

## **Evaluating Modi's Foreign Policy: Continuity or Change**

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### **Abstract**

*The foreign policy of India has seen tremendous transformation under Modi's premiership underscoring that leadership plays a pivotal role in elevating the stature of a country. Modi's slogan of 'Shining India' signifies India's aspiration for acquiring great power status in international system and vision of leadership to make it happen. He has drastically shifted India's foreign policy from slow to steady approach. India's growing confidence and vigor to aspire a leading role in the world is evident in provocations of the leadership. Modi's pro-active policy and worldwide initiatives reflect India is outreaching/expanding diplomatic clout, winning the support of allies and revitalizing economic policy hence making India a rapidly growing economy in the world within two years since the current government has taken office. The success of Modi government will lie in turning the world in its favor and projecting India's soft image through raising distinct voice at international level, achieving climate change and economic development goals and strengthening elements of national power domestically. The pitfalls of current policies centered at aggravating communalism, humanitarian issues and religion oriented politics may impede India's long term struggle. The real victory of Modi's government will lie in his dealing with contemporary challenges at domestic, regional and international level.*

**Key Words:** Nehru, Indira, Modi, Shining India, Continuity and Change

Narendra Modi stepped in as India's Prime Minister with the slogan of "shining India" and that the 21<sup>st</sup> century will be "India's century." Modi's era is being conceived as marking the 'third epoch' in the foreign policy of India. He has emerged as one of the vibrant leaders not only in India but internationally, and a shrewd politician who can raise the trajectory of India for having a greater role in the global affairs. Since, he has taken over the office of premiership; India became one of the fastest growing economies in the world with current growth rate of over 7%. Additionally, India is nurturing strategic alignments in almost all regions of the world and assimilates elements of national power for its soft power projections. However, the real test of leadership will be to reform domestic and foreign policies by consolidating economic grounds, state institutions, and robust military capabilities. India's leadership needs concerted efforts to counter emerging regional and global challenges and hence achieving the pinnacle of its long term aspiration. Therefore, this paper aims to explain the historic trends in foreign policy of India and role of leadership in modifying them over the period of time. Moreover, highlighting how Modi has

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brought a shift in attributes of India's foreign policy and to what extent will it be successful for India's aspirations.

### **Theoretical Framework**

Foreign policies of states are crafted in range of complex phenomenon; the external and internal factors contribute in designing foreign policies of states. James N. Rosenau's model of Foreign Policy is taken as a framework to study the foreign policy of India and the role of dynamic leadership in leading the country. According to Rosenau, factors derive foreign policy "involved are nothing less than internal and external needs- the aspiration, attributes, culture, conflicts, capabilities, institutions, and routine – of large groups of people who have somehow managed to achieve and maintain a social, legal, and geographic identity as a nation state." (Rosenau: 1976) The foreign policy was primarily derived from geopolitical, economic, historical and strategic derivatives but contemporarily speaking, these factors are not the only determinants rather they have seen multiplication.

According to Rosenau, there are four types of factors which are major sources in foreign policy making and policy formulating behavior. They can be categorized by two methods; one is the time factor and the other being the level of analysis. The time dependent factors are static and slow, whereas the others undergo rapid transition. The second category includes systemic, societal, governmental and idiosyncratic. The geography and history are static factors which change in centuries, whereas, strategic alliances, power structures, technology, public opinion are moderately changing sources. On the other hand, crises and leadership are rapidly changing sources of foreign policy which are also known as situational factors.

Let us put into perspective India's foreign policy in the framework of Rosenau's model; how the level of analysis could be applied on India's foreign policy? Analyzing systemic level, India gained independence as a result of anti-imperialism and de-colonization process. However, systemic constraints could not impede India's resolve to stand against imperial policies. India by leading the non-aligned movement sustained and distinguished itself by not becoming a satellite state. At the regional level, it somehow aspired to assume the leadership role of the third world. At the national level, India remained a unique entity in developing institutions and attempted to adopt secular approach and democratic norms. It has embraced multi-culturalism and heterogeneous societal structures by shedding colonial legacies. At the individual level, role of leadership and attributes of personality has been an impetus behind India's foreign policy formulation and guiding force during

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crises and external hostilities while maintaining country's sovereignty and integrity and adopting autonomous foreign policy.

