

INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY UNDER MODI: ISSUES AND CHALLENGES

Tanmoy Saha

Rabindra Bharati University

Abstract:

Narendra Modi wants to establish India as a strong regional power in South Asia. Narendra Modi has placed more emphasis on national power in his foreign policy. Among the foreign policy initiatives of the Modi government, Neighborhood first policy, Act East policy, Link west policy, Fast track diplomacy, etc, are particularly noteworthy.

Keywords:

Narendra Modi, covid diplomacy, China, foreign policy, hindutva

Introduction:

Various principles of Indian foreign policy have brightened the image of Narendra Modi. According to a survey conducted by The Morning Consult, Narendra Modi is in the first place among the global leaders with 70% rating. Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi has successfully introduced Hindu nationalist thought to the world, which has made the world more familiar with Indian civilization (Wojczewski 2). For Instance, Saudi Arabia has included the Ramayana in its curriculum for the purpose of teaching students (Mohan). This is one of the examples of the personality factor of Hindu nationalist leader Modi. During the swearing-in ceremony of the Prime Minister in 2014, Narendra Modi invited the Heads of State of the SAARC member countries. Special emphasis has been laid on global socio politics and soft power in Narendra Modi's foreign policy. Narendra Modi's government has made it clear that economic relations are never possible without international security relations. Modi has moved ahead with India's technological and economic development by strengthening ties with the world's major powers. Prime Minister Narendra Modi has emphasized on 'atmanirbhar' (self-reliant) India, so, that India can play an important role in the production of goods and services. It is worth mentioning here that the vaccine race in India is a strong example of this statement. The two vaccines that India has produced in different countries of the world are Covishield, which is being manufactured by India's serum institute, and Covaxin, which is manufactured by Bharat Biotech (Siddiqui).

Relations with Neighbors During Modi's Era:

In general, India's neighboring countries include Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Sri

Lanka, but according to the latest data from the Ministry of External Affairs, China and Myanmar have been included in the list (Chaturvedy 12). This can be termed as a new form of India's 'Neighborhood Policy'. India's previous policy on ASEAN was 'Look East' but the 'Act East' policy has been adopted in response to the growing Chinese aggression. It is pertinent to mention here that the Act East Policy is a special strategy where India has moved forward to ensure India's economic development through cooperation with ASEAN countries as well as Japan, Vietnam, Australia. Bangladesh has been given an important place as a 'regional frontline partner' under the 'Neighborhood first policy' in response to the growing threat from China. Narendra Modi visited the Maldives and Sri Lanka in June after being re-elected as Prime Minister. During the visit, Narendra Modi signed a total of six agreements, including a meeting with Maldivian President Ibrahim Mohamed Solih, which included 'white shipping information' (Ganguly 136). Under the agreement, the Maldivian government will share information about any ship entering the Maldivian border with the Indian government.

In 2016, Pakistan-backed militants carried out a terrorist attack on India's armed force base Uri. In response to this incident, 'surgical strikes' were carried out by the Indian Army on terrorist units in Pakistan-occupied Kashmir at the behest of the Prime Minister (Chaturvedy 9). In 2019, there was another terrorist attack on the Indian Army in Pulwama. Naturally, the Indian Air Force bombed Jaish e Mohammad's training camp in Balakot in response to the incident. As a result of various terrorist attacks on India by Pakistan, India has stopped all cultural diplomacy with Pakistan. Modi requested ISRO's Indian scientists to build a SAARC satellite, which would enable socio-economic development of South Asia with the help of technologies like tele medicine, e-learning, etc. During the Covid 19 pandemic, India donated 10 million USD to SAARC's Covid 19 Emergency Fund. India launched Operation Sanjeevani for SAARC member Maldives.

