

INDIA'S POLICY OF EXTENDED NEIGHBOURHOOD

Dr. Ashok Kumar

Associate Professor

RKSD (PG) College Kaithal

Email-id: atri12197@gmail.com

Abstract: The end of the Cold War and the rise of regionalism, integration and neo-functional organizations have transformed the global balance of forces and the nature of international relations. India's foreign policy, which was based on anti-colonialism, anti-imperialism, anti-racialism and nonalignment, has lost its relevance and direction in this new scenario. India needs to adopt new strategies and principles to cope with the challenges and complexities of the new configuration of international forces. This paper examines India's foreign policy reorientation towards its extended neighbourhood, which includes South Asia, Middle East Asia, Southeast Asia and Central Asia. It analyses India's interests, new policy of extended neighbourhood and its implications for regional stability and cooperation.

Keywords: Extended neighbourhood, Regionalism, integration, Nonalignment and anti-colonialism

1.0 Introduction

The end of the Cold War have brought about a sudden shift in global balance of forces. It led to the collapse of bipolar world and related military power blocks and rise in the forces of regionalism, integration and neo-functional organizations. International relations are going through unprecedented and profound changes. There is increasing trend towards globalization and economic privatization amid twists and turns. This scenario has replaced the importance of political order by the one dominated by economic alignments. All these developments has emerged as a great changer that shaping world politics and international relationship. Thus, the contemporary world is witnessing an unprecedented restructuring of international relations in a fast changing scenario.ⁱ

These events have also ripped the foundation from beneath Indian foreign policy. The main pillar of India's foreign policy that provided its content and direction—anti colonialism, a global redistributive justice, and nonalignment—have all lost their significance.ⁱⁱ The most important task for India would be to understand the nature and content and the need to evolve a new set of principles to cope with this situation. It has to adopt new strategies and look beyond the Nehruvian vintage which had guided Indian policy till now. As rightly pointed out by Poonam Mann,ⁱⁱⁱ

India's foreign policy was framed in an environment characterised by the bipolar world, imperialism, racialism and advent of nuclear weapons. Thus, it adopted the policy of nonalignment, anti-imperialism, anti-racialism and peace by adopting strategies to overcome the forces of discrimination and hegemonism in the world and work for a just political and economic order. However, far-reaching changes all over the world in the recent years have necessitated a review of its established policies and to re-define them in the context of changed scenario.

Thus, the question arises how India pursues its short term and long term objectives in this changed global era. The need for India is to put brave face towards challenges and complexities of the new configuration of international forces.

In recent years, India has shown greater willingness to evolve a new framework for resolving the bilateral disputes with the neighbouring and regional countries. There is a far more visible presence of political commitment to and investment in good neighbourly relations than even before. It has been following a policy of positive engagement in its international relations since then. India has displaced swift changes from Idealism to in real term. India is also looking forward to an increasing role in global and regional affairs. Prof. Baljit Singh is the view of that^{iv}:

"India has identified the three concentric circles of its foreign policy ranging from immediate to intermediate and then to overarching. The immediate circle is constituted by its neighbourhood, whereas, the intermediate consists of extended neighbourhood and the overarching one includes the global players like the United States, European Union, Russia, Canada and other major players in the contemporary world power structure".

Much of the current dynamism in India's foreign policy can be attributed to the consequences of this changed international global scenario. The focus of Indian foreign policy increasingly shifted from global issues to events relating to the regional one and increasingly beyond its traditional China-Pakistan focus. It is looking to expand its circles of engagement with immediate and extended neighbourhood, particularly South Asia, Middle East Asia, Southeast Asia and Central Asia. In this paper, India's foreign policy reorientation relating to so called extended neighbourhood is the subject of inquiry. Looked at in this light, broadly speaking it would be better to analysis India's policy towards these regions in these spectrum: Firstly, India's Interests; secondly, New Policy of Extended Neighbourhood.