Additionally, the time sources such as history and geography remains inspiring factors in India's entire foreign policy. India takes inspiration from two thousand years old Hindu Civilization. Moreover, its geopolitical and geostrategic location is additional factors of national power. Since history and geography are static factors; therefore, they remained unchanged. However, India's alliance structure, technological advancement and public opinion kept on changing and have not remained inert. For instance, India continued to profess Non-Alignment but received massive military aid from the West against the Chinese and in 1971, India became an ally of the Soviet Union by signing strategic partnership agreement. Similarly, India has been technologically advancing itself. It became a nuclear weapon state in 1998 and is currently largest importer of conventional arms. (SIPRI: 2015)

Importantly, situational sources brought abrupt changes in India's foreign policy choices. Initially, India's leadership did not account for military as an important tool of power politics. However, Sino-India war (situational factor) abruptly shifted India's foreign policy choices (Rosenau's rapid changing sources). However, military crises with China as well as Pakistan were external factors. Similarly, leadership (internal factors) has been dominating feature of India's domestic and foreign policies. Since inception, India got visionary leader such as Jawaharlal Nehru who architected India's autonomous foreign policy and provided India the essence of great power. He did not believe in divided world and therefore, had socialist inclinations. His daughter and grandson carried his mission but with deviations.

Succinctly, the parameters of foreign policy revolve around internal and external constraints. Rosenau has provided a broader framework to study the foreign policy of nations while putting in perspective systemic, time and situational constraints. However, human factor and their orientations always play an important role in driving foreign policy and to take best decision during hard time. In fact, leadership emerges during the crises.

### **Evolution of India's Foreign Policy: Nehru's Internationalism (1947-1964)**

In the aftermath of World War II, the decolonization process began which resulted in liberation of many nation states in international system. India remained a unique entity; whose leaders have foreseen its destiny in the future not fixed it on the past. In the entire post- independence history of India, leadership remains central pillar of its strength and a powerful tool of national power. Nehru who was first Prime Minister of India ruled over 17

years, laid the foundation of India's foreign policy. His foreign policy was regional centric coalesced with ideals of realism and idealism. (Nayar: 2003)

Nehru is believed to be the pioneer of foreign policy of India. Being the first Prime Minister of India, he played important role in giving direction to India's foreign policy and foresaw India's becoming leading nation of the world despite constraints.(Shah: 1998) However, he was less believers of hard politics. Irrespective of revolutionary changes in the international world, the principles which had evolved during Nehru's era hold validity. Nehru was convinced that its glorious past as great civilization demands India to retain its unique standing and identity in the future worldwide by giving a discrete liberated voice, regardless of its affiliation with any bloc. It was his farsightedness which persuaded him to see interests of India while not becoming part of East-West politics and this pragmatism was institutionalized by laying the foundation of Non-Aligned Movement. (Rafi: 2015)

Non-Aligned Movement established India's leading role at regional level and among the third world countries. This initiative of Nehru was aimed at preventing weaker and poor newly independent states from becoming victim of the Cold World Politics. Nehru wanted smaller nations to overcome their problem such as poverty and institutional building rather than indulging in rivalries between Eastern verses Western blocs. By virtue of leading third world states, India objected to maintain its independent role while defying colonial, neo-colonial and imperialists powers.

Nehru founded internationalism as central pillar of foreign policy objective and his grand strategy revolved around it instead of confining it to nation centric politics. His political ideas were beyond castes and religions. He believed in one world; therefore, he avoided being part of divided world. He adhered to the values of national independence, and integration, while supporting the development of an egalitarian, society, and dedicated his political life to accomplishing the objectives of socialism and internationalism pre and post partition of the subcontinent. The most challenging task for Nehru was to reinforce, preserve India's national independence. Subsequently, he repelled the diffusion of external actors in India's economic and political structure; however, he did not pay much heed to military power or hard politics. (Nayar: 2003)

The ultimate tenet of foreign policy set by Nehru was to preserve the autonomy of India, and unacceptability to the subsidiary role of India in world affairs. Nehru conceived the greater role of India in international relations. He remained marching towards seeking India's greater influence in world affairs. India after independence had elements of national power such as economic

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capability, military base and resources; moreover, the regional dynamics were also supporting it as there was no potential competitor in its vicinity. Therefore, Indian leader was foreseeing its regional power dominating the neighboring countries based on its material power and leadership capabilities. (Bandyopadhyaya: 2003)

Nehru's political and foreign policy ideals were initially the reflections of idealism where internationalism, institutions, cooperation and moral politics could be used as tools for winning the status of powerful state; however, that could not last longer and shifted towards realism and hard realities of world politics. Nehru in 17 years of his era provided India with Grand Strategy which is his legacy still appreciated and applauded. Shifting from his ideals was challenging for his successors but changing dynamics were compelling and therefore, national interests were supreme for his successors. Nehruvian autonomous foreign policy and his legacy were molded later on by his own daughter by opening a new chapter in the history of India.

