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**Challenges of India's Foreign Policy**

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**ABSTRACT**

Most nations and large ones at that do not easily alter their international orientation. States tend to be conservative about foreign policy. Fundamental changes in foreign policy take place only when there is a revolutionary change either at home or in the world. Much as the ascent of Deng Xiaoping in the late 1970s produced radical changes in Chinese foreign policy, India's relations with the world have seen a fundamental transformation over the last decade and a half. A number of factors were at work in India. The old political and economic order at home had collapsed and externally the end of the Cold War removed all the old benchmarks that guided India's foreign policy. Many of the core beliefs of the old system had to discard and consensus generated on new ones. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the new wave of economic globalization left India scrambling to find new anchors for its conduct of external relations.

**Keywords:** - Policy, Political, Change, Relations, Globalisation.

**Introduction:-**

India has formal diplomatic relations with most nations; it is the world's second most populous country, the world's most-populous democracy and one of the fastest growing major economies. With the world's seventh largest military expenditure, ninth largest economy by nominal rates and third largest by purchasing power parity, India is a regional power, a nascent great power and a potential superpower. India's growing international influence gives it a prominent voice in global affairs. The Economist magazine argues, however, that underinvestment in diplomacy and a lack of strategic vision have minimised India's influence in the world.

India is a newly industrialised country, it has a long history of collaboration with several countries and is considered one of the leaders of the developing world along with China, Brazil, Russia and South Africa (the BRICS countries). India was one of the founding members of several international organisations, most notably the United Nations, the Asian Development Bank, G20 industrial nations and the founder of the Non-aligned movement. India has also played an important and influential role in other international organisations like East Asia Summit, World Trade Organisation, International Monetary Fund (IMF), G8+5 and IBSA

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Dialogue Forum. Regionally, India is a part of SAARC and BIMSTEC. India has taken part in several UN peacekeeping missions and in 2007; it was the second-largest troop contributor to the United Nations. India is currently seeking a permanent seat in the UN Security Council, along with the G4 nations.<sup>1</sup>

Most Indians agree that its first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru had defined a unique foreign policy for India at the very dawn of its independence. Despite many critics of his world view, a broad national consensus had emerged around Nehru's ideas on independent foreign policy, non-alignment, and third world solidarity. Since the 1990s, though, the challenge for the Indian leaders has been to reinterpret Nehru's ideas to suit the new political context that had confronted it. The new Indian leaders could neither denounce Nehru nor formally reject Nehru's ideas, for that would have invited serious political trouble. Yet they had to continually improvise and refashion India's foreign policy to suit the new requirements. This has not been easy. The tension between the imperative of the new and the resistance of the old ideas on how to conduct foreign policy is real and is unlikely to end in the near future. The fear of the new and fondness for the old continue to be reflected in all aspects of Indian diplomacy from engaging the United States to an optimal strategy towards the smallest of the neighbours. The "new" foreign policy of India is indeed work in progress. Yet it is not difficult to see that the direction of Indian diplomacy has changed substantially since the end of the cold war amidst internal and external impulses.<sup>2</sup>

#### **Policy:-**

India's foreign policy has always regarded the concept of neighborhood as one of widening concentric circles, around a central axis of historical and cultural commonalities. As many as 21 million people of Indian origin live and work abroad and constitute an important link with the mother country. An important role of India's foreign policy has been to ensure their welfare and well being within the framework of the laws of the country where they live.<sup>3</sup>

#### **Historical Overview:-**

Modern Indian history can be divided into three broad time periods that overlap at the edges. The first period, in the 1950s and 1960s, features an essentially unified ideology shared by most of the Indian elite. The Congress party under Nehru enjoyed one-party dominance at home and represented a largely unified foreign policy ideology to the world. Internationally, Nehru chose the middle path of non-alignment to confound the bipolar order of the Cold War, arguing that India would have to "plough a lonely furrow." This policy was followed until a border war with

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China in 1962 compelled the Indian establishment to face the realities of power politics in the international system. Subsequently, having weathered further conflict with Pakistan in 1965 and leadership changes in the Congress party, both the domestic scene and India's foreign policy began to shift. The period of the 1970s and 1980s was one of intermittent realism. The general election of 1967 marked the beginning of the decline of Congress hegemony. Indira Gandhi, Nehru's daughter, assumed leadership of the Congress in 1966 and by 1969 the party had split into two factions under the government and the party organization respectively. In August 1970, Mrs. Gandhi told a Congress seminar that the problems of developing countries could be faced "not merely by idealism, not merely by sentimentalism, but by very clear thinking and hard-headed analysis of the situation." Domestically, she used every method possible – constitutional and unconstitutional – to centralize power within her party and bring state governments into line. While a rhetorical commitment was maintained to anti-imperialism, Third World solidarity and non-alignment abroad, and secularism, democracy and socialism at home, a marked drift in practice towards power politics occurred in both spheres.<sup>4</sup> The 1990s onwards saw the birth of pragmatism in Indian domestic politics and foreign policy. The old world order marked by the Cold War collapsed, giving way to new configurations. At home, over four decades of socialist economic policy culminated in a severe balance of payments crisis. Gradually, idealised conceptions of India's society, polity and role in the world were mostly discarded. The new ordering of the domestic sphere revolved largely around the process of electoral and parliamentary alliance formation. Shedding anti-Western ideology in the international arena, India downplayed its earlier moral exceptionalism, casting itself more as a nation, like any other, on a quest for power and prosperity. This produced greater normalisation of traditionally antagonistic relationships with neighbouring countries, a greater interest in international institutions that could legitimise its emerging great power status, a more positive approach to relations with the United States and, importantly, self-sufficiency in nuclear defence. Indian foreign policy in the 21st Century is characterised by pragmatism and a willingness to do business with all (an approach also reflected in much of India's domestic politics).<sup>5</sup>

### **Challenges of India's Foreign Policy:-**

#### **There are some problems before India's Foreign Policy:-**

- India has to give priority to safeguarding its security interests in its neighbourhood. Nepal is currently being wracked by the Maoist insurgency and its political system is under

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strain. In Sri Lanka the Peace Process with the LTTE is showing some hopeful signs but its ultimate success will depend on Sinhala unity and the real transformation of the LTTE from a terrorist organization to a peace partner. Our largest border is with Bangladesh. This porous border creates problems of insurgency and illegal migration which can be dealt with effectively only in conditions of acceptance of each others' legitimate concerns. The problem of Indian insurgent groups misusing Bhutan's territory for launching terrorists operations against India has to be resolved within the framework of India's excellent relations with Bhutan.

- With Myanmar, with which India shares its borders in the troubled eastern region infested with violent insurgency, a cooperative relationship is being steadily built around a commitment to stabilize the area, cooperate in economic projects and create multi-modal transport links extending to Thailand and prospectively beyond. Myanmar is keen to balance its external relationships and India has vital long term interest in increasing Myanmar's strategic options.
- The biggest challenge and a prospect worthy of realization would be the emergence of Pakistan as a moderate Islamic State in the true sense, with "moderation" being evaluated not merely in terms of the pro and anti-West orientation of Islamic regimes. Pakistan was born on the basis of extremist muslim demands and the roots of its identity lie in ideologically confrontational Islam. Indeed, Pakistan's emergence was a "clash of civilizations" in action long before the West discovered this frightening concept. Political Islam, as opposed to pious Islam, which the West began to fear after the Khomeini Revolution in Iran because of its perceived anti-West orientation has long been used against India, first to break it up and now to continue wounding it through recourse to terrorism. The military, which has ruled Pakistan for large periods of its existence, has become the custodian of Pakistan's Islamic hostility towards India, not the least because under that cover it can continue to preserve its enormous privileges within the system. Pakistan was fully involved in the creation and unleashing of the Taliban on the hapless Afghans. The Al Qaeda networks were built under its nose. Together with Afghanistan, Pakistan became the epicenter of international concern. So long as this activity promoted

