

## FOREIGN POLICY: A LAYMAN'S VIEW

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### INTRODUCTION

This paper presents a layman's view of a country's foreign policy and its key ingredients -- objectives, guiding principles, and policies. It also looks at current challenges in the global environment and possible directions for the future.

There is something called the SWOT Analysis of a country which refers to an analysis of its strengths, weaknesses, opportunities and threats. It provides a useful perspective for discussion of the country's foreign policy. Table 1 below presents a SWOT analysis for India, as a general backdrop to the discussion

Table 1: SWOT analysis of INDIA
<b>STRENGTHS</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. World's largest democracy</li> <li>2. Fifth largest economy in the world, by GDP</li> <li>3. Second most populous country in the world</li> <li>4. Founding member of several supra-national bodies: United Nations, Asian Development Bank, G 20, BRICS Bank, other.</li> <li>5. Large domestic market</li> <li>6. A large stock of skilled manpower</li> <li>7. One of the biggest film industries in the world</li> <li>8. Many tourist attractions (Agra, Jaipur, Varanasi, other)</li> <li>9. Linguistic and Cultural Diversity</li> </ol>
<b>WEAKNESSES</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Grinding Poverty ( One quarter of the population living below the poverty line)</li> <li>2. Diverse cultures and religions. Communal tensions erupt from time to time</li> <li>3. Road indiscipline</li> <li>4. Water Crisis</li> <li>5. Fake news</li> <li>6. Abuse of power by politicians</li> <li>7. Recurring problems due to floods and droughts</li> <li>8. Farmer unrest</li> <li>9. A legal system that is slow to respond to the problems of the poor and the weak</li> </ol>
<b>OPPORTUNITIES</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Potential regional and super power</li> <li>2. Increasing trade with current trading partners</li> <li>3. Deepen relations with the global economy</li> <li>4. Attracting global companies to set up shop in India</li> </ol>
<b>THREATS</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Unresolved boundary disputes with China and Pakistan</li> <li>2. Growing competition in India's areas of strength (eg. IT)</li> <li>3. Natural disasters, such as floods, cyclones, droughts, heat waves</li> </ol>
<i>Source : SWOT analysis of India, by M Rahman, HOWANDWHAT, 21 March 2021</i>

India has diplomatic relations with more than 200 countries around the world, with the prospect of adding more in the near future. The general consensus is that India's foreign policy has served its purpose well through the past seventy odd years since independence, if you allow for a few brief spells of tension. Although this paper is about foreign policy in general, it takes a few short peeps into India's foreign policy – the opportunities and constraints surrounding it.

### **EVOLUTION OF INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY**

When independent India's first Prime Minister, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, began formulating the country's foreign policy, there were two major power blocks in the world – the so-called free world led by the United States, and the communist world led by the Soviet Union. Each kept trying to expand its sphere of influence, not always by peaceful means.

What must have weighed in the mind of the Prime Minister and his foreign policy team at that time (the late 1940s) was the country's huge neighbour to the north, namely the Soviet Union -- with an area of over 10 million square miles, 12 time zones, more than twice the size of the United States, and covering more than one sixth of the world's landmass. India had just emerged from centuries of colonial rule, a poor country with millions living below the poverty line. So, from the standpoint of both geopolitics and economics, the Soviet Union was the natural magnet for India's policy makers. Thus began a foreign policy that, from Day One, seemed more aligned with the Soviet Union than the United States. That, over the years, this policy helped India import technology and equipment for its steel, heavy engineering and heavy electrical industries, at significantly lower rates than those offered by firms in the West, is now part of India's economic history.

Fast forward to the present – the year 2022 in the new century, fully thirty years after publication of the famous book END OF HISTORY by Francis Fukuyama, the well-known political philosopher. The book had put forward an interesting thesis: "With the ascendancy of Western liberal democracy, the end of the cold war, and the dissolution of the Soviet Union, humanity had reached not just a critical point in its post war history, but the end of history". Fukuyama did not literally mean the end of history, but used the phrase more as a metaphor, to mean that man's ideological evolution had ended. But here is the reality: History does not look like ending any time soon, and the jury is still out on the question whether capitalism has indeed won the race.

### **OBJECTIVES AND GUIDING PRINCIPLES**

What might be some of the key factors guiding the formulation of a country's foreign policy?

A few factors suggest themselves: national security, availability of key resources, and building a peaceful and prosperous world. An interesting paper brought out by the CBPBU lists the following objectives, principles and policies guiding India's foreign policy (1).

<b>OBJECTIVES</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Preservation of Territorial Integrity</li> <li>2. Promoting International Peace and Security</li> <li>3. Aiding in the country's economic development</li> </ol>
<b>FIVE GUIDING PRINCIPLES (TOGETHER CALLED PANCHSHEEL)</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Respect for the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other countries</li> <li>2. Non-aggression against other countries</li> <li>3. Non-interference in the internal affairs of other countries</li> <li>4. Equality and mutual benefit, and</li> <li>5. Peaceful co-existence</li> </ol> <p><i>Note: Interestingly, these five principles were first enunciated by Chinese Prime Minister, Zhou En Lai, at the start of bilateral talks between China and India over the question of Tibet. The term PANCHSHEEL was however coined by Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru, India's Prime Minister at the time, to describe the five principles guiding India's foreign policy.</i></p>

<b>POLICIES</b>
<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1 Non-alignment</li> <li>2 Resisting colonialism, Imperialism and Racism</li> <li>3 Peaceful settlement of international disputes</li> <li>4 Support to the United Nations and its various organs</li> <li>5 Respect for International Law, and Commitment to a just and equal world order.</li> </ol>



### **ELEMENTS OF FOREIGN POLICY**

We now take up the elements of foreign policy. Here is a list of sixteen elements that have been suggested (2).

#### **Elements of Foreign Policy**

1. Size of the Country's Territory
2. The country's location on the world map (i.e. its geography)
3. Level and Nature of Economic Development
4. Cultural and Historical Factors
5. Social Structure
6. Government Structure
7. Internal Situation
8. The country's Leaders (their values, ability, experience, personality, other)
9. Political Accountability
10. Ideology
11. Diplomacy
12. Global Strategic Environment
13. Public Opinion
14. Technology
15. External Environment
16. Alliances and Treaties (Bilateral and Multilateral)

The list is interesting but a bit too long for meaningful focus. It needs to be distilled into a shorter list, such as the following:

1. Size and Geography of the country
2. Cultural, Historical and Social Factors
3. Government Structure and the Caliber of the country's Leaders
4. Global Strategic Environment, and
5. Alliances and Treaties

### **GLOBAL STRATEGIC ENVIRONMENT, A KEY INPUT IN FOREIGN POLICY**

There is a view, in some quarters, that the Chinese aggression of 1962, was an attempt by China to distract India's attention from the rapid economic progress achieved through its five year plans, implemented in a democratic framework(3). I recall hearing whispers in those days (the early nineteen sixties) that India's communist parties were conspiring with China, to balkanize India's northeastern states and help China annex those states to its own territory. These were just whispers, no more, but they point to the crucial importance of the global strategic environment in shaping a country's foreign policy.

The clashes with Pakistan in 1947 and 1965 exposed India's strategic weakness in terms of having to fight a war on two fronts -- the western and eastern -- separated from each other by two thousand miles. India was understandably keen to overcome this weