**Study Material**

**Prepared by: Prof. Raj Kumar Kothari**

**M.A. 2nd Semester**

**[Course No: PLS: 202/B]**

**Subject: Political Science**

India’s Foreign Policy under Narendra Modi: A Critical Appraisal

Theoretically speaking, India’s foreign policy since independence rests on strong footing. India’s foreign policy, since independence had been inspired by the ideals and vision of the leaders of independence movement. Distinguished Leaders like Mahatma Gandhi, Jawaharlal Nehru, Subhash Chandra Bose and few others were largely responsible for providing the philosophical and intellectual foundations of India’s foreign policy strategy and directions. Some of its major tenets were articulated by Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s first prime minister, at the Asian Relations Conference held in Delhi in March 1947. It is important to add that from the very beginning India’s foreign policy systematically combined its national interests with the broader objective of establishing a just and equitable world order. Moreover, it was deeply anchored in the ideals of truth, non-violence, tolerance, the notion of global governance and the world as a single family of human kind. In other words, as far as trends and directions are concerned, Indian foreign policy since independence had a rich tradition. In fact, India’s pluralism, diversity, democratic practices, and multicultural make-up - all are internationally viewed as elements of strength rather than fragility.

Foreign policy of any country, particularly the major powers, do not change dramatically with a change in leadership. Sovereign states tend to be conservative about foreign policy. Fundamental changes in foreign policy take place only when there is a revolutionary transformations either at home or outside the sovereign boundary. India’s foreign policy since 1947 has evolved in response to India’s internal conditions while taking into account the structural factors. Due to fundamental changes in the domestic and external factors, India’s foreign relations with the world have witnessed a fundamental transformation after the end of the cold war that coincided with the fall of the Soviet Union in 1991. Some notable changes in the 1990s were: (a) a shift in India’s foreign policy from idealism to pragmatism; (b) India’s integration into the world economy and the rise of economic thrust in its foreign policy; and (c) India’s strategic partnership with the United States.

In the backdrop of globalisation and subsequently the reforms initiated by the Government of India in the early 1990s, a real paradigm shift in India’s foreign policy had taken place. India’s special ties with the former Soviet Union had come to an end and the country and its policy makers turned towards the world in search of new business and strategic partners. New Delhi gradually replaced the normative discourse of non-alignment and strategic autonomy in India’s foreign policy. From non-alignment India moved towards multi-alignment. It was at this moment that India’s foreign policy became transformative in style and content which could be described as a consequential moment in India’s international evolution. Few significant developments in this regard are noteworthy.

In the year 1998, the Vajpayee government pushed India beyond the nuclear Rubicon by conducting the Pokhran-II nuclear test and thereby making its nuclear doctrine more explicit. Other notable changes include Japan’s increasing involvement in infrastructural development as well as its emergence as the largest donor of official development assistance to India and one of the largest sources of foreign direct investment (FDI), and most significantly a transformation of its relationship with the United States. The India-US Civil Nuclear Deal Agreement signed during Prime Minister Manmohan Singh’s visit to Washington in July 2008 led to a transformative relationship between India and the United States. The Bush administration agreed to change its domestic non-proliferation law in favour of India. Similarly the very foundation of India’s constructive engagement with the West European countries started taking place since the early 1990s after the fall of the USSR. It was at this time, India initiated the much needed ‘Look East policy’ that transformed India’s relations with South East Asia and the Asia Pacific. India’s political and economic engagement with all the five Central Asian countries – Kazakhstan, Tajikistan, Uzbekistan, Kirgizstan, and Turkmenistan - started taking shape towards the later part of 1990s which gained a fresh momentum in 2012 when New Delhi launched ‘connect Central Asia Policy’. Towards the end of 1990s, Vladimir Putin came to power in Russia and immediately thereafter New Delhi-Moscow bilateral relations took a fresh turn. Lot of efforts were put into strengthening India’s bilateral relations with its neighbouring countries, particularly China and Pakistan. On the whole, India’s foreign policy strategy since the end of the cold war had resulted in building strong partnership with all the major powers including the United States along with the prospects of improved relations with its neighbours. Based on these developments one may argue that transformation in India’s foreign policy in the post-cold war years had been substantive in nature.

When Narendra Modi came to power in 2014, foreign policy establishments in New Delhi put in great efforts to renegotiate the terms of India’s engagement with the outer world. A number of foreign policy experts have argued that India’s foreign policy under Narendra Modi has been transformative in style and content. C. Raja Mohan interpreted Narendra Modi’s foreign policy initiatives as ‘a consequential moment in India’s international evolution’. Harsh V Pant have stated that Narendra Modi seems to be redefining the terms on which India is likely to engage with the world in the coming years. However, if we make an in depth analysis about the developments with regard to trends and directions of India’s foreign policy during last three years of Narendra Modi’s tenure, it could be stated that the changes have largely been of style not substance.

Now, three years have elapsed since Narendra Modi became the Prime Minister. Trends indicate that India-Russia bilateral relations are on the wrong track. India’s relations with its important neighbours, particularly China and Pakistan, have taken a down turn with no major signs of recovery. India-China standoff over *Doklam* development might have boosted India’s strategic image under Modi, but this has hardly that helped to normalise New Delhi’s relations with Beijing. India’s bilateral relations with Nepal are under stress with no signs of recovery. The South Asian Association of Regional Countries (SAARC) have even failed to hold its yearly conference for two consecutive years during Modi’s tenure. Today, SAARC has become a ‘comatose’ organisation.

Reeta Chowdhuri Tremblay and Ashok Kapur in their book entitled: “Modi’s Foreign Policy” has argued that the new foreign policy discourse of Narendra Modi is about inter-linkages – alignments aimed at avoiding zero-sum outcomes by pursuing a course of integrative bargaining among diverse powers with diverse interests. Kanti Bajpai refers to this approach as a ‘hybrid neoliberal-cum-hyper-realist grand strategy’. It means deepening economic relationships with China yet getting tougher on border issues and more assertive in the Indian Ocean. Another important development is the simultaneous military and defence alignments with the United States, France, Australia, Japan and Russia. Therefore, it would be a grave mistake to argue that there has been a paradigm shift in India’s foreign policy under Narendra Modi.

--------------------