### **Indira's Foreign Policy: From Internationalism to Regionalism (1966-1984)**

Pakistani Prime Minister, Z.A Bhutto stated that;

“By the time he died, India's foreign policy was in utter confusion. He left his country in an orphaned condition, neither aligned nor non-aligned, with a beggar's bowl in its hand. He witnessed the shambles of his foreign policy from his deathbed,...From its loft height of idealism, the foreign policy of India was brought down to dust. Contradictions began to manifest themselves at every step, causing India to sink into abyss of gloom.” (Bhutto: 1966)

After eighteen month government of Lal Bahadur Shastri, Mrs. Indra Gandhi took over the power in 1966. Being daughter of Nehru, she had inherited family attributes. Her era was most critical in India's history after independence. Sino-India War of 1962 had demoralized India and shackled its economy. In 1964, Chinese nuclear test added challenges for India's security and existence followed by 1965 and 1971 Indo-Pak War. Subsequently, the series of events compelled India to shift its foreign policy by adopting the principles of real politick based on principles of realism. In this time of test, Indira Gandhi has emerged as pragmatic leader who run the country at decisive moments and took prudent decisions on various policy matters which later verified India's strength in coming times. (Bandyopadhyaya: 2003)

Indira Gandhi's era of ruling India was extension of Nehru's anti-imperial policies and standing for decolonized world. However, due to changing circumstances, India could not prolong it further and had to step in to the realist world. The post-wars dynamics were challenging for India. India faced extreme drought and food insecurity along with economic destabilization. Consequently, India could not remain autonomous in its relations with the worldly powers. Therefore, it was dependent on the US for food and on the USSR for military security. The internal turmoil and regional dynamics became cause of bringing India closer to the major powers.

The Non-Aligned policy was over with start of friendship with USSR by getting in to an agreement for strategic cooperation in 1971. Through this treaty, both the countries agreed to strengthen cooperation for prosperity and progress. Moreover, it was a promise to strengthen bilateral ties in long term future which are in the interest of both countries. (Document on Declaration by MEA-GOI) However, critics argue that this long term strategic partnership was sought to counter any future aggression from neighboring countries. Finally, it ended Non-Aligned policy by bringing India closer to the USSR.

In 1971, Indira Gandhi adopted a ruthless policy vis-à-vis neighboring countries. The Bangladesh war was direct military confrontation between India and Pakistan in which the latter lost its eastern wing. The series of military adventurisms tremendously shifted India's foreign policy orientations. Indira Gandhi has realized that without building military muscles and developing defense capabilities, India cannot influence the power politics. Subsequently, India's leadership became decisive not to compromise on national security issues. Resultantly, it became nuclear possessors' state and abstained to become party to the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT). India held its distinctive voice on non-proliferations issues unlike the other third world countries which mostly became party to it. Furthermore, India had 'peaceful' nuclear explosion in 1974 which aggravated the security situation in the region. According to Scott D. Sagan, domestic determinants played important role for India's decision to go for nuclear option. (Sagan: 1995)

The Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in 1979 was a test to India's leadership. India reluctantly supported Soviet Union but was mindful of the fact this has brought Cold War rivalries at India's door step which India never became part to. India's heavy dependence on the Soviet military equipment and the US support to Pakistan were significant factors which India could never overlook. Similarly, Khalistan movement which was Sikh uprising for separation from India and demanded to have their own homeland was suppressed by the Indian government. It was a question mark on India's secularism and anti-communalism. However, India alleged Pakistan's involvement in fueling the

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Khalistan movement. The counter narrative also prevails which pervades Pakistan's positive role in diffusing the Khalistan uprisings with the help of special services groups' commandos who took timely action against Sikh hijacker. (Aziz: 2015)

During her tenure, she tried to restore relations with the great powers of Cold War. However, Washington due to its failure in Vietnam and weakening military strength compared to the USSR, approached China keeping in view its future role and interests in South Asia. During 1971 war, Washington supported Pakistan while considering India as an aggressor. Similarly, *Enterprise* which was the US naval nuclear aircraft carrier task force sent to Bay of Bengal was taken by India an open act of hostility. However, it could not bring direct confrontation between the two as Pakistani forces surrendered before the arrival of the task forces. (Kux: 1992)

Indira Gandhi during her two terms faced multiple challenges. However, she was regarded as iron lady due to her resilience, which despite all odd circumstances led the country and kept it out of turmoil. Mrs. Gandhi leadership and characteristics of foreign policy were different than that of her father. She had to deviate from moral politics based on peaceful co-existence and norms. However, the changing dynamics and supreme national interests instigated her to take best decision in her country's fate.