2.0 India's Interests

Given the growing trend towards regional groupings and integration, India has increasingly engaged with its immediate and extended neighbourhood for consolidation of its ties with them. It has given emphasis for greater efforts to not only strengthen SAARC but also expand interactions with the countries of much talked extended neighbourhood in particularly South East Asia, West Asia and Central Asia. These regions have the special priority in India's foreign policy orientation for the time being.

The importance of these regions to India lies in its following broad contexts: I. Economic; II. Strategic; and III. Political. The comprehensive analysis of all these dimensions can reveal the vital significance of these areas to India.

3.0 Economic Dimension

In this changed scenario, it is fair to say that economics has become a significant agent of political and strategic security. At government and private level serious attempts have been made in this direction. India has begun to evolve strategic and sectoral economic partnerships to further her economic security.^v These areas of extended neighbourhood have great potentials in terms of its enormous natural resources and trade potentials.

The regions of West Asia and Central Asia hold world's largest hydrocarbon reserves. The importance of Persian Gulf in point of energy resources has already to be known in international arena, the Central Asia is to be considered next haunting ground for power politics. It is estimated that the CARs has the untapped natural resources ranging between 90 to 200 billion barrels of oil and 46 percent of the world gas reserves.^{vi} Besides, they also possess a quarter of the world's known Uranium resources and the largest goldmine on earth. On the other hand, East Asia and ASEAN has great trade potentials. However, these potentials can be enhanced with the help of enormous economic investments and by massive application of sophisticated and advanced technologies. It is very difficult for them to thoroughly realise their potentials without the support and co-operation of other states. Hence, most of the countries in these regions are trying to diversify their economies and are in close contact with new partners to enhance economic cooperation.

Thus, these regions have the potential to emerge as an important area of economic activity for India. It is likely to be a great center for investment market for joint ventures in the core sector of their economies. Simultaneously, due to rising India's energy demand, It is making efforts to look for reliable long-term sources of energy to boost its economy. The pursuit of energy sufficiency and markets impel India to look seriously to its extended neighbourhood.^{vii}

4.0 Strategic Dimension

After the collapse of Soviet Union a new dimension has been added to Asian geopolitics. A power vacuum has existed in Central Asian Region. Combined with West Asia, it has not only added strategically new conceptual problems for policy makers of this region but also for entire world politics. Geographical location, mineral and oil wealth and demographic composition make both these regions as the very important areas from the strategic point of view. Hence these regions invite the attention of all competing powers for creating their stronghold.

The location of West and Central Asia including Afghanistan has made these regions not only a bridge between Europe and Asia, but has also positioned it at the crossroad of West Asia, South Asia, Russia and China.^{viii} Besides, the huge resources of oil and gas and possession of nuclear technology by some Central Asian Republics have made this area an area for power politics.^{ix} Furthermore, Islam constitutes the major belief into the population of these regions. The fundamentalist powers of this area and surrounding countries want to secure their parochial objectives in this complicated situation.

Country like Pakistan is keen to develop its relations with the countries of West and Central Asia relying on Islamic fraternity. It has supported whole-heartedly to Islamic revivalism particularly in CARs. So the use of Islamic revivalism is more dangerous than the religious unity among the Muslims. Islamic fundamentalists are

striving captive power by coercive means in these countries resulting in civil strife and turbulence which is likely to have a direct bearing on the Indian demographic set up. Any success by Islamic fundamentalist in this area can invigorate similar activities in Kashmir.

External powers' indulgence in this region has created a serious concern in the minds of Indian policy makers as it may have far more sinister implications in this region and adjoining areas in South Asia. India's security interests are inextricably entwined with these turbulent regions of West and Central Asia.^x Hence to contain the nefarious activities of these powers and restrict the increasing influence of Islamic states pose a great threat to India. Owing to its proximity to these regions it has to be cautious of the spillover affects on India's security.

