then the Western powers particularly the US have viewed Pakistan in terms of their own global strategic interests. First, it was viewed as a bulwark against Soviet expansionism and its search for 'warm waters' in the Arabian Sea/Indian Ocean region that made Pakistan a frontline state in the Cold War calculus of the US. Soviet intervention in Afghanistan in 1978 made Pakistan once again a frontline state—this time as a conduit of arms and money to the *mujahedens*—in the grand battle between the East and the West. In the wake of the terrorist attacks in US on 11 September 2001, Pakistan has once again become a frontline state—this time in the US war against international terrorism. Besides, the West in general is looking at Pakistan as a gateway to the grand opening that awaits the exploitation of natural gas and other minerals in Central Asian region. Interestingly, Indian foreign and security policy planners have rarely, perhaps for understandable reasons, taken into account the thesis of a decline in the US power, which many neo-realists had peddled during the Cold War.

Yet, another matter of concern has been Sino-Pakistan axis. Pakistan has been the 'most reliable friend' of China ever since the latter was in near isolation in international affairs. China's clandestine support to Pakistan's nuclear and missile development programmes is an evidence of anti-India axis of their relationship. It is the play of extraneous powers and forces which are intent on creating a sort of military 'parity' between Pakistan and India which has remained a matter of great concern to Indian foreign policy planners and leaders. For, India which is several times the size of Pakistan in terms of territory, population, GNP, and military preparedness, the externally induced idea of 'parity' is seen as a bid to stymie India's own great power claim. The convergence of international and regional strategic forces and actors and the dispute over Jammu & Kashmir

bedevil India-Pakistan relations. Realists point out that Pakistan's intransigence and pursuit of adversarial relationship are also impinging on national unity. Pakistan is the direct source of many of India's domestic problems including trans-border terrorism and support for militant groups in Jammu & Kashmir and North-East of India.

2.3 PERSPECTIVE OF INTERDEPENDENCE AND 'COMPLEX' INTERDEPENDENCE

Another view, and which has gained currency, is that there are deep connections between the domestic factors and foreign policy priorities and conduct of India. A narrow and simplistic view of political-military security is not only static but outmoded also. Writings mostly from the decade of 1990s suggest that Indian foreign policy is undergoing political instability and ideological uncertainty as to the basic goals and means appropriate for the entire gamut of its external relations.

A point repeatedly underlined is that international system is much more than inter-state system; and it involves various kinds of non-state and trans-state actors and relations. These include for instance the trans-national corporations, the entire complex of NGOs-INGOs and international financial agencies. In short, it is undeniable that those who influence or have stakes in policy-making include societal forces and non-governmental actors, which are both domestic and international.

Besides, it is argued that military-political security is only one of the dimensions of security of a country; and, moreover, such a definition is not only narrow but also takes a static view of state security. Issues related to environmental degradation, trans-border migrations and the networks of international terrorism, crime and illicit finances besides growing poverty in the South and income gap between the North and the South all are matters of security and sovereignty—environmental, economic and social. Even the great powers, notwithstanding their ability to influence the course of international relations, can be unilateral and are facing a world that is increasingly inter-dependent and multi-polar. To face new types of challenges are required new forms of inter-state cooperation and trans-state activity.

Inter-dependence is more true of the international relations in the aftermath of the Cold War and with the rapidly integrating economies. Realists' understanding of security does not take into account problems such as the growing social and economic gap between the developed countries of the North and the developing countries in the South, and within each developing country the growing gap between the elite and the vast multitude of the poor; or population explosion in the developing world and the problem of the migration within and across national borders or, even for that matter, the global environmental degradation. Admittedly, these problems render a realist view of security as of declining importance and somewhat outdated.