Indira Gandhi has given an Indira Doctrine which was same as US Monroe's Doctrine. (Cohen: 2001) In fact, it was intimidation to the neighboring countries not to intervene in India's internal affairs and similarly an assurance that India would also not do so. (Gupta: 1983) Moreover, it was to create deterrence for extra-regional powers to avoid becoming party in a regional conflict. Indirectly, India attempted to give an impression to be accepted a regional power by the regional actors.

### **Nationalism in India's Foreign Policy: BJP in Power 1998**

The secular and internationalist traditions decayed after Nehru and Mrs. Indira and her son Rajiv merely because of changing circumstances and regional compulsions had to deviate from moralistic politics. The nationalist and religiously based parties originated in India's political system. In 1951, the emergence of The Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) had introduced new dimension in Indian politics with more focus upon nationalism and inclination towards rightist ideology. BJP's foreign policy is a shift away from secular status of India, the abrogation of attributes of non-alignment, with more emphasis on economic development with quests of making India more

powerful. It came into power in 1996 when Atal Bihari Vajpae became the Prime Minister of India. According to Ankit Panda;

“Hindu nationalism means many things to many people today in India. At its most extreme poles, self-identified Hindu nationalists want to preserve India as the bastion of Hinduism, resorting to violence if necessary (see groups like the Rashtriya Swayamsevak Sangh, or RSS). However, more moderate Hindu nationalists, a category in which...the likes of former Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee, Narendra Modi, and other BJP leaders can be included, take the view that India’s unique heritage as the birthplace of Hinduism and its overwhelming Hindu majority warrant that its government undertakes policies cognizant of that reality. In this sense, the BJP largely opposes India’s post-independence tendency to pursue secular redistributive and populist policies. On the foreign policy front, contemporary Hindu nationalism is poorly understood. Salient features of Indian foreign policy, such as non-alignment and strategic autonomy, emerge from the Nehruvian tradition of international relations. Hindu nationalists have a markedly different view of the world. Two intellectual heavyweights of the Hindu nationalist movement, Vinayak Damodar Savarkar and Madhav Golwalkar, have written quite a bit about what Hindutva (a term coined by Savarkar roughly equivalent to Hindu nationalism) means for India’s engagement with the outside world.” (Panda: 2014)

The Hindu nationalism’s ideals essentially take into account the rationale of realists’ principles in international relations. However, Savarkar known as putting forward the concept of Hindutva explicitly see nationalism as preserving the national identity as foremost resolve of India. Nationalist party-BJP conferred national identity as an important and central pillar of foreign policy and blends it with strong defense capabilities. Modi, a nationalist leader also sees identity impetus behind strong military capabilities and strong sense of nationalism gives strong fighting spirit to the soldiers.

The foreign policy of India cannot be understood without studying national identity as an important ideal of nationalist party. In 1998, the nuclear weapons test of India, named as Pokhran-II, was also conducted during nationalist regime which was in a coalition government. Therefore, the credit of India’s nuclear pride is also given to BJP which was fulfillment of its ideals of nationalism.



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### Modi Pro-activism and India's International Outlook

Modi's magnificent victory in 2013 enabled him to come into power with full majority in the last thirty years history of India. He has emerged as dynamic and vigilant leader in India who changed India's outlook internationally, thus being regarded as master of foreign policy worldwide. He invited head of SAARC countries on his swearing ceremony giving impression of India's leadership role in the region. He is the first to host the US president Obama at the Republic Day of India and proactively has taken initiative to meet the challenges of climate change, and shows responsibility to counter rising threats for global peace and security. Modi is also pursuing active diplomacy for the peace in Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and addressing issues pertinent to cyber security and outer space. (Sidhu: 2015)

The ideological inclinations in BJP remain impetus behind winning majority seats in the parliament. The two terms of the last government and their fewer shares in boosting economy has also become the reason of BJP holding the government. Modi has taken up the challenge to boost and revive India's economy. However, BJP being a right wing party could not restrain being involved in communal politics with multiple reported cases.

