

Transforming India's Foreign Policy : Modi 2.0

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ABSTRACT

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The present paper is an analysis of India's foreign policy during the present government known as Modi 2.0. It has evolved from the grip of BJP ideologues to the diplomats and emissaries. Modi 1.0 was dominated by RSS's mantra but Modi 2.0 is liberated from outdated and archaic policies of foreign affairs. Indian has shown its intelligence level to the World and soaring higher and higher day by day.

Keywords : Foreign Policy, RSS

INTRODUCTION

Since the present government came into power for the second time in 2019, it has concentrated on bringing a sea change in the country's foreign policies. There is a new impetus in India's overseas policy, a scientific sharpness to its external policy plan, verbalization and functioning. The new foreign policy is a clear departure from the prejudiced and opinionated diplomacy that characterised the foreign policy of Prime Minister Narendra Modi 1.0. There is today an evident revolution in India's engagement of the world. The Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) seems to have taken back the gearstick of the country's foreign policy from the party ideologues, preferring substance over style.

The foreign policy of Narendra Modi 1.0. was a conciliatory policy. It focused on Hindutva ideology and imperious aggression towards the region/neighbourhood. But in the second regime,

India's neighbourhood policy is an act in vigilant, well-calibrated and well-thought-out policy overtures towards most of the region, with a profound craving to triumph back the neighbours. During Modi 1.0, relations with Nepal, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka were intricate due to ideological overtones and belligerent policies. The interference in Kathmandu's making of the constitution and the ensuing barrier of Nepal; peeving the Bangladeshis by distasteful references; endeavouring to be the kingmaker in the Sri Lankan elections, seemed to emerge from an authoritative attitude. Such an 'either you are with us or against us' attitude impelled many of India's neighbours to opt for the second choice allowing China a free pass into India's traditional sphere of influence, at least to some extent.

The RSS has always sought to build India a Hindu-State incorporating its neighbouring territories as was proposed by its one of the prominent ideologues V D Savarkar: Our first and

foremost aim in our political activities must always be to guard the integrity of Hindusthan intact. Hindusthan to us does not only mean the so-called British India but comprises even those parts which are under the French and the Portuguese possessions; Gomantak and Pondicherry are as integral parts of our motherland as Maharashtra or Bengal. From the Indus to the Himalayas, from the Himalayas to Tibet, from Tibet to Burma and from Burma to the southern and western seas run the lines of the boundaries of our land. The whole territory including Kashmere and Nepal, Gomantak, Pondicherry and other French possessions constitutes our national and territorial unit and must be consolidated in a free and centralised state. It must ever remain undivided and indivisible. Any attempt to divide this territorial and national unity of Hindusthan so as, for example, to break it up into Hindu and Moslem zones, must be opposed tooth and nail and chastised as an act of treason and treachery.

But such thoughts cannot be materialised and concretised in the current scenario. Things have changed significantly and the Modi 2.0 is well aware of it. In the matter of Taliban India has shown an unprecedented measure. It has shaded its past reservations and its outreach to the West Asian/Gulf states is commendable. India's new Nepal policy is devoid of Savarkar's Rashtriya Swayam Sewak Sangh's fantasies and ambassadorial imperiousness. Nepal shares not only a border of over 1850 km with five Indian states – Sikkim, West Bengal, Bihar, Uttar Pradesh and Uttarakhand, but also cultural and religious affinities with India. Taking all these points into considerations, Modi 2.0 has modified India's foreign policies for Nepal. During Modi 1.0 (2014-2019) there have been regular exchanges of high-level visits and interactions between India and Nepal. Prime Minister Narendra Modi visited Nepal twice in 2014 once for a bilateral visit in August and in November for the 18th SAARC Summit. Nepalese Prime Minister Mr. K.P. Sharma

Oli paid a State visit to India on 19-24 February 2016. Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Home Affairs of Nepal Mr. Bimalendra Nidhi visited India on 18-22 August 2016 as Special Envoy of the Prime Minister. Nepalese Prime Minister Mr. Pushpa Kamal Dahal visited India twice in 2016 –first on a State visit and on and then to participate in the 1st BRICS-BIMSTEC leaders' summit in Goa. Prime Minister of Nepal Mr. K.P. Sharma Oli visited India from 30-31 May 2019 to attend the oath-taking ceremony of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Union Council of Ministers. All these visits by the topmost leaders of both the countries resulted in new affairs between the two neighbours. And the entire credit goes to the dynamic leadership of India.

