

## **INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY: STRATEGY, THOUGH AND PRACTICE**

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### **Abstract**

India is a multicultural civilizational state with a tradition and practice linked to various lineages and histories. The people across the regions share certain cultural values and belongingness, yet the political unity of Indian subcontinent has remained a challenge. On different epochs of history, Delhi centric empire has unified the region. In 1947, the republic of India succeeded British India empire and followed non-alignment policy. With the end of the Cold War, a shift was initiated towards more proactive military and economic engagement with the great powers. The question arises that how India imagines its role in world affairs. And which strategic culture determines India's strategic behavior. The paper would be an attempt to comprehend scholarly debate on India's strategic culture and its relations with India's foreign policy.

### **Grand Strategy**

Although the foreign policy is subjected to international constraints, where the gap between aspirations and ability is often so pronounced that self-image and the reality seem an odd enterprise (Mehta, 2009). The critics also argues that leaders are not always visionaries. More often, leaders tinker with the status quo, experiment, and lurch from crisis to crisis (Roberts 2018). But this cannot said that leaders neglect strategy.

A strategy denotes a framework or plan within which actors (individuals, firms, states) seek to achieve certain overarching or longer-term ends by using available resources (Kapur and

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Mukherjee 2018: 1). The strategy in terms of state is adoption of a plan to achieve certain long term goals or game plan or master plan by using available resources in an environment of possible conflict with other states and non-state actors (Kapur and Mukherjee 2018). Therefore, every strategy has an end or goal or objective. The states have a strategy that guides their foreign and even domestic policies. The strategy evolves in response to circumstance. In the nineteenth century, grand strategy was about plan made a top level of authority for defeating the enemy in the battlefield. With the advent of total war, the concept expanded. At tactic level, victory demanded total mobilization of the entire physical and moral forces of the nation. It was in this context that B.H. Liddell Hart (1967) defined grand strategy as a national policy guiding all aspects of social and economic activity toward the achievement of war aims. With the onset of the Cold War, the concept expanded again. With the onset of the Cold War, the greater power politics further expanded the concept of grand strategy. Thomas Christensen (1996) defined it, “the full package of domestic and international policies designed to increase power and national security” in peacetime as well as wartime. Andrew Monaghan (2017) defines grand strategy as the art of “using all of the nation’s resources to promote the interests of the state, including securing it against enemies perceived and real.” “A grand strategy is a state’s theory about how it can best ‘cause’ security for itself. It is the highest plane at which strategy operates in the realm of statecraft” (Posen, 1984:13).

On the other side, tactics try to find out the methods through which strategy can be implemented. It is process that involves actions to integrate all national resources to cope up with the changing situation while pursuing the goal. Tactics is a subset of strategy. It is the application of strategy at the lower plan (Hart, 1967).

### **Indian Strategic Culture and Thought**

The study of strategic culture of a state gives us a wider historical context and predict its behavior (Rodhan and Nayef Al 2015). The essence of the strategic culture lies in its ability to shape the cognitive characteristics of the state and its elites. In a path breaking debate American scholar George Tanham (1992) came with a study that India lack strategic culture. According to him, India presented a example of a society that had been rigid caste-based social structure and the geography of the Indian subcontinent has allowed groups to promote their culture, language and kingdoms. Although people across the regions share certain cultural practices and

belongingness, the political unification of the Indian subcontinent has always been a challenge (Tanham 1992). Tanham's basic charge that Indians are unable or unwilling to think strategically and rarely engages in long-term thinking about its foreign policy goals met with stiff intellectual resistance in India. The Indian scholars argued that India is more a civilizational state rather the Westphalian state. It has classical literature and texts (such as Vidas, Ramayana, Mahabharata, Arthasastra etc.) delve into diplomacy and strategy of the state. However, the questions has remained whether these classical ideas have remained more of philosophical and ethical work or art of statecraft (Bajpai et al 2014). The British India tried to devise a grand strategy for India's defence (Tanham 1992). The brainchild of India's defence was Lord Curzon (Radford 2013). Whereas, the post-colonial India had not followed a declarative strategy, but that does not mean it does not have strategy. The scholars have argued that India possess a rich treasure of strategic culture and that impacts India's strategic thinking. Kati Bajpai has identified broad six schools of thought- Nehruvianism, Neoliberalism, Realism, Hindu nationalism, Marxists and Gandhianism. However, in terms of strategic thinking India schools either fall into idealists or realist domain. Pratap Bhanu Mehta (2009) believed that the Indian tradition of realism has its origin in Kautilya's "mandala theory" and idealism in "universalistic" thinking in Ashoka'. Further, scholars have identified Nehruvianism, Neoliberalism, Realism, Hindu nationalism as most influential schools (Sagar 2009). Within this category, the Hindu nationalists thought is believed to share foreign policy vision with Indian realists (Bajpai et al 2014). Each of these main four schools of thought have essential strategic cultural component which distinguish for other. The following part would be attempt to explore and comprehend those four Indian schools of thought.

