

Modi Era in India's Foreign Policy

Dr. Kanchan Mishra

Associate Professor, Department of Defence and Strategic Studies, V.S.S.D. College, Kanpur, Uttar Pradesh, India

ABSTRACT: The foreign policy of the Modi government (also referred to as the Modi doctrine) is associated with the policy initiatives made towards other states by the current government of India after Narendra Modi assumed the office of prime minister on May 26, 2014. The Ministry of External Affairs, headed by External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, is responsible for executing the foreign policy of India. Modi's foreign policy is focused on improving relations with neighboring countries in South Asia, engaging the extended neighbourhood of Southeast Asia and the major global powers. In pursuit of this, he has made official visits to Bhutan, Nepal, and Japan within the first 100 days of his government, followed by visits to the United States, Myanmar, Australia, and Fiji. In his former role as Chief Minister of Gujarat, Modi made several foreign trips to foster business relations with major Asian economic powers. This included meetings with Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe in 2007 and 2012, which reportedly built personal rapport. He also reached out for investment deals with China and Israel, who sought to increase economic ties beyond defense and agriculture, according to Israeli Ambassador Alon Ushpiz. Modi was widely appreciated for his endeavor to organize Vibrant Gujarat, a biannual international business summit, which welcomed investment in his home state and helped build a pro-development and business friendly image.

KEYWORDS: Narendra Modi, prime minister, foreign, policy, chief, ambassador, Gujarat

I. INTRODUCTION

Few Indian prime ministers—with the clear exception of the first, Jawaharlal Nehru—have prompted as intense and sustained a debate about their foreign policy as Narendra Modi.

In part, this is due to the energy he and his Bharatiya Janata Party-led government brought to the conduct of international relations after their first landslide win in the May 2014 general election. In contrast to his predecessor, Manmohan Singh, Modi proved a very enthusiastic traveller, embarking on as many foreign visits during his first term in office as Singh did in a decade, attending a series of high-profile summits, and aiming to establish rapport with his counterparts in China, Japan, and the United States, as well as in South Asia. His government also revamped key initiatives—such as 'Look East', rendered into 'Act East'—and launched others, including a renewed effort to build better ties with India's neighbours, branded 'Neighbourhood First'.





It promised to play a major role in providing security and improving infrastructure in the Indian Ocean region, as well as to enhance its defence and diplomatic ties with states stretching from the Middle East through Central and South Asia to Southeast Asia. Significantly, the Modi government also pledged to reground Indian foreign policy in a set of principles more in tune with what it views as India's traditions, and to restore its standing in the world, ensuring its status and interests are respected by all, including major powers like the United States or China.[1,2]

Whether Modi and his ministers have achieved these objectives or will achieve them with the policies they have put in place are keenly contested questions. Some argue that the Modi government has revolutionised as well as energised foreign policy, boosted national pride and the country's 'soft power' in the world, strengthened relationships with key partners, and restored the standing of India in the world, as well as the confidence of foreign investors. The 'Modi government's foreign policy has been transformative', one study concluded, and Modi 'has established himself' as both 'a world leader' and a 'policy entrepreneur'. Footnote2 His 'open embrace' of a strategic partnership with the United States has been praised as both far-sighted and prudent and his handling of an increasingly assertive China cast as deft. In parallel, his government's responses to terrorist attacks across Kashmir's Line of Control—including a punitive raid by Indian special forces and an air strike into Pakistan proper—have been praised for their strength and their supposed deterrent effects on Islamabad.[3,4]

Others are less complimentary. A number of analysts argue that Modi and his ministers have changed less than might at first appear. For them, the basic strategy and overall 'trajectory', Rajesh Basrur put it, of Indian foreign policy is largely 'unchanged'. Footnote3 Some suggest that the Modi government's claims to have broken from long-standing ways of thinking about or practicing foreign policy are unconvincing. Many question its management of key relationships and challenges. [5,6]



They argue that since 2014 the US-India partnership has not progressed as far and as fast as it might and that even when the disruptive effects of Donald J. Trump are taken into account, the Modi government bears a significant amount of responsibility for those failings. The administration's handling of relations with China and Pakistan has been subjected to even more sustained criticism, even if his various critics disagree on the exact source of the problem. Modi has been assailed for being too confrontational with China, to India's detriment, and at the same time, criticised for being too deferential to its President, Xi Jinping. His government's efforts to diplomatically isolate Pakistan over

its alleged backing of terrorism have found more support, but doubt remains in some minds about India is more or less secure as a result of its punitive raids across the Line of Control and its heavy-handedness in Kashmir Footnote4 Similarly, Modi's efforts to strengthen ties with India's South Asian neighbours and like-minded states in the wider Indo-Pacific region have received very mixed assessments.[7,8]