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Pakistan's strategic interests and was directed against India, it was ignored by the West. Now we know at what cost. Big tragedies have big lessons to offer and for the sake of the victims all of us should learn them. Today the forces behind the Taliban and Al Qaeda, displaced from Afghanistan have re-emerged in the North West Frontier Province and Baluchistan in Pakistan. What was removed by force in Afghanistan has re-emerged legally in adjoining areas waiting for patience and time to run out before the politics of fundamentalism and destabilization is resumed. The nerve-centre of all this remains in Pakistan.<sup>6</sup>

- International terrorism is our common challenge today and how we deal with it holds out common prospects for all of us. Political expediency, short term gains, considerations of geopolitics, the difficulties in making a choice between one's own immediate priorities and the global good, nurturing of old constituencies, faulty analysis, double standards, all these and other reasons unfortunately blur the moral clarity and political focus on how this terrorism should be dealt with. Pakistan is today being rewarded for its cooperation with the West against terrorism with political and financial oxygen. The military leader of Pakistan has been allowed to manipulate the political system by weakening mainstream political parties and creating space for fundamentalists. From the margins these fundamentalists have moved into the mainstream. While deep concerns are mounting about the nexus between fundamentalism, terrorism and weapons of mass destruction, the spotlight is not on Pakistan which has all the three ingredients of concern, plus the additional one of fears of it becoming a "failed State". We have seen how there is a remarkable lack of curiosity about Pakistan's nuclear connection with North Korea in exchange for missile technology, which poses grave challenges to our security.
- One of the major challenges facing India today is the one posed by terrorism from across its borders. In fact, it is not a challenge that appeared in the context of today; the country has been seeing its innocent citizens victimized for the last two decades. It has evolved from being a mere law and order problem because of Pakistan's deliberate policy of relying on terrorism as a form of proxy war and an instrument of foreign policy. This has made terrorism a major security threat and countering it a predominant foreign policy

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challenge for us. India has successfully met this challenge earlier in Punjab. Cross-border terrorism in Jammu & Kashmir has assumed greater dimensions partly because the success that Pakistan had in foisting the Taliban in Afghanistan provided it with extensive experience of using terrorism as policy. According to conservative estimates, the extensive cultivation of opium in Afghanistan provided the Pakistani establishment with between US \$ 90 million to US \$ 136 million of money per annum for at least seven years. This money has been used to finance its proxy war in J&K, equip, train and arm terrorists and infiltrate them into India with weapons and modern communication equipment.<sup>7</sup>

- The evolution of the situation in Afghanistan presents a complex and enormous security and political challenge to India's foreign policy. Afghanistan is more peaceful but not stable yet. The political vacuum in the Pashtun areas, the absence of any anti-Taliban cohesive Pashtun force, the failure to curb Pakistan's ambitions in south and eastern Afghanistan and the likelihood that the situation in the middle east may further divert attention from the danger of pro-Taliban Pashtuns being backed by Pakistan filling this vacuum is real and present. There are reports that Taliban and Al Qaeda elements are regrouping along its southern and eastern borders and continue to receive support, both moral and material from Pakistan. Early economic reconstruction of Afghanistan is one of the most important requirements for the return of peace and stability to that country. India has provided extensive humanitarian, financial and project assistance to Afghanistan. The governing philosophy of India's assistance to Afghan reconstruction has been to respond to Afghan felt and priority needs. India regards this as crucial for regional peace and stability and views her relationship with Afghanistan as direct and bilateral. Our close historical links with Central Asia provide an asset for building important relationships.
- Moving eastwards, East Asia has been a natural component of India's foreign policy priorities. India is an Asian country, the second largest both demographically and geographically. Developments in Asia impinge directly on our security and strategic interests. China is a direct neighbour as are ASEAN countries such as Myanmar and