### **Nehruvians**

The Nehruvian are modified structuralists that aspire for greater security for India without losing moralists outlook in foreign policy (Mehta 2009). Their security outlook is defensive (Tanham 1992). For Nehruvians power-politics leads to perpetual competition and rivalry and ultimately wars. The balance of power politics leads interference in other countries business and demand taking polar stands which does not suit India's interests and peaceful world vision (Mehta 2009). Nehru articulated this position on September 7, 1946.

In his first broadcast on All India Radio as India's interim prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru advised his fellow countrymen, 'to keep away from the power politics of groups, aligned against one another, which have led in the past to world wars and which may again lead to disaster on an even vaster scale (McGarr, 2013: 44).

The Nehruvian idealism dominated the Indian political ethos and laid the foundation of the secular democratic state and non-alignment basis foreign policy. The idea of autonomy and self-sufficiency is central to their foreign policy vision (Sagar 2009). They view India as the preeminent South Asia power which deserves great power status recognition from the international community.

### **Hindu Nationalists**

In the 19th century, the European scholars did out of box historical work and discovered old Sanskrit literature and Bhraminical tradition and Aryan origin create, this subsequently became base of the Hindu nationalism (Ogden, 1998). They glorified the past and Hindu civilization. The division of the Indian subcontinent and continued Kashmir dispute over provided Hindu nationalists political environment to reassert their vision of India. Their understanding of history is closer to the idea of the clash of civilizations. For them, the nonindigenous faiths (Muslims and Christians of India) are responsible for weakening India's cultural homogeneity (Haynes 2008). The neighboring Muslim states and China has been considered a cultural and military threat. Their political vision is ideologically driven and aim to promote and protect the Hindu culture and its symbols, values and practices (Hansen, 1999). They propagate unity Hindus and making them feel like victims of Nehruvian secularism and terrorism from Pakistan. Their demand is clambering the appeasement of minorities and acting muscular towards neighborhood (Commuri 2009; Rodenbeck, 2018). The political expression of this ideology is represented by Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) whose foreign policy focus had has been Pakistan and China. Their admiration of US and Israel is the reflection of ideology that the three democracies are the victim of Islamic terrorism and Jews and Christians are strategic allies against Islamic and Confucian threat (Bidwai, 2003).

### **Indian Strategists or Realists**

The Indian strategists advocate political realism (Sagar 2009). They take their origin in Kautilya's Mandala theory and mostly makeup India's bureaucratic thinking (Sullivan 2014). The Mandala theory propounded that the states exist in a group and each state has its own circle and outer circle. The immediate neighbors' are the natural enemy and the states in the second circle are friends by the shared enemy (Rajeev, 2011). This theory also argues that for achieving perpetual peace the king must expand to unit Indian subcontinent. There is also emphasis on role of friendship, diplomacy, neutrality and deceit in foreign policy.

The contemporary Indian strategists, perceive India must become a powerful state to sustain in the environment of anarchy (Bajpai 2013). They are critics of nonalignment and Third worldism and advocate mutual interest based cooperation with the West to address India's defense deficit and hedge the strategic challenges posed by China-Pakistan alliance.

### **Neoliberals**

The rise of neoliberals is the product of new changes in Indian state and society. They desire to transform India's image as an economic powerhouse that would dominate the world from non-military capabilities. They are people who believe in shared democratic and liberal value based relations with the West. Moreover, neoliberals acknowledge the importance of a strong military state, but their priority is diplomacy, trade, investment and technology-driven foreign policy (Bajpai 2013).

Like most of the multicultural Empires, British India disintegrated into many states. Nevertheless, this does not change radically Indian state notion of New Delhi's place and role in South Asia. India's territorial and demographic position explains the part of it. India's strategic culture also explains the part of it. Despite the existence of multiple and mutually exclusive domestic perspectives on India's foreign policy role, there appears a consensus among Nehruvian, Hindu Nationalists, Strategists and neoliberal on core national interests. The differences have remained limited to policy and tactic level. The Indian elite perception of the Indian subcontinent and extended neighborhood regions continue to be influenced by historical ties. The Hindu nationalists skepticism towards pluralism could not change the reality of Indian

society and in power, the BJP has acknowledged plurality and democracy part of Indian identity. There is historical continuity of shared Indo-Islamic or Indo-Persian culture, art and architecture, that bounds two civilizations together Reiterating commitment to secularism PM Vajpayee told Iranian legislators in April 2001 that "Islam is part and parcel of our national and social life" (Mohan, 2003: 231).

### **Indian Foreign Policy: Strategy and Tactics**

Indian foreign policy has not come up with a grand strategy. Although it has various doctrines that are area specific. Such as nuclear doctrine, maritime doctrine, counterterrorism strategy and a road map for energy (Energy Vision 2030) and environment (sustainable development vision 2030). The absence of a declarative grand strategy does not mean absence of grand strategy. As strategist Edward Luttwak (2009) said, all states have a grand strategy, whether they know it or not. This part would be an attempt to find patterns in India's foreign policy choices.