II. DISCUSSION

In the Strategic domain, India's outreach to Africa and Central Asia has been a major success story of India's mature and nimble diplomacy. India's outreach to littoral's through its policy of SAGAR has made it a trusted partner in terms of HADR and other maritime challenges particularly in tackling of Anti- Piracy. This has translated into immense goodwill for India along with granting of permission for use of overseas military bases in Seychelles, Mauritius, Madagascar as well as Djibouti. India's recent admission into IOC as the observer state and it's recently conducted HADR operations like Operation Vanilla to come to the rescue of the cyclone hit Madagascar and it's a leadership role in providing medical assistance to Seychelles in the ongoing pandemic highlights and establishes its role as a "First Responder" and augurs well for its SAGAR doctrine.[9,10]



On the Goeconomic front, while India decided to abstain from joining Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership, it has of late, made an earnest effort at reviewing FTA's with its key partners. The US isolationism, near dormant state of WTO's Appellate Body and decline of major institutions representing the Global Liberal Economic Order, continue to pose a stiff challenge. While a limited edition of US-China trade talks promises some thaw, the overall economic situation remains highly precarious and prone to fluctuations owing to any change in the status quo in the Middle East. Spectre of BREXIT along with the slump in overall economic conditions in Europe in addition to no substantial developments being made on a possible India-EU FTA, the general perception signals a dead end in India EU trade relations as of now.[11,12]

III. RESULTS

The completion of the first year of the Modi government's second term in office in India presents a good opportunity to take stock of its successes and failures on the foreign policy front. One of the notable successes of this government has been in its outreach to India's neighborhood, which began with Modi's visit to the Maldives and Sri Lanka soon after taking office for his second term. The Maldives was very important since it seemed to be veering toward China in the time leading up to the 2018 election of the new president, Ibrahim Mohamed Solih.

Another notable success has been in the government's engagement of the Indian diaspora in different parts of the world.[13,14]



The Pakistan conundrum continues for New Delhi. There has been no let-up in the incidents of terror emanating from Pakistan. The Indian government has refused to enter into talks with Pakistan unless and until Islamabad completely stops exporting terror to India.

The road ahead for the Modi government in the foreign policy realm is mired with challenges, especially in the light of the coronavirus pandemic. Though the number of fatalities in India has been relatively low, the number of cases has shot up recently.

This presents a big worry for the government, as the economy has also suffered. It will be a huge challenge to revive the economy. New Delhi will need to cooperate with other countries in order to surpass over this crisis.[15,16]

The neighborhood seems likely to be the biggest challenge for New Delhi in the times ahead if it is to achieve its goal of being a great power. In addition, dealing with the China challenge will be key for India in the years ahead. With regards to Pakistan, India will have to think of innovative ways to tackle the threat from that country, as it has refused to budge from its stand of exporting terror to India.[17]

It also seems that New Delhi will get a lot closer to the United States than in the earlier times, since the threat from China shows few signs of diminishing. Trump has already advocated that India should be included along with other countries in the G-7 to make it the G-11, in the meantime.

IV. CONCLUSION

Ever since the Narendra Modi government came to power in India in May 2014, there has been a debate in the policy and academic community about its foreign policy.



Foreign policy act to lay on SAGAR doctrine

While some argued that Modi is fundamentally altering the trajectory of Indian foreign policy, most disagreed. They talked of how the Modi government's shift is only about the style and not substance. Yes, Narendra Modi may be a more energetic and visible prime minister on the foreign policy front, but he has only tinkered with the long-held foreign and national security assumptions of India. The Modi government may not have uttered the world non-alignment, but in practice it is balancing between the United States and China. It may have ignored Pakistan, but in practice it has tried to find a modus vivendi with Islamabad. It may have changed the nomenclature from "Look East" to "Act East," but in practice India's engagement with East and Southeast Asia remains a continuation of the past. It may want to be a big player on the global stage, but it doesn't have the ability to project its aspirations adequately. And most significantly, the Modi government may have had a stronger rhetoric against Pakistan and terrorism, in practice, there are limits to what it can do on the ground.[18,19]

Modi's strong response to the terror strikes in Pulwama at the very end of his first term in office has made it clear that despite his critics, he has managed to change the fundamentals of Indian foreign and security policy in his five years in office. The use of air power to target terror camps deep inside Pakistani territory last week was the first such act after the 1971 war. It shattered the myth of Pakistan's nuclear capability and has thrown open the possibility of India fighting a limited conventional war if need be. It has put the onus back on Pakistan for escalation. Modi's message to Pakistan has been heard around the world and will have serious ramifications for India's global engagement. India has not only defined these air strikes as "non-military pre-emptive" action, but has also taken Pakistan to the ICJ and worked with the Financial Action Task Force to turn the screws on Pakistan, thereby underlining the central difference between a "responsible" India and a "rogue" Pakistan. India's Pakistan policy has been altered, perhaps unequivocally.