New Brands of Modi's Foreign Policy:

100 days after coming to power as the central government in 2014, The Ministry of External Affairs published a booklet entitled 'Fast Track Diplomacy' (Chaturvedy 13). Foreign Minister

Sushma Swaraj said that Fast Track Diplomacy has three faces, they are proactive, strong and sensitive. The Modi government has specially formulated the Act East Policy considering East Asia in the interest of increasing engagement with the Gulf countries, which foreign policy experts refer to as 'Link West'. In the case of the Middle East, the 'West Asia' approach is working as India's key strategy. In foreign policy, the Modi government wants to strengthen India's presence at the international level with the help of India First policy and Para Diplomacy.

The Chinese Aggression:

China has tactfully influenced not only Pakistan but also Nepal, Bhutan and Myanmar. Booz Allen Hamilton was the first to use the term 'String of Pearls' as a tactic to expand China's dominance over India in a discussion at the US War House in 2004 (Chengappa). The South China Sea plays an important role geopolitically as India's economic zone (Pant). The Modi government has adopted the 'Act East Policy' to prevent Chinese aggression in the South China (Pant). Border disputes such as the Dokhlam and Galwan valleys have caused tensions between India and China (Singh).

Collaboration with Major Powers:

In 2005, when he was the Prime Minister of Gujarat, the Bush administration imposed a ban on Narendra Modi's U.S. visa, which was in effect until 2014. In 2014, when Narendra Modi won the election with a majority, Obama congratulated him by telephone and invited him to the United States. Modi visited the US in September 2014, where Obama called Modi the 'Man of Action' (Mann). This incident can be termed as a positive effect of Modi's 'Personality Factor'. It is worth mentioning here that Obama was the first US President to be the chief guest on India's Republic Day. Joe Biden was recently elected as the 46th President of the United States, creating some new dimension about the relationship between the two countries. The Trump administration took a neutral stance on a number of issues, including the Jammu and Kashmir Citizenship Amendment Act. Mutual relations between the two countries will depend on the Biden administration's response to these issues in the future.

India and Japan are working together on issues like Artificial Intelligence, 5G network, Internet of Things, Space research. Both India and Japan are investing economically in countries like Iran, Africa, Sri Lanka and Myanmar to counter China's growing influence in these countries. On September 14, 2017, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe

signed a 1.08 lakh crore (\$ 17 billion) deal in the interest of the bullet train project in India. Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, in his famous book *Utsukushil Kuni E*, hopes that in the next ten years, if the relationship between India and Japan transcends the Japan-United States relationship or the Japan-China relationship, it will not be a surprise for Japan (Seth).

The Rafale Deal, signed under Narendra Modi, has made the Indian Air Force much stronger. On September 21, 2021, the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi and the President of France Emmanuel Macron announced that they would follow the 'act jointly' policy in the Indo-Pacific region (Gaurav). Between 2014 and 2018, 58 per cent of India's defense equipment was imported from Russia. India and Russia have signed 15 agreements on defense, air and natural gas, etc. In addition, Narendra Modi has decided to contribute 1 million USD to the Russian Far East in the interest of realizing the vision of Russian President Vladimir Putin (Mohan). Narendra Modi mentioned in one of his speeches that the friendship between India and Russia has been tested by time. The friendly relations between India and Israel have become very strong during the rule of Narendra Modi. In the response of the Pulwama attack in 2019, Israel announced "unconditional support" for India (Staff).

Covid Pandemic and India's Vaccine Diplomacy:

During Covid pandemic, India has helped countries like Maldives, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Seychelles in many ways to strengthen its neighborhood first policy. India launched the 'Vaccine Maitri' in January 2021, resulting in a major diplomatic shift in India's foreign policy (Dhar). As the two million doses of Covishield vaccine were en route from Chhatrapati Shivaji Maharaj International Airport (CSMIA) to Brazil, Brazilian President Jair Bolsonaro sent a wonderful tweet thanking Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi for the vaccine export. In this tweet, President Bolsonaro shared an illustration of Lord Hanuman, the character of the Indian epic Ramayana, where Lord Hanuman is on his way to Brazil with a mountain of vaccines. It is worth mentioning here that in the Ramayana, Hanuman blew up the entire Gandhamardan mountain including Sanjeevani Booti in order to save the life of his lord Rama's brother Lakshman (Siddiqui). It is important to note that India's vaccine diplomacy could lead to tensions with China over geo politics.