The post-colonial India came to international seen with the legacy of western colonial experience, underdeveloped state but the largest state in South Asia. Its foreign policy came to dominated by the non alignment policy of Nehru and continue dominated for about four decades. The nonaligned India took some principled positions in international affairs. Like, India gave priority to state sovereignty, non-intervention, non-bloc politics (Abraham, 2009). It criticized the western powers use of humanitarian intervention and democracy promotion in the Third world states as a mask for serving their imperial interests. The idea of Asian solidarity and Third world unity were promoted to reflect India's Asian identity and shared historical struggle against colonialism and imperialism. Regionally, India did not accept ethnoreligious bondage as the constituting force of nationalism. The moral of secularism was used by the Government of India in justifying the conquest of the Muslim majority Jammu and Kashmir region (Cohen 2013). India played a vital role in the liberation of Bangladesh on humanitarian grounds and later intervened in Sri Lanka and the Maldives to restore order.

The Cold War foreign policy of India was more than ideological choice (Abraham 2009). Nehruvians did not compromise on national security for lofty principles. When the normative overturn could not satisfy India's national interests, force was used to secure those vital interests.

It fought wars with Pakistan and a war with China. It went on forming the quasi-military alliance with the Soviet Union in 1971 (McGarr, 2013). It continued research and development of a nuclear technology and concurrently opposed the discriminatory Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty(NPT). Nonaligned India played rules based foreign policy as long as it served India's interests; however, the constraints to exercise of power did not come from ideology, but from India own weaker material capabilities (Mehta, 2009). India subscribed to ideological minimalism and laid stress on honoring the principle of sovereignty.

However, the end of the Cold War and the emergence of the US-centric unipolar world presented a challenge for socialist-oriented India. The gap was filled by the rise of neoliberals within the Indian National Congress (INC) and the BJP. Both parties came in support of liberal economic reforms and greater integration of the Indian economy with the global economy. The neoliberals push India towards the outward looking emerging global economic power and reducing the prospect of conflict with the great powers by following strategy of cooperation and compromise. The criticism to the US military adventurism in the Third world avoided and rather focus had been given to shared democratic values and victims of terrorism.

The BJP envisioned a strong military response to Pakistan-China military alliance and global efforts to force India to sign the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) by conducting series of nuclear tests in 1998 (Basru, 2006; Kapur, 2006) . Following the nuclear test, India offered friendship to the US. It was one of the first countries to offer the US cooperation for war on terror that began with the US invasion of Afghanistan in 2001 (Rudolph, and Rudolph 2006). The BJP led government built military ties with the West and upheld capitalist ideology. It tactically modified its ideological stand and accepted India's legitimacy lies in democracy and pluralism (Hansen 1999). The shared democratic values and victims of terrorism with the US became the diplomatic tool for India to create international pressure on Pakistan and make inroad into Afghanistan. India has find strategic convergence with the US and Israel on terrorism and with the US and Japan on China. The cooperation was deepened with these three states not only on ideological level but also to redress some of national security challenges. India secured entry into the global nuclear technology market with the signing of Indo-US civil nuclear deal in 2005. It has got access to Israeli missile and drone technology and American military technology that

helps India to balance against threat posed by Pakistan-China alliance. While pragmatic economic cooperation with China has provided India low cost technology and investment. Both sides have come to support global liberal economic order in both have witnessed their economic rise.

### **Conclusion**

India's foreign policy had been influenced by Indian perspectives. But these three schools have been in competition and none have exclusive influence over in determining the grand strategy Indian statecraft. There is no clear cut idealist and realist division in India's foreign policy practice. The Nehruvian idealism had never lost sight of realism. The policy towards China and Pakistan on the one side and Iran and Soviet Union on the other side were influenced by realistic logic of Mandala Theory. All thought, the normative tone in foreign policy has come down in the post-Cold War period, but power politics has not gained precedence. India's leadership global ambition is more as a symbolic status driven rather than projecting its military power outside South Asia. Its core security and strategic concerns are Indian subcontinent in nature. There is a national consensus that self-defense and minimal deterrence are core parts of the idea of India's defense (Mehta, 2009). India has forged strong democratic value based military ties with the US which has opened India access to western military technology, but the relations have not evolved to the level of formal security pact of NATO or US-Japan type. The idea of foreign policy autonomy has retained its position in India foreign policy under the vision of strategic autonomy (Rao N. 2010; Monsonis 2010). There was a national consensus that Indian army would not join the US-led invading forces on Iraq in 2003 (Devirupa, 2016). Similarly, India has come to perceive threatened by Chinese expanding geopolitical influence, but that has not resulted balancing act beyond Indo-Pacific region. India has promoted strong naval cooperation with the US in the Indo-Pacific region while also has continued the strong trade relations with China. It took the full membership in China led Shanghai Organization Cooperation in 2017 (Bhattacharjee, 2017). Therefore, India's foreign policy is shaped by interplay of various factors and strategic culture also has capabilities to explain various foreign policy choices.



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