Modi faces few challenges towards regional policy. The three catalysts which characterize, derive and underscore India's commitment and engagement and shift in its foreign policy preferences are neighborhood policy-three dimensional impulses directed at geography, geo-economics and regional integration which are also tied with security concerns and development imperatives in addition to Modi leadership and his vigor to change abrupt strategic thought vis-à-vis external affairs. (Passi: 2015)

Modi's foreign policy is essentially driven by two important and ambitious goals. The first and foremost is to make India the leading economy and accordingly, a major player in an emerging multipolar world. To accomplish these aims, there are pre-conditions which will make India's trajectory smooth to achieve its goals. Firstly, ensuring a no military adventurism with South Asian neighbor and maintain balanced relations with them. The stable South Asia will make India an attractive market for the foreign investment which allows India to economically grow. Secondly, India's larger role in setting guidelines in the economic structures likes Group of 20 (G-20) and Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa (BRICS) which would enhance its economic potential worldwide. (Sidhu: 2015) Thirdly, it requires active diplomacy and political clout to win permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

The rationale of Modi's foreign policy, regional engagements and strategic alliances is to use the power of persuasion to make India attractive destination for the world to seek economic interests. Modi's foreign tours to technological advanced countries like Australia, France, Japan, UK, and USA aim at revitalizing strategic ties which would enhance India's military strength. Modi's vigorous commitment made France to invest 2 billion Euros and Japan to invest 35 billion dollars and respectively and the US-India Business Council concluded to make 41 billion dollars investment in next few years. Similarly, Prime Minister of China Xi Jinping's in his September 2014 visit committed to make an investment of 20 billion dollars in India in next five years. (Ibid) Additionally, Modi's pro-active participation in multilateral economic structures like BRICS and the G-20 manifest India seeking economic collaboration which is the foremost goal of current government. Its entry into the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR)<sup>1</sup> is a success of India's multilateral and proactive diplomacy based on principles and norms.

Thus, the geopolitical, geostrategic and geo-economic impulses, tied with India's regional and global aspirations, have motivated New Delhi to look beyond its immediate neighborhood to an extended sphere of regional connectivity, one which includes Iran to the West, Central Asia Northward, and Myanmar and Southeast Asia Eastward. Connectivity has become the buzzword, both in bilateral and regional contexts. This has been amply highlighted by Modi during his visits to neighboring countries and his speech at the 18<sup>th</sup> SAARC summit in Kathmandu in 2016.

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Modi came with slogan of region and 'neighborhood first'. The Modi policy towards South Asia is directed to achieve three basic objectives. Firstly, "Geography, Regional Cooperation and Geo-economics, secondly, No-Expansionism but Development for All and thirdly, Securing the region." (Passi: 2015) By fulfilling the first objective, Modi has taken multiple initiatives to cooperate and integrate the South Asian countries. For Instance, India's government along with Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal have taken economic and technical initiative for the purpose of increasing interdependence of these countries on each other. The unprecedented India's engagement with Iran's

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<sup>1</sup> MTCR is established in April 1987, the voluntary group aims to limit the spread of ballistic missiles and other unmanned delivery systems that could be used for chemical, biological, and nuclear attacks. The regime urges its 35 members, which include most of the world's key missile manufacturers, to restrict their exports of missiles and related technologies capable of carrying a 500-kilogram payload at least 300 kilometers or delivering any type of weapon of mass destruction.

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Chabahar port and an investment of \$500 million; (BBC: 2016) and the projects like 'Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI)' gas pipeline are all substantial steps taken to increase the interdependence among the regional actors and economic outreach.

The role of leadership plays a crucial role on prioritizing and setting the agenda for foreign policy goals. Therefore, Modi set the priorities while keeping neighbor first agenda on his list. Modi provocations of 'Neighborhood First' stressed the need of regional integration and he started enacting this policy conferring much interest to the neighbors.

Afghanistan is important regional actor which is heart of Asia and is vital for regional security. Afghanistan is seeking much attention of Modi's regional policy. The old ambitious of becoming great power demands India to explore its core interests in Afghanistan through soft power approach. (Tharoor: 2009) India is applying liberal international model while fostering cooperation with Afghanistan. India's strategic, economic and security objectives are embedded in Afghanistan. In post 9/11 period, it supports democratic and stable Afghanistan which is also in the interest of India. Similarly, India realizes the geostrategic importance of Afghanistan which connects India with Central Asian states. Therefore, the role of Afghanistan is crucial in securing energy routes of India. India's fostering relations and huge investment in Afghanistan of estimated one billion dollars and inauguration of Salma Dam show India's long term commitment. (Dawn: 2016)