Modi age

But this is not only about Pakistan. Modi has deftly handled major power relations at a time when major powers are increasingly in contestation. When he had come to office, Modi had challenged his senior diplomats “to help India position itself in a leading role, rather than [as] just a balancing force, globally.” Underscoring that it’s time India becomes part of the rule-making process, Gokhale argued: “In the rules-based order, India would have a stronger position in multilateral institutions.” This is as much an assertion of India’s desire to play a larger global role as it is about India changing its approach to global engagement.[20,21]

While sections of the Indian political intellectual establishment still retain a somewhat reflexive anti-Americanism, Modi has used his decisive mandate to carve a new partnership with the United States to harness its capital and technology for his domestic development agenda. He is not ambivalent about positioning India as a challenger to China’s growing regional might and assertiveness.[22]

REFERENCES

1. Harsh V. Pant. "Out With Non-Alignment, In With a 'Modi Doctrine'". The Diplomat. Retrieved 1 February 2015.
2. ^ Christophe Jaffrelot. "A Modi Doctrine?". Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. Retrieved 1 February 2015.
3. ^ Lakshmi, Rama. "Modi's speech in Nepal shows India is paying attention to its neighbors". The Washington Post. Retrieved 6 August 2014.
4. ^ Rajeev Sharma. "Modi's equation with Shinzo Abe will make Mission Japan a success". Firstpost. Retrieved 15 June 2014.
5. ^ "Sino-India ties set for "big boost" under Modi: Chinese media". Zeenews.india.com. 27 May 2014. Retrieved 15 June 2014.
6. ^ Moskowitz, Jeff (23 May 2014). "Is Narendra Modi, India's New Prime Minister, Israel's New Best Friend?". Tablet Magazine. Retrieved 28 July 2014.
7. ^ "Israel to expand ties with Modi govt, offers help in Ganga clean-up". The Indian Express. 13 June 2014. Retrieved 15 June 2014.
8. ^ "Vibrant Gujarat Summit 2013: Ratan Tata praises Narendra Modi". The Times of India. 11 January 2013. Retrieved 5 August 2014.



9. ^ "In Arunachal, Narendra Modi warns China". The Indian Express. 23 February 2014. Retrieved 15 June 2014.
10. ^ "Why Modi is right on the Bangladeshi migrants' issue". Oneindia.in. 13 May 2014. Retrieved 6 August 2014.
11. ^ "India's 2014 Elections: Narendra Modi Says Some Illegal Immigrants From Bangladesh Are Better Than Others". International Business Times. 11 September 2001. Retrieved 15 June 2014.
12. ^ "Modi pledges strong foreign policy". Independent Online. South Africa. 9 June 2014. Retrieved 15 June 2014.
13. ^ Busvine, Douglas (16 May 2014). "Election landslide to embolden India's Modi on world stage". Reuters. Retrieved 23 June 2014.
14. ^ Aswathy (17 May 2014). "World leaders, media react to Narendra Modi led BJP's election victory". Oneindia.in. Retrieved 23 June 2014.
15. ^ Krishna Uppuluri (25 May 2014). "Narendra Modi's swearing-in offers a new lease of life to SAARC". Daily News and Analysis. Retrieved 15 June 2014.
16. ^ "PM swearing-in: US media praises Modi for inviting all SAARC leaders". Firstpost. 27 May 2014. Retrieved 5 August 2014.
17. ^ "China Tries to Woo India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi". Bloomberg BusinessWeek. 10 June 2014. Retrieved 15 June 2014.
18. ^ Iftikhar Gilani (10 June 2014). "Chinese Foreign Minister Wang Yi seeks Narendra Modi's company to dominate the world". Daily News and Analysis. Retrieved 15 June 2014.
19. ^ "Visit of Deputy Chairman of the Government of the Russian Federation to India (June 18–19, 2014)". Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.
20. ^ "Official Visit of Foreign Minister of French Republic to India (June 29 – July 2, 2014)". Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.
21. ^ "Visit of Foreign Secretary of United Kingdom to India (July 7–8, 2014)". Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India.
22. ^ "Russia Sanctions: India Defiant, Finland Nervous". defenseneews.com. 30 July 2014. Archived from the original on 12 August 2014. Retrieved 5 August 2014.