

“ Unveiling the Transformative Dynamics of India’s Foreign Policy and Emerging Dimensions of Global Engagement “

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***Abstract** – In the recent past, India has unveiled a new foreign policy, signalling an obvious and imperative shift in its global engagement. India's new foreign policy reflects a dynamic approach to global affairs with an aim to cultivate a favourable international environment for its rapid economic growth and development. The present research paper explores the change in strategic priorities and objectives of India's foreign policy and how does it aim to manoeuvre the international landscape to foster and strengthen bilateral and multilateral relationships.*

***Key words** - India's Foreign Policy, Changing Strategic Priorities, Bilateral and Multilateral Relationships, Economic Diplomacy*

Introduction

India's foreign affairs saw some categorical changes from the beginning of 90s, bringing in pivotal changes to its economic system. India had to practically abandon its old role in favour of giving higher priority to promoting international economic cooperation and consequently economic diplomacy, under the open and free market economic system and becoming one with the core socio-liberal-economic democracies of the world preordain. India opened up to foreign direct investment and access to markets in the developed world. The slow but successful economic reforms unleashed the economic potential of the nation, generating rapid economic growth, thus providing a basis to transform its relations with great powers, regional rivals Pakistan and China, and the neighbourhood as a whole (Viquaruddin, M., 2018). Evolving Indian diplomacy focuses its engagement with the major powers, the USA, China, other P-5 member countries, and hereto unexplored Africa has loomed into focus along with Latin America and economic diplomacy has taken the pole above that of political and security issues.

The dynamics of India's foreign policy - The dynamics of India's foreign policy are clearly traceable in the fact that India continues to maintain independent foreign policy decision-making while engaging with various countries and global powers. It has prioritized economic diplomacy and global trade to attract foreign investment, promote exports, and strengthen economic ties with countries worldwide, without forgoing the values of universal association. It actively engages in multilateral trade negotiations, including through the WTO, and pursues free trade agreements (FTAs) with various countries and regions. It aims to harness technologies such as artificial intelligence, space exploration, and digital connectivity for economic growth, governance, and social development. partnerships with other countries, research collaborations, and regulatory frameworks that are essential for leveraging these technologies effectively. (Tyagi, A. 2023)

The change is explicitly visible as it seeks to emphasis deepening engagements with major powers, strengthening ties with Africa, advancing digital diplomacy, advocating active multilateralism, and nurturing neighbourhood diplomacy. The changed dynamics in its foreign policy priorities is expected to play an important role to meet the challenges of the ever-changing global climate and embrace the role as a responsible global actor. India's new foreign policy places a strong emphasis on enhancing regional connectivity. Recognizing the importance of its geographical location, India seeks to strengthen economic, trade, and infrastructure ties with its neighbouring countries. Initiatives like the International North-South Transport Corridor and the Chabahar Port project in Iran are aimed at boosting regional trade and connectivity, fostering economic growth, and promoting stability in the region.

Keeping this cognizance, 'Neighbourhood First Policy' continues since the past, rooted in the value system and India continues to maintain friendly relations with all SAARC members and BIMSTEC leaders. Strengthening neighbourhood diplomacy and recognizing the importance of maintaining strong and friendly relations with its immediate neighbours has always been an integral aspect of India's foreign policy. The changed dynamics is the relentless push towards, trade, FDI and 'Make in India', contributing to India's economic development and growth. Efforts are now diverted to focus on enhancing economic integration, people-to-people exchanges, and resolving outstanding bilateral issues. Initiatives like the Neighbourhood. First Policy and the BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation) platform reflect India's commitment to promoting regional cooperation and stability. With this India has now deservedly assumed a 'leading role' globally for India, rather

than just as a 'balancing force' – India is proudly juxtaposed as a "pole" in its own right. It has also assumed a greater role for military and defence diplomacy with a willingness to participate in the global arms market as a supplier rather than as a major buyer only. The worldwide presence of India in all countries with whom we have diplomatic ties, signifies the importance we attach to all our bilateral ties, irrespective of size, strength or distance. Connectivity, commercial ties and cultural bonds are the three Cs of India's Foreign Policy mantra and the huge public boost in bonding with the diaspora is unprecedented. (Shaw, D.2019)

Foreign Policy of any nation has exceedingly multi facial aspects and India has seen many changes since the decolonization process that started in 1947 as an independent nation to a new approach with changing dimensions in its foreign policy and India's dealing with the world.