The hallmark of Modi's government with Bangladesh is to sign long 'Historical Land Boundary' Agreement thus ending 41 year of long issue. It was 4,096-km long land boundary dispute and its settlement opened the gateway to stateless people across the border to get a citizenship. It has advantages for both the countries. Settlement of this dispute allowed both Bangladesh and India to use the common sea for shipment. The shipment time period is shortened to one week which was 30-40 days before. (Indrani: 2015)

Bhutan was the first destination of Modi's official visits in which he reinforced regional integration rhetoric. "Modi laid the foundation stone for the 600MW Kholongchu Hydro-electric project. Hydro-electric power generated by Bhutan's run-of-the river dams is the economic bedrock of the India-Bhutan relationship. India has helped finance the dams through a combination of aid and loans and buys the excess electricity at very low prices." (Hindu: July 30, 2015) Another regional initiative of Modi at the regional level is a sub-regional cooperation between Bangladesh, Bhutan, India and Nepal (BBIN) on water resources management, hydropower, connectivity and transit. It was also established that the BBIN nations would jointly discover cooperation on power

generation apart from hydropower, and employ multimodal transport channels that could meet the economic and tourism needs of these countries. This project-based cooperation, under the auspices of the SAARC, could potentially become a vital entry point for sub-regional diplomacy in the future. (Medha: 2016)

India Nepal relations have been in doldrums. Modi in his visit to Nepal tried to consolidate relations by promising multiple projects such as bus services, and announcement of \$1 billion for hydropower projects and infrastructural development. Modi has also promised to bear expenses of building a Police Academy which will be used to provide training to Nepalese police officers.

Modi is first Prime Minister who visited Sri Lanka after 39 years. The credit goes to Modi who took an initiative to make visit to Sri Lanka after three decades and realized its necessity. Similarly, Modi's Sri Lankan counterpart also visited India in which they agreed to cooperate in multiple sectors, the most important being nuclear cooperation. Nuclear cooperation envisages training and exchange of expertise in civil nuclear technology. (Sudha: 2015)

The toughest and challenging neighbor of India is its western neighbor, Pakistan. Unfortunately, there is stalemate in bilateral relations between the two. The uncommon in their historical relation is Pathankot incident of January 2016, which went without escalations. India cooperated with Pakistan to investigate the underneath elements which want to sabotage the peace process. Primarily, Modi government's approach was to concentrate on bilateral cooperation to invigorate both regional trades, along with resumption of comprehensive dialogues on contentious issues. However, substantial progress is not made so far. Both counterparts in Ufa also discussed cooperation to eliminate terrorism. There are challenges which overshadowed peace process between India and Pakistan. Kashmir is the biggest hurdle. Importantly, both countries need to define their redlines and take into consideration each other sensitivities. Pakistan's unending support for Kashmir cause and India's concerns over terrorism set the priorities on both sides. However, the future of South Asia revolves around the stable relations between the two.

### **Modi's 'Act Asia Policy'**

'Look East' which is now 'Act Asia policy' is one of the major pronouncements since Modi took office of Prime Minister. In November 2014, at the Association of South East Asian Nation ASEAN 12<sup>th</sup> summit, he announced the new policy. (PIB-GOI: 2014) However, one can trace back the historical roots of Act-Asia policy which lies in 1991 officially launched by Prime Minister Narasimha Rao

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and later was made public by Ministry of External Affairs of India in 1996.(Bhattacharjee: 2016)Modi started his 'Act Asia Policy' from Bay of Bengal recognizing that Myanmar serves as a bridge which connects India with Southeast Asia. Therefore, the strategic importance of Myanmar is significant for India. The changing dynamics of regional and global politics and future aspirations demand India not to restrain its alliance with South Asia but with extended neighbors.

India through Act Asia policy is magnificently working on projects such as India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway project which will connect India with Thailand through Myanmar (and will be extended to Laos, Cambodia and Vietnam); the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM.). The Economic Corridor that plans to link the four countries in the sub-region; and the Delhi-Hanoi Rail Link that envisions a railroad linking India with the Mekong countries (China, Myanmar, Lao People's Democratic Republic (Laos), Kingdom of Thailand, Cambodia and Vietnam). To gain benefit of these projects, Modi is conscious of the fact that improved and upgraded infrastructure in India's Northeast, which increases its connectivity with Myanmar, is vital as it is the 'gateway' to the East. (Yhome: 2014)