While, the countries of East Asia and ASEAN have gained importance in Indian policy perspective mainly due to addressee the hegemonic stature of China and contain its rising dominance in Asian politics and secondly, as has huge trade potentials in this changed economic world order. China has emerged as super power after the demise of erstwhile USSR. It has adopted multi prolonged and overlapping policies to achieve economic and strategic objectives in this area. The aggressiveness on foreign policy front combined with disputed history has rung the bell in the mind of policy makers of India as well as for other East Asia and ASEAN countries.^{xi} And, hence proper handling of this situation is the need of hour.

'Look East Policy' in fact is the creation of economic need of India in recession of the decade of nineties. It has pragmatically constituted this policy for her economic survival, and this policy in due course, was extended to more East. In these years, India has found a great success in term of free trade, and attaining Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and economic assistance from ASEAN members.^{xii}

5.0 Political Dimension

Although, Islam has emerged as the major belief of most of the residing people in the demographic composition of Central Asia and ASEAN, yet social arrangements is of plural character. People of different languages, nationalities and ethnicity formed a composite culture. In view of the poly-ethnic composition of the Republics and the artificially drawn state borders dividing people and nationalities in the recent past have invited numerous inter-ethnic tensions and conflicts in this area. This fragile ethnic strife has the direct bearing on the country like India known for diversity.

Most of the countries have the political setup based on Islamic ideology. Whereas, the dissolution of Soviet Union has given birth to a sudden resurgence of Islam in whole of Central Asia, as it the major belief of demographic composition. The disappearance of Soviet ideology has left a vacuum in the beliefs and value system leaving search for an alternative ideology an inevitable phenomenon. Consequently, Islam is likely to take deeper roots among the masses in CARs. Under conditions of social tensions, possibilities of easy conversion of 'folk Islam' into 'political Islam' loom large, and through the exploitation of the latter by vested interests, into 'fundamentalist Islam'.^{xiii} This new phenomenon has become the most complex issue, which may work as a destabilizing factor in and around these regions. So the resurgence of fundamentalist Islam in this region is a major policy concern for the whole world.

Pakistan has always sees this type of situation in a win-win situation. The supports to religious fundamentalism and international terrorism have become important components of strategic benefits for the countries like Pakistan. The emerging bizarre situation in Central Asia provides a space for Pakistan to play its anti-India sentiments and enlist Central Asian support for its regional policies. India has already paid a price for this in the case of Organisation of Islamic Countries (OIC). These trends have far reaching implications and a matter of deep concern for India's policy makers.

This analysis of these economic, strategic and political dimensions reveals that the concept of extended neighbourhood occupies a prominent factor in the formulation of India's foreign policy.

6.0 India's New Policy of Extended Neighbourhood

The fear of increasing fundamentalism and economic crisis led India to adopt the 'Look Asia policy' in the decade of 90s.^{xiv} Indian policy maker's has taken various initiatives for a closer regional collaboration with the Association of South-East Asian Nations (ASEAN) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) states, Shanghai Five, Conference on Interaction and Confidence-building Measures in Asia (CICA) and Bishkek International Conference on Enhancing Security and Stability in Central Asia. It could be seen as an India's attempt to penetrate regions to it's around traditionally dominated by other regional and global powers'.^{xv} It has created the basis for bold and innovative changes in policy formation of India towards its neighbour. That in turn has position India to emerge as one of the dominant political player in this region. These

changes can be viewed in terms two concentric circles of engagement with immediate and extended neighbourhood. Looked at in this light, broadly speaking it would be better to analysis India's relations towards these regions under so called 'look Asia policy.' It comprises three areas- East and ASEAN, West Asia and Central Asia Including Afghanistan.

7.0 Look East Policy

The process of renewal and reaffirmation of the friendly relations among India and the countries of South East Asia, marks, what one may call the historical cycle? India's linkage with these countries took a distinctive shape since the early 1990s in the form of 'Look East policy'. It has been a multi-pronged approach encompassing political, strategic and economic aspects and enhancing its influence in these countries threw actively participating in the activities of ASEAN and East Asia Summit (EAS).