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Indonesia. The Indian Ocean straddles the most important sea routes that connect the oil producing region of the Gulf with the consumer countries of East Asia. Increase in maritime trade is another reality today. Cooperation between India and these countries is a necessary prerequisite for the 21st century to become the century of Asia. India's look east policy starts from North East Asia and not simply the ASEAN region. Yet, India is excluded from APEC as also ASEM. We have, however, a sound framework for meeting the challenges ahead – India has become a member of the ASEAN Regional Forum and a summit partner with the ASEAN. The ASEAN countries themselves have realized the value of engaging India for greater political, security and economic balance in the region. India has engaged in an effort to craft special trade and investment arrangements through an India-ASEAN Free Trade Area to be brought about in 10 years, a BIMST-EC FTA as also bilateral arrangements such as the India-Thailand FTA and India-Singapore Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement. BIMST-EC and Mekong-Ganga Cooperation are other structural frameworks for India's "Look-East" policy. We are working on a trilateral highway project between India, Myanmar and Thailand. Connectivity, canalizing resources and policy coordination among India and the countries in the region are the tasks ahead.

- Our relations with the United States have entered a phase of unprecedented improvement. India and the United States are, respectively, the world's most populous and the most powerful democracies, having clear commonalities in shaping a new democratic and pluralistic world order. The US with its belief that it is right to be good and India with its belief that it is good to be right can together promote what is both good and right, in the one case bringing power to the enterprise and in the other case numbers. Our Prime Minister has described India and the US as natural partners. Our relationship with the US is being transformed. There is an intensive dialogue covering a broad agenda, seeking new possibilities for cooperation. Besides regular political dialogue, India and the United States have established over 15 institutional forums that meet regularly. Notwithstanding the chill of May 1998, dramatic progress has been seen in security and defence cooperation, and trade and investment – the US is our largest trading partner (US \$ 23 billion in goods and services last year), the predominant destination of our IT services

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exports(US \$ 5.7 billion last year) and the major source of foreign investments. Areas for dialogue include energy and environment, science and technology, biotechnology and health, information technology and cyber security, combating terrorism and missile defence. Yet, the challenges remain for better management of relations, given the different geo-strategic and economic contexts, and occasional differences in perspectives. Our approach seeks to deal with these differences in a transparent, positive manner, according to enduring principles of our foreign policy that sought never to define relations with any one country through the prism of any other country or regional equations or alliance systems. The investment that both sides have made in the relationship is predicated as much on mutual benefit as on its global significance.

- Our relations with China are following a positive course and a steady effort to overcome past differences and build a growing convergence of interests is being made. The challenge that we face vis-à-vis China is to sustain the steady expansion and strengthening of the relationship in diverse fields even as we attempt to together resolve the border issue. India and China are amongst the fastest growing economies in the world, the two largest developing countries and two major Asian powers with a recognized capacity to play major roles in shaping the future of the continent. The challenge is to balance legitimate interests of all the other players – Japan, the ASEAN bloc and the US - in a cooperative framework. Bilateral trade between India and China this year will equal four and half billion US dollars. Compared to the three and a half billion dollars trade with Japan, this illustrates the progress in efforts to normalize relations. But the unresolved border issue as also elements of China's own internal and external policies, the impact of its growing strength on the region and beyond, the extent of its sensitivity to concerns about proliferation of nuclear and missile technology in the region and the degree to which its economic success would translate into a more democratic, transparent system, would be a subject of intense interest to India as also to the international community as a whole.<sup>8</sup>

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**Conclusion:-**

In years to come as India will graduate to a responsible world power, its foreign policy will be facing many more challenges. The biggest challenge will be walking tightrope between competing interests of India's friends; who may not be each other's friend. Other challenge will include increasing Indian leverage and presence in other developing countries and use their potential for own benefit. India will also be required to make its stand clear on many important global issues and there will be no escaping from this. India should align itself more with the BRICS grouping it has formed. It must try to have a more consistent foreign policy aligned with its BRICS allies. This may be the road ahead for India.

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