### **Modi Extended Neighborhood Policy**

Iran-US rapprochement became cause of reviving Indo-Iran relations. India underlines the significance of West Asia for India's economic and strategic calculus. Initially, international sanctions and regional compulsion have remained impediments between India and Iran; however, they have opened up the friendship corridor for each other, underscoring their strategic convergences. The 'three way transit' agreements which Modi signed with Iran and Afghanistan in May, 2016 is a promise to invest up to \$500 million develop a strategic port in Iran and also agreed to work on other bilateral projects which will worth hundreds of millions of dollars. (Dawn: 2016)

Similarly, Modi's April, 2016 visit to Saudi Arabia revived India-Saudi relations. Saudi Arabia and India have long history of strategic partnership in the Gulf region. Modi's government bolstered relations from static Riyadh Declaration of 2010. (MEA-GOI: 2010) The last government of India consolidated India-Saudi relations by exchange of visit of issuance of Declarations which is an important corner stone of long term promising partnership. Modi's visit intended to explore new avenues of cooperation while emphasizing to cooperate on multiple issues such as trade, terrorism and investment.

Historically, India-Saudi closeness was impeded by latter's stance on Kashmir issues and alignment with Pakistan. However, currently, Saudi government

recognizes the rising role of India in global affairs and therefore need of the hour to get closer to it. India has become a natural choice for commercial and developmental enterprise in Saudi Arabia's efforts to expand its associations by engaging various Asian countries. (Pradhan: 2016) Saudi Arabia is the largest importer of Pakistani small and medium conventional weapons, (Haider: 2016) which remain a crucial factor for India-Saudi engagements and similarly, India closeness with Tehran remain a matter of concern for Riyadh.

### **Policy towards Major Powers**

China and India are the most significant neighbor, strategic competitors, having asymmetric power equation and largest trade partners have been transforming their relations by increasing interdependence. China and India are regarded as defining powers of 21<sup>st</sup> century. China's global aspirations, military maneuvering in South China Sea, hegemonic designs in Indian Ocean, military build- up and close strategic partnership with Pakistan are matter of great concern for India. India and China have been transforming and normalizing their relation in their best interests. While reserving divergences, they are exploring common ground of mutual interests.

Modi while speaking at the Madras University's Centenary Hall on the subject of 'India and the World' in October 2013, highlighted three important points. Firstly, India; could not let China dominate India in foreign policy matters; secondly, that it is time to let the people decide their destinies not the politicians. Thirdly, let the cultural strengthen prevails in foreign policy rather than high politics." (Indian Express, 2013)

France considers India its first strategic partner. (Hindu: January 28, 2016) On India's Republican Day Celebrations, France President François Hollande in the joint statement promised to expand their relationship in the long run. "India and France reiterate the need for urgent reform of the United Nations, including its Security Council, through an expansion in both categories of membership, to make it more representative of the contemporary world. France reaffirmed its support for India's candidature for a permanent membership of the UN Security Council." (Hindu: January 25, 2016) Moreover, both committed to revise their relation through cooperation in multiple fields. France and India concluded various agreements such as Defense and Nuclear Energy, Space, Memorandum of Understanding between Indian Space Research Organization and France National Centre for Space. They also agreed to cooperate in non- proliferation and to strengthen export control regime, namely, the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG), the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), the Australia Group(AG), and the Wassenaar Arrangement. France reiterated its active support to

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developing consensus among member states of export control regime to recognize the role of India and determination to progress the set agenda. (Ibid)

Modi attempted to reshape the India-UK partnership for the new century. Modi's November 2015, visit to the UK has attempted to drastically redefine the contours of their partnership. The UK is the largest European investor in India, and India is the second largest investor in the UK. And through this visit, two countries made estimated £9billion worth of commercial deals covering wide range of issues such as, education, energy, finance, health sectors, Information Technology, and logistics, which will have lasting effects in the future. (Pant: 2015)

India and the US, two largest democracies are strategic partners and allies based on mutual interests fulfilling their commitment of making "one of the defining partnerships" of the 21<sup>st</sup> century. (Agrawal: 2016) Indo-US strategic partnership is win-win situation for both keeping in view latter's interests in Indian Ocean, competing goals with China and unpleasant relations with Russia. However, According to Ashley J. Tellis, "The US is an important host for India's skilled labor; remains a critical source of capital, technology, and expertise; and constitutes the fulcrum of strategic support for India's global ambitions. If India maintains robust ties with the US, even as it strengthens relations with key US allies in Asia and beyond, it will continue to gain indispensable benefits." (Tellis: 2016)

### Continuity or Change

Modi's era of foreign policy is assumed in changing geopolitical and geo-economic environment compare to his predecessors. India has geopolitical compulsion. It has strategic competitor China in the region and South China Sea dispute which India thinks it as major concern. On its western border, India has enduring rivalries and uneasy relationship with Pakistan. There is stalemate on conflict resolution. The emerging threat of Islamic terrorism is widespread and South Asian region is prone to it. Therefore, Modi can never overlook such emerging challenges which could be detrimental for India's security.