Keeping its distance from the United States, Israel, and the Persian Gulf states on regional issues has long been India's default mode in the Middle East. India partnering with the US, Israel, and the UAE in the region is a reflection of how fundamentally India's foreign policy in the Middle East has shifted. Engagements with Major Powers across the globe is one major hallmark of India's foreign policy that includes bolstering strategic partnerships with countries like the United States, Japan, Australia, and European nations. Strengthening these relationships is essential for India to circumnavigate complex geopolitical strategic challenges, promote economic cooperation as well as address security concerns. (Ojha, R.2003) India aims to engage with the global community by advancing digital diplomacy and leveraging technology and social media platforms. India's foreign policy seeks to embrace digital diplomacy through platforms like the India-ASEAN virtual summit and the global virtual conference on cyber space. Promoting and strengthening ties with the African nations through increased trade, investment, and development assistance is another important change in India's foreign policy. United States, India, Israel, and the United Arab Emirates have agreed to set up a new joint working group often touted as 'new Middle East quad' to coordinate strategy. By endorsing active multilateralism, India seeks to play a proactive role in global forums like the United Nations, G20, BRICS, and the Indian Ocean Rim Association. By engaging with multilateral institutions, India aims to shape global agendas, advocate for its interests, and contribute to finding collective solutions to global challenges such as climate change, cybersecurity, and , sustainable development. (Kataria, K. 2023)

The dynamics of the changing policy have to be viewed against the stressed global economic situation post COVID, financial crisis and recession, which were followed by rise of China and shifting of fulcrum of global power from the West to the East

Major Challenges to India's Foreign Policy – While the new foreign policy has enabled India to navigate the turbulent international territories with ease, the challenges are deep and real. Though India's external engagements have yielded important gains during the last years due to international activism, and, despite its small size, has usually managed to punch above its weight, the environment around India remains unsettled in diverse ways. The evidence suggests that India is still unable to shape its surroundings, both near and afar, to suit its interests, sometimes because of failed initiatives but, more fundamentally, because it still lacks the material capacities and the appropriate kinds of penetration abroad that would induce greater support for its objectives by others to curb the fallout of these issues.

Because India often lacks the economic instruments of influence—deep trade links, significant financial investments, or extensive physical connectivity—and cannot easily utilize its military forces without putting at risk other national goals, New Delhi's influence even within the Indian subcontinent and its immediate peripheries—in Afghanistan, Burma, the Maldives, Nepal, Pakistan, Sri Lanka, and the Indian Ocean island states—is largely dependent on which political forces are dominant within these countries at any given point in time.(Tellis, Ashley,2019). Non-conducive external environment as a result of rivalry between major powers, Russia-Ukraine war among other reasons have created stressed international environment.

India's huge dependency for its energy security of India is something that is a very potent challenge, looking at the pump prices of petrol and diesel. Unfortunately, India's dependence on imports of oil and gas, in the absence of large recoveries at home, has only grown over the years. Meanwhile, foreign policy has to tread carefully so that our supplies of crude oil from the Middle East and Iran are not upset. Disintegrating global frameworks for cooperation, domestic systemic constraints and lack of resources for effective engagement with diaspora population, rise of non-traditional challenges and threats like maritime geopolitics of Indo-Pacific, nuclear weapons, pandemics and emerging technologies ,climate change and environmental degradation, pandemics like COVID 19, drug trafficking and human trafficking, food security are among the other major problems that the international community needs to work together.

Regional Instability due to factors like border disputes, terrorism etc. continues to remain a major menace, despite the best effort nationally. Terrorism hardly respects international boundaries. Despite the best effort nationally, without international cooperation, it is impossible to stamp out this global menace. Sharing of intelligence, choking the sources of weapons, technology and funding, bringing perpetrators to justice, are some of the measures that have to put in place through regional and international negotiations.

Tactics to combat Challenges to India's Foreign Policy - Mindful efforts are required for India's Foreign Policy to navigate through the turbulent international environment. Tactful dealing with China for defending India's territorial integrity and striving to stabilise relations with Pakistan and yet be prepared to deal with any eventuality along with seems to be the right approach as of now. Continued stability and prosperity at home and political consensus on broad foreign policy parameters, will help India reach this goal. (Shaw, D.2019) Expanding the domain of strategic autonomy by engaging with developing and emerging economies, securing national interests like border security, energy and food security, non-discriminatory global trade and with a proactive foreign policy, India should be able to navigate efficaciously through the turbulent terrains of the international subtleties.

Conclusion – India has clearly demonstrated its will to play a leading role in the global arena and be counted as 'pole' in its own right. India's foreign policy has evolved and changed over the last years, usually at a steady pace, but sometimes drastically to respond to fast changing global or regional scenario. Foreign policy can only go so far and diplomacy can be that effective, to the extent of a country's political, social and economic health. India has been fortunate to enjoy good growth and prosperity for the last three decades. This has provided greater leverage to India's foreign policy, and allowed far greater resources to be allocated for the conduct of diplomacy, including consolidating and strengthening our diplomatic presence all across the globe. Transition in Indian foreign policy is about the shift from being a great power of the third world to the recognition of the potential that India could also emerge as a major economic power even though it is a soft state, is a journey worthwhile and one of the most significant dimensions of the contemporary foreign policy.

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