Inter-dependence underscores the aspect of economic globalisation. In effective terms, it means the rise of new transnational economic agents, mechanisms and institutions. These are trans-national corporations, World Trade Organisation (WTO), and International Monetary Fund and the World Bank along with the G-7 countries. Patterns and volume of capital, technology control regimes, economic and increasingly political and social conditions attached to loans and assistance or access to the markets of developed countries, and concerted pressures built by industrialised

countries importantly US through the WTO on developing economies to open their agricultural, industrial, services, and financial sectors to global financial and economic actors all mean that the notion of economic sovereignty has become outmoded. A number of militarily strong states have experienced economic regression, even collapse in the 1990s. A major challenge for Indian foreign policy is how to intervene in these emerging international economic institutional patterns. In other words, India's foreign policy in the present and in the future will have a large economic content. Put differently, what should India's place in the global economy be? The question has become as important, if not, more important than the goal of a great power status. Geo-economics has taken precedence over geo-politics. National security is today closely related to the prosperity and standard of life of its citizens.

In view of the above, it is argued that India better rid itself of the realist framework, and thereby of great power status. In the first place, in our increasingly inter-dependent world, even great powers are not able to influence decisively the course of international relations. This is true even of the US—the sole super power—which perhaps had exercised a greater influence during rather than after the Cold War. Other great powers including Britain, France and potentially Germany and Japan have even less influence today. In the complex inter-dependent world, there is diffusion of power and influence within the international system favouring the emergence of multipolarity and a concert of powers that would include India also. More so, India needs to seize and exploit judiciously the opportunities that economic globalisation is offering. It needs to enter into coalitions of the like-minded countries to advance its economic goals.

Indian realists have paid a good deal of attention to China as potentially a great power, even as a future super power. It is suggested that India can advantageously build economic bridges with China while resolving the border dispute in a pragmatic “give-and-take” fashion. In contemporary times, geographical contiguity need not produce a naturally adversarial relationship; on the contrary it can be the beginning of trans-border trade, investment, and integrated production system. The profile of the two-way trade between China and India is presented as proof of the logic of geo-economics.

The realist goal of regional pre-eminence, critics argue, has presented insurmountable problems. In its place, Indian foreign policy should focus foremost on economic cooperation in South Asia. Normally, two aspects of a South Asia-centric foreign policy are stressed upon. In the short and medium term, it is stressed that relations with Pakistan be managed in a tension-defusing manner so as to gradually transform that relationship. India may as well launch a peace offensive towards Pakistan through a series of confidence-building measures, reciprocal arrangements for verification of nuclear and related issues, greater civil society interaction, etc. The second element in this view is to realise the goal of South Asian economic cooperation. In the absence of a robust South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), not only the economic diplomacy to interact with other regional economic forums such as the Asia Pacific Economic Co-operation (APEC) or South American Common Market (MERCOSUR) etc. will bear limited dividend, India's own search for regional pre-eminence gets pushed that far into the future. Regional economic cooperation is seen as a stepping-stone for an eventual political community in South Asia, which, in the long term, is also necessary to keep extra-regional powers away and out of the region. It is through a complex South Asia-centric policy that some satisfactory and enduring solutions could be found to the disturbing inter-state relations—be it separatism in Kashmir, trans-border terrorism, influx of Bangladesh refugees, or the Tamil issue in Sri Lanka.

Inter-dependence calls for a different kind of pragmatism that focuses on issues of trade and economic cooperation. Indications of change are already evident. For instance, the role of economic ministries in the making of foreign economic policies has increased, while the Ministry of External Affairs especially India's diplomatic missions abroad are playing more the role of a 'facilitator'. Among the domestic constituencies impacting the foreign policy, the role of corporate sector is on the ascendance. Governments may make policies but it is the corporate world, which is realising those policies. It is a moot point whether India's corporate sector has become an influential member of the 'strategic community'.

It is to be noted that some of the above analyses are also part of the realist perception, which admit of the metamorphic changes in the international system. Admittedly, Indian strategy is one of 'muddling through' without either racing towards total globalisation or relinquishing the conventional political-military dimension of national interest and security.