Modi has been pragmatic in dealing with geopolitical and geo-economic challenges. Modi foresightedness in addressing the emerging challenges will prove to be pragmatic policies in the long term future of India. Modi's foremost preference is to work on strengthening economy without getting affected by international event. At the domestic level, government policies are likely to be thwarted by systemic constraints. First and foremost, at the domestic level,

economic growth must have trickle-down effect. India is urban based economy, and poverty ratio is very high which 29.8% (CIA, World Factbook). Therefore, alleviation of poverty is a big challenge for India's fastest growing economy. Secondly, institutionalization process of foreign policy making and role of researcher feedback along with accountability of decisions maker and structural corruption need to be addressed. Thirdly, New Delhi lack of ability to engage all stakeholders in foreign policy initiatives still require revision and reconsideration. Fourthly, striving for the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) permanent membership is test to multilateral diplomacy. Lastly, separatist movements and how Indian leadership will tackle those is a big question mark? Undoubtedly, Modi is very effectively exercising 'New Panchsheel' by operationalizing and promulgating the very principles of external policy.

Modi's foreign policy is bit of continuity rather than variations in India's broader foreign policy principles; however, there is little change in style of leadership which is pragmatic and pro-active. The international engagements are expanding along with allies which are shifting equilibrium in India's favor which seeks greater role in international affairs. There is substantial tilt of world politics in India's favor. The last government despite two terms remains inert and unable to take audacious decisions with special regards to neighbors, and India's diaspora facing problem in the world. But with the changing government, role of India's states are being recognized in foreign policy formulation which is a positive move. Moreover, through high technological means government is effectively engaging foreign audience along with domestic electronically.

Modi has taken audacious decisions vis-à-vis its neighbors such as expansion of strategic partnership with Afghanistan by supplying military equipment such as helicopters despite Pakistan's concern and apprehensions. Modi's has attempted to balance Chinese's influence in Indian Ocean Region by cultivating ties with Asia pacific countries, simultaneously, India's increasing interdependence over China through trade and commercial interests. Hence, the leadership of India has been an important factor in driving foreign policy and successfully projecting India's aspirations.

## **Conclusion**

Undoubtedly, India's foreign policy under Modi has been steadily shifting and largely expanding all over the world. The most distinguishing aspect of his foreign policy has been the emphasis on improving relations with smaller neighborhood. Modi has resolved maritime disputes with Bangladesh and revived relations with Sri Lanka; however, Pakistan as a key neighbor remains



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missing as part of pro-active neighborhood policy. A breakthrough was expected under Modi's government vis-à-vis bilateral contentious issues with Pakistan. Since, India and Pakistan broadly define South Asian security and there is stalemate in peace process, therefore, it is deemed necessary that both the countries engage with each other and address their bilateral disputes and break the ice.

At the domestic level, rising communal violence, humanitarian issues in Indian occupied Kashmir and indigenous uprising are set back for India's soft projection of power on the world stage. These issues can cause India's secular image to get spoiled in the diplomatic circles worldwide. Being secular country, India's constitution strongly holds for equal treatment of all citizens irrespective of their religion. Therefore, Modi's government faces another challenge to deal all sects of society equally and to justify the secular status of the constitution. Similarly, beyond all struggles of Modi's foreign policy successes, the biggest of all challenges is to eradicate poverty which is largest in India. Modi promise is for inclusive growth in India. He is cognizant of the fact that urban based economy will not serve the purpose of eliminating poverty rather trickles down effects must be felt at low level of the society. He claims that his government is for the welfare of the people and sustainable growth is highest achieving object, which will ensure the economic development.

Conclusively, Modi style of leadership has started a new era in entire history of India. Convincingly, he has established new dimensions in foreign policy of India. The pro-active foreign policy coupled with multi-dimensional successes in terms of economic growth, enlarging alliances, strategic partnerships and distinct voices on multilateral for a broadly mark Modi's era as an epoch and it is anticipated to mark the beginning of India's leading role on the world and its preferences will be defining for the world politics.

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