The region includes China, Japan, Burma, North Korea, Taiwan, and ASEAN countries-Brunei, Cambodia, Indonesia, Laos, Malaysia, Philippines, Singapore, Thailand and Vietnam. Out of these China, Japan and ASEAN countries are the core members whom, India's policy makers are more concerned. India's relations with Japan and China have developed considerably with several exchanges of high level visits in recent times. With Myanmar, dropping the earlier policy of isolationism practiced, the Indian government hosted a week-long visit from the its military general Than. Several other initiatives at governmental level are also taken in this regard.

By making India a Full Dialogue Partner, the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) renewed and restored their relations. Indian companies have long had a presence in this area. These countries are important markets for Indian goods and labour oriented services.^{xvi} During these years, India's trade with these countries has shot up from US \$ 3.1 billion ion 1991 to more than US \$ 37 billion in 2007.^{xvii}

8.0 Look West Policy

India used to enjoy lot of goodwill, respect and credibility in West Asia from the beginning. It has not fulfilled energy needs but it was also important because of geopolitical concerns. In post cold war period, a similar dynamism is also seen in India's approach towards Gulf region and West Asia. It witnessed a major shift from pro-Arab tilt to closeness with Israel. Although India has assured these countries that its relations with Israel are not at the cost of the Arab cause, even then it has created some type of anxiety in the mind of these countries.

With its economy is growing at 9 percent rate per annum, India has a need to ensure adequate external supplies of energy resources and raw materials. It is trying to get access to traditional as well as new regions for fulfilment of this requirement. Iran is one of the most important countries in this region with which India has maintained fairly extensive relationship. As Priya Ranjan Kumar has concluded^{xviii}:

“There are a number of factors, such as the unipolar nature of international system, India's need to get substantial support to counter Pakistan's influence in the Islamic world, its search for the participation the Great Game in the increasing geopolitical importance importance of Central Asia, and the need to strengthen economic commercial ties in the search of energy security, which have been responsible for the growing convergence in Indo-Iran interest in post-cold war period.”

This was reflected in India's invitation to Iran's Prime Minister to be the guest of honour at the Republic Day celebrations in January 2003. It has strongly opposed military action against Iran on the issue of nuclear programme. Iran also extended full support to India on the issue of Jammu and Kashmir most of time exception to recent U- turn of religious leader Al Khumani.

With Iraq, India shared close ties until the latter invaded Kuwait in 1990. India has maintained good bilateral relations with Iraq in both political and economic sphere due to its strategic significance to Indian interests in this area. While on economic front, the UAE and Kuwait are the biggest trade partners in the recent times. Saudia Arabia is the largest source of crude oil to India supplying half a million barrels of crude oil per day. Bahrain, Oman and Qatar are another countries in this region with them India has developed good economic and political relations in recent times. There are a number of joint ventures which Indian companies have taken up in these countries. There are about five lakh Indian workers are living in these countries.

In the post cold war period, India-Israel relations witnessed the major policy shift despite hue and cry situation at political level in India as well as in Arab countries. India decided to have close relations with it in the areas of agriculture, technology transfer, security, defence and strategic affairs.

9.0 Afghanistan and Central Asia

The changing scenario in Afghanistan and its unpredictable future has emerged as the most serious security challenge in this region. Violent turbulence is affecting India as well as whole the region of Central Asia. It has become the source of fundamentalism and extremism. Most countries in this region are convinced that fundamentalists consolidating in Afghanistan under the Taliban will destabilize whole the area. India apprehends that the expansion of Islamic extremism will increase the pressure on Kashmir as well as bordering areas of Uzbekistan, Tajikistan and Kyrgyzstan.