India's affable outreach to both Bangladesh and Sri Lanka are already yielding desirable results. Barring from the 'illegal Bangladeshi migrants' issue that is still a cause of contention largely because of electoral reasons, the affection generated by the current golden jubilee celebrations of Bangladesh's emancipation from Pakistan could further fortify the association.

India's many-sided engagements have also become more result-driven and interest-based which it seems to follow without getting caught in any sanctimonious speechifying. India's membership and presidency of the United Nations Security Council watched some unbendable positions from the nation. New Delhi's able framing of the world body's response to the crisis in Afghanistan along with an outreach to the Taliban, when much of the world was struggling to make up its mind on how to deal with Taliban 2.0, was remarkable. India's far more determined engagement of the **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue** (India, Australia, Japan and the U.S.) and the global climate change negotiations in Glasgow, while at the same time pushing back attempts at securitising climate change at the UNSC, also specify that it is enthusiastic to be a conscientious

stakeholder in global as well as regional governance fora.

For a country like India, situated in frosty environs and caught amidst the fancies of great power competition among the United States, Russia and China, it is not easy to balance an assortment of geopolitical contradictions. India's foreign policy has, of late, exhibited a great deal of legerdemain and elasticity in managing those contradictions to the extent possible. India's relationship with Russia has always been problematic for its neighbouring countries. Even as India is closer to the United States of America, Russia continues to play a decisive responsibility in Indian stratagem. Modi 2.0 has revolutionised India's affairs with Russia despite its closer relationship with the United States. Now the country is not only its superpower affairs with its oldest friends but also looking for new ties across the World and India has reaped the golden harvest of these affairs post-surgical strikes on Pakistan.

In the broader West Asian region too, India's balancing acts have been significant: between the Arab States and Israel, Israel and Iran, Iran and the Gulf States, and Iran and the U.S. In all of these, Iran seems to be the weakest link in India's West Asian balancing acts, but that is a different story. The influx of the West Asian Quad comprising the U.S., India, UAE and Israel is yet another signal of the newfound foreign policy flair in New Delhi. On the flipside the question is whether New Delhi can deliver on all these promising partnerships given the sharp staff shortage in the MEA. (in his article Rebooting India's foreign Ministry, Pranay Ahluwalia states: The Indian Foreign Service (IFS) currently has nearly 850 IFS officers. To offer some comparisons: Singapore has 1,066; China is estimated to have 7,500, and the U.S. Foreign Service has 13,790. This is a long-standing limitation for India. In 2016, India's Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs expressed alarm at the 15 per cent

shortage of officers in the Foreign Service. Five years later, at 13 per cent, this shortage continues to persist.

If New Delhi desires to be a system-shaping power, it must have more officials to execute the planning prepared by the MEA.

Regardless of the military stand-off on the Line of Actual Control (LAC), mutual trade has only shot up: India-China trade, for example, augmented by a record 62.7% in the first half of 2021. New Delhi has also been able to engage the China-dominated Shanghai Cooperation Organisation even as it is strengthening its participation in the Quad. As Indian Foreign Minister S. Jayshankar said:

Thirty years ago there was virtually no trade with China. Today, China is our number two trade partner after the US. There was no travel with China... We engaged with each other in pretty much every domain.

The Modi government seems to have realised that its desire to make India a \$5 trillion economy (from the current \$3 trillion) by 2024-25 will remain a daydream unless it is able to proactively hunt trade agreements, among other things.

In sum, it can be concluded that India is shedding its non-alignment hangover, embracing its progressively more crucial place and vigorously shielding and projecting its interests abroad. New Delhi appears to have realised that the pursuit of national interest is a seriously big business and must move beyond the endorsement of ideological predilections and personality cults. An innovative and reinvigorated Indian foreign policy must find ways of imagining a new regionalism with or exclusive of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), and must shed its mania with Pakistan and terrorism. Modi 2.0 has also concluded that Pakistan or terrorism poses no existential intimidation or threats to India nor

should the country fritter too many diplomatic resources on them. Maintaining diplomatic relationships is far better than pondering over less significant issues. Neighbourhood threats have also been converted into opportunities.

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