Conclusion:

India's vaccine diplomacy can bring many positive results to India in the future, which will make India economically and socially stronger. As a result of Modi's foreign policy, India has been able to gain the support of various countries at the international level on various issues including Kashmir, counter-terrorism and citizenship issue. However, the rise of the Taliban has hampered India's foreign policy. India has been working for the past few years to develop Afghanistan's infrastructure. But the establishment of the Talibani Rule in Afghanistan has created security problems in India (Mohan).

Works Cited:

1. Chaturvedy, Rajjev Ranjan. "Modi's Neighborhood Policy and China's Response." *Issues & Studies: A Social Science Quarterly on China, Taiwan, and East Asian Affairs*, vol. 55, no. 2, 2019, pp. 1-23.
2. Chengappa, Raj, and Ananth Krishnan. "India-China standoff: All you need to know about Doklam dispute." *indiatoday.in*. 17 July 2017, Web. 18 Sep. 2021.
3. Dhar, Biswajit. "India's Vaccine Diplomacy." *globalpolicyjournal.com*. 8 Apr. 2021, Web. 15 Sep. 2021.
4. Gaurav, Kunal. "PM Modi, Macron vow to 'act jointly' in Indo-Pacific as France fallout with US, Australia." *hindustantimes.com*. 21 Sep. 2021, Web. 9 Sep. 2021.
5. Ganguly, Sumit. "Has Modi Truly Changed India's Foreign Policy?" *The Washington Quarterly*, vol. 40, no. 2, 2017, pp. 131-143.
6. Hall, Ian. *Modi and The Reinvention of Indian Foreign Policy*. 1st ed., Bristol University Press, 2019, pp. 21-41.
7. Mohan, C Raja. "Is Taliban really open to commercial and political engagement with India?" *indianexpress.com*. 31 Aug. 2021, Web. 21 Sep. 2021.
8. Mohan, C. Raja. "Are Indo-Russian Ties the Next Casualty of Great-Power Shifts?" *foreignpolicy.com*. 7 Sep. 2021, Web. 16 Sep. 2021.
9. Mohan, Geeta. "Saudi Arabia includes Ramayana, Mahabharata in new curriculum for students." *indiatoday.in*. 23 Apr. 2021, Web. 9 Sep. 2021.
10. Mann, James. "Why Narendra Modi Was Banned from the U.S.." *wsj.com*. 2 May 2014, Web. 15 Sep. 2021.
11. Pant, Harsh V. Pant. "India and China Slug It Out in South Asia." *thediplomat.com*. 11 Dec. 2014, Web. 31 Aug. 2021.
12. Siddiqui, Huma. "Vaccine Maitri Diplomacy: Special flights take off for Brazil, Morocco with COVIDSHIELD vaccine in the wee hours." *financialexpress.com*. 22 Jan. 2021, Web. 21 Sep. 2021.
13. Seth, Maulshree. "Japan one of India's most trusted friends in strategic, economic spheres: Modi." *indianexpress.com*. 16 July 2021, Web. 14 Sep. 2021.
14. Staff, Swarajya. "India's Friend Indeed: After Pulwama Attack, Israel Offers Unconditional Help in Combating Terrorism." *swarajyamag.com*. 20 Feb. 2017, Web. 4 Sep. 2021.
15. Singh, Vijaita. "Minor face-off with Chinese troops in Galwan Valley." *thehindu.com*. 23 May 2021, Web. 13 Sep. 2021, Web. 16 Sep. 2021.
16. Wojczewski, Thorsten. "Populism, Hindu Nationalism, and Foreign Policy in India: The Politics of Representing 'the People'." *International Studies Review*, vol. 22, no. 3, 2019, pp. 1-3.