A stable and politically mature Afghanistan is not only in the interest of India and these countries, but also desirable for other neighbour states. But Pakistan considered Afghanistan as the territorial enticement to realize its quest for strategic depth, primarily for its rivalry with India. The emergence of Taliban has once again provided platform to Pakistan to play its game here. Its control over the whole of Afghanistan would mean gains for Pakistan to have direct access to Central Asia. This changed scenario would not only alter the security environment in entire region, but would also alter balance of power in Asia.^{xix}

Furthermore, another problem that related to this is that of drug trafficking. The terrorist groups, particularly in Afghanistan, regard the drug production and sales as the most appropriate means to earn money to purchase armaments. It has become the biggest transit point for drug delivery to other neighbouring countries. It poses a major threat to peace and stability in the entire region. A rapid expansion of the traditional cultivation of opium in this area has helped to finance the terrorist groups and fundamentalists in northern India.^{xx}

For India, the need for peace, stability and greater co-operation in Afghanistan has never been as important as it is now. The region can obtain a dynamic and sustainable development only if stability and geopolitical balances are preserved in this country. This changed scenario in Afghanistan with the ouster of Taliban has also provided a great opportunity to India to promote peace and stability in their neighbourhood.^{xxi} Establishment of friendly government in Afghanistan can prove to be extremely rewarding in strategic point of view. The cheap energy available in Central Asian region can be of use to India if it can reach through viable route. As proposed the Central Asian oil and gas will travel either by pipelines or through trade routes either by Afghanistan, Iran or China, India cannot ignore the importance of Afghanistan as a cheap and shortest trade route provider. Thus, India can steer up their diplomatic efforts by keeping in view the importance of stability and security in this country.

On the foreign policy front, India supported the Marxist regime in Kabul until its collapse in the spring of 1992. Religious extremist forces led by B Rabbani and supported by Pakistan seized power after that. Pakistan's objective supported by Saudi Arabia was to spread the religious agenda in this region.^{xxii} India then attempted to regain some influence in the country by cooperating with Iran.

Strategic situation became more worsen in point of India's security when the Pakistan backed Taliban came to power in this country in 1996. They enforced their own agenda and turn Afghanistan into the hub of arms, drug trafficking and international terrorism with Osama bin Laden using it as a base of Al Qaida and other Islamic terrorist outfits. Instability in Afghanistan and its unpredictable future has become the most serious security challenge not only for South Asian region but also for Central Asia. Violent turbulence is affecting India as well as whole the region. It has become the source of fundamentalism and extremism.

With the shift in international politics from Europe to Asia particularly Eurasia, the importance of Central Asia has enhanced considerably. Located in the heartland of Asia, Kazakhstan, Kyrgyzstan, Tajikistan, Turkmenistan and Uzbekistan emerged as a result of disintegration of the former USSR. All these countries constitute the region of Central Asia, situated at the crossroads of the ancient silk-rout linking China, India and Iran with the West.^{xxiii}

Historically a buffer zone between Asia and Europe this region also provides a convenient transit route connecting other major regions of Asian continent to Europe^{xxiv}. Its location alone is a good indicator of its political and strategic significance. The strategic location, demographic composition and availability of oil and mineral wealth, this region has become vital for global politics in general and India in particular. It has become much more crucial for India than before, to alter the changing security relationship in its extended neighbourhood in this changed regional scenario. Despite India having no direct borders with Central Asian states, geographical proximity of this region makes the region to be considered as part of India's extended neighbourhood.

This is why, India followed the policy of consistent engagement with this region in the areas of economic, strategic and political affairs since their inception. Hence, India established diplomatic relations with these states immediately after their independence and made efforts to develop frameworks for diplomatic, economic, and cultural cooperation with them. Most of the leaders of both regions have visited each other. Leaders, academicians, businessmen of both the region too have reciprocated goodwill visits to each other region and explored the possibilities of grounds for further relation building.

As far as economic relations are concerned, India has seen a number of areas in which it has considerable strength for cooperation. These are: automobile ancillary components; textiles; hotels; banking and insurance; drugs and pharmaceuticals; non-conventional source of energy; and electronics; and trade. Joint ventures of India and these Republics were envisaged in these areas. India has also offered facilities for training of Central Asian journalists, diplomats and students. A number of Indian companies are already doing good business in CARs in different areas. India has also offered credit facilities and moderate financial aid to all the Republics. Both India and these states have given 'most favored nation' status to each other.