2.4 NEW WORLD ORDER

Interdependence between rich and poor, and powerful and the weak are bound to create asymmetrical relationship, which enhances the dependence of the poor and weak over the rich and the powerful. Globalisation means among others that the locus of decision-making is shifting beyond the control of national sovereignty. Diminished autonomy in international relations means loss of decision-making powers not only in economic but also in political sphere. Whether it is policies of investment, import of technology or even foreign aid, conditionalities, which are not only of economic but also of political and social nature, are being attached. Conditionalities are intrusive and strain the democratic process of contestation and consensus, rendering governments not only powerless but also unpopular and illegitimate. Equally deleterious are the consequences for societal cohesion and stability. Internally arrived consensus and ideological preferences are being given a go-bye as internationally prescribed uniform and standardised formulae are being adopted in economic, political and social areas by countries one after another. Self-perception and self-confidence of people are on the wane and paving way for bitterness and discontentment leading to outbursts of chauvanism, fundamentalism etc. Diminished status in international system and the pressures coming from the US and other great powers and the IMF/ World Bank are impinging on the domestic economic and democratic processes of India too.

Globalisation is singularly the most important dimension of the new hegemonic world order that the advanced capitalist countries led by the US are imposing on the countries of the South including India. One significant consequence witnessed is the rolling back of the Nehruvian framework of the Indian foreign policy. Not only has the international public space for India shrunk gravely, but also the autonomy of action and the ethical dimension of its Non-aligned foreign policy. More dangerously, the US-led New World Order has put the concept of nation-state in the countries of the South in serious crisis. Several states have dissolved; others have been intervened in the name of general well-being and protection of the populations. The New World Order threatens the assiduously built national consensus on an independent foreign policy, national security, national unity and a democratic order.

Critics portend the dangers of the New World Order for India; and warn against national goals and aspirations becoming hostage to US unilateralism and conditionalities of international institutions.

2.5 NON-ALIGNMENT AND THE NEHRUVIAN CONSENSUS

For a long time, particularly during the Nehruvian years, Non-alignment had served as the most significant approach to the study of Indian foreign policy. India never had a more coherent view of the world and of its place therein than during the heydays of Non-alignment during the 1950s and the 1960s. There was a coherence, rather a consonance, of the goals and instruments of Indian foreign policy until nearly the 1970s when the so-called Nehruvian consensus broke down, ironically for the high moral ground that Indian foreign policy had occupied on international issues and precisely for the failure of Non-aligned stance to ensure India's security (in the wake of the Chinese aggression of 1962) and its great power ambition. It is however undeniable that a Third World solidarity that had infused non-aligned policy continues to enthuse India's foreign policy in some very significant manner even today.

Nehruvian consensus was built around the ideals and principles that had developed in the course of India's struggle for freedom. The influence of Mahatma Gandhi was profound on the entire course of Indian national movement. What he had struggled for was not mere political freedom but a cultural and moral regeneration of the Indian civilisation. Nehru had combined these Gandhian moral and social imperatives while analysing the course of international relations between the two World Wars. Nehru had found that the two dominant norms in international relations were the politics of power and the threat of force. It were these norms that had caused the onset of First World War, failure of League of Nations, rise of fascism, and the politics of alliance and counter-alliance leading to the outbreak of the Second World War. Nehru was very perceptive in foreseeing the working of the same norms behind the unfolding rivalry between the US and the Soviet Union.

It remains a matter of debate among scholars to view Nehru as an idealist who sought to base Indian foreign policy on certain ideals; or somewhat even as a realist who accorded high importance to diplomacy in order to circumvent the power politics of international system. By placing Indian foreign policy on the precepts of non-alignment, Nehru had simultaneously pushed for normative changes in the international system and thereby secure the perceived national interests of India.

How did he reconcile these goals? In the first place, non-alignment was based on securing the independence and freedom of action especially of the newly independent countries of Asia and Africa. In that respect, Nehruvian foreign policy was premised on the idea of sovereign nation-states as the units of the international system. Secondly, Nehru sought to upgrade the aspect of inter-state cooperation—in place of confrontation which was inherent in the power politics—in the international system. One can see this pragmatic mix of idealism and hard-headed national interest in at least three important concerns of Indian foreign policy under him. Non-alignment was a response to the threats posed to the international system by the two super powers armed with nuclear weapons who were engaged in encapsulating and subordinating the weaker regions of the world. In this way, the super power rivalry that was beginning to expand beyond the Western world so as to include in its fold the countries of the developing world constituted a direct threat to the international system. In other words, Cold War marked a regression to the evolution of a universal, democratic international society. Non-alignment was a principled and pragmatic step to retain and widen the space for autonomy in the rapidly shrinking international

public space caused by the bloc politics. Nehru was very perceptive a realist to have foreseen the course of international relations and exhort India and the other struggling colonies against the dangers of bipolarity as early as 1946.

Lack of concern for or importance attached to the national security is often the criticism levelled against the Nehruvian framework of Indian foreign policy. However, the enthusiasts of the non-aligned framework argue cogently that by insisting upon the autonomy of foreign policy decision-making and by containing the expansionism of Cold War, Nehru was as well addressing the core issue of national security. That non-alignment was more than idealism was apparent in the context of India's relations with Pakistan. A non-aligned stance did not close the windows of opportunity towards the West including importantly US, discouraged the formation of Soviet-China axis (who were until at least 1957 close friends) against India, and kept relations with Pakistan and Indian position on Kashmir intact in the face of the fact of Pakistan's membership in the Western alliance system. The same primacy of diplomacy was evident in the way Nehru sought to tackle Chinese challenge to Indian security; first through *panchsheel* and *Hindi-Chini bhai bhai* and later, building closer relations with Khrushchev's Soviet Union which was beginning to acknowledge NAM as its 'natural ally'. The military debacle against China notwithstanding, the reliance on skillful diplomacy to keep India as a prominent power while at the same time resetting the norms of international system away from power politics were the hallmark of Indian foreign policy under Nehru.

The relevance of Nehruvian consensus remains under debate in the changed circumstance of today. However, one may still argue that the reliance on skillful diplomacy rather than military force was never more relevant than today as India seeks to engage a whole range of powers to work out strategic understandings and economic cooperation. To the contrary is the view that considers Nehruvian consensus as outmoded and largely abandoned. For one, the international public space, which had allowed Nehru, and the Non-aligned Movement in general, autonomy of action has shrunk. Besides, Non-aligned Movement itself has lost its internal coherence and unity of purpose so as to be of any relevance.

Apart from putting the Non-aligned foreign policy of India in the larger cultural and historical context of Indian freedom movement, analysts invariably pay glowing tributes to the personal influence of Nehru on the thinking and conduct of India's foreign policy. Nehru was a keen observer of international affairs and had devoted considerable time to formulating, thinking and position of the national movement on issues of international importance. He was his foreign minister. He continued to formulate the Indian foreign policy practically himself throughout his term as prime minister; and would consult only a very close group of ministers including Sardar Patel, Maulana Abul Kalam Azad, Dr. Radhakrishnan, and V. K. Krishna Menon and officials such as Gopalaswamy Ayyangar, Sir B. N. Rao, Sir Girija Shankar Bajpai and India's first foreign secretary K.P.S. Menon-Senior. During the early period of Nehru's prime ministership, the institutional and structured policy planning mechanisms were either lacking or were weak. J. N. Dixit, India's former foreign secretary has opined "Jawaharlal Nehru was the perceiver of national concerns and interests, conceptualiser of policies and options to meet them, and the initiator of policies and actions on all aspects of External Affairs. He had the unique advantage of back-up by unqualified national consensus on priorities as well as policies in External Affairs." He was able to carry the cabinet, the parliament, the political parties and the public opinion along with him on all-important aspects of Indian foreign policy.

2.6 SUMMARY

India's foreign policy combines various influences, factors, goals and mechanisms. It is for these reasons that no single theoretical approach is appropriate for the study of India's foreign policy. The eclectic approach is perhaps the best to the study of India's foreign policy. There is an indigenous quality to the writings of Indian foreign policy; and these writings are also responding to diverse forces and factors both — domestic and international. Statesmen and policy planners and practitioners also do not fit their ideas and practices into theoretical frameworks.

A perusal of these varieties of approaches nevertheless reveals the principles and ideals, mechanisms and instruments, and the actors and forces that have come to frame the objectives and devise appropriate instruments of foreign policy. And this precisely is the purpose of studying the theme of approaches to the Indian foreign policy.

2.7 EXERCISES

- 1) Describe briefly the 'Realist' view of Indian foreign policy.
- 2) What do you understand by the term 'Nehruvian Consensus'?
- 3) Highlight the points of divergence in the Realist and Inter-dependence approaches to the study of Indian foreign policy.