India is also aware of the importance of vast natural resources available in these states because energy security is the fundamental and inevitable requirement in contemporary world. India and CARs are also collaborating in this sector. Any arrangement would bring together the main producers and consumers of oil in Asia. India and CARs are busy to create the right kind of atmosphere for companies to enter this strategic field. They have been striving hard to create new routes to get access in these oil fields. India had also signed the treaty on 'principles of inter state co-operation' and Bilateral Investment Promotion and Protection Agreement (BIPA) with each of these Republics for trade Promotion in these years. India offered a moderate financial aid to all of these Republics. India and most of these countries have established Joint Commissions to promote economic and technological linkages. It has launched a Focus CIS Programme in March 2003. To enhance India's trade with countries of this region, the Programme has now been extended further till the financial year 2007-2008. India extends assistance to exporters, EPCs, Business chambers etc. to visit these countries, organise trade fairs, invite CIS trade delegations to visit India and undertake various other market promotional activities under this programme.

Bilateral trade with some of these countries has grown significantly if the figures since 1999 are taken into account. Bilateral trade with some of these countries has grown significantly if the figures since 1999 are taken into account. It has more than doubled with each country in these years. The balance of trade was in favour of these Republics in the beginning. However, after 1998-1999, it has been turned in favour of India. India's trade with states of Central Asia stands around 102935.39 lakhs rupees as in 2004-2005 accounts growth for around 24.47 % in comparison of 2003-2004 trade of 93110.34 lakhs rupees. During 2004-2005, there has been an increase in both Indian exports and imports. Indian exports increased to 75991.29 from last year exports of 69769.92 lakhs rupees and import to 26984.10 lakhs rupees from 23340.42 lakh rupees during this year. Thus India-CARs bilateral trade in whole though small in volume, has been growing steadily over the years and holds promising potential for further growth and diversification.^{xxv}

Besides these agreements on economic cooperation, all of these Republics are a part of the Indian technical and economic cooperation (ITEC) programme, through which a number of students from these countries are availing training programmes in different Indian institutes. The Confederation of Indian Industries (CII) has been regularly organizing trade fairs and 'Enterprise India' exhibitions in the capitals of these countries to serve as a platform for the Indian small and medium enterprises (SMEs) in Central Asia.

In this context, economic scenario; security and strategic issues; and threat of political instability have led to the emergence of serious challenges from these regions for India. There is unending scope to derive multifarious benefits via a two-way union with these regions. The dynamics of these individual relationships was, however, influenced by some common problems and constraints faced by the region as a whole. Lack of direct transportation system, language barrier, inadequate transit facility, modest progress made both in liberalisation and privatisation, inadequacy of information about business opportunities, lack of direct and regular interaction among the business entities and inadequate banking facilities in these countries and some other political strategic issues are some of the major problems which hinder the existing relations.

This changed world scenario has provided both challenges and opportunities for India in the reorientations of its foreign policy goals. So it is imperative for India to look towards these areas with more seriousness. These regions required consideration at three levels: firstly, to sustain India's existing political and economic presence in these regions; Secondly, preventing the region falling prey to Islamic- theocratic-polity; Thirdly, to counter negative political and strategic trends based on pan ideology, which tend to isolate India.

To sum up, for India, its extended neighbourhood constitutes a very important geo-strategic region with which India has age-old ties. In the post-Cold War period most of the countries are busy in developing and diversifying their relations and policy with other countries. Large-scale strategies are being framed; deals are being signed for exporting strategic materials and energy from these regions in all the directions. On the basis prevailing goodwill among these states India should capitalize on it and should take concrete and bold steps to strengthen its economic, political, scientific and cultural relations. India's basic thrust towards this region should be one of positive

engagement. The relaxation of tension in the post-cold war era is likely to strengthen their bilateral ties in a more constructive manner.

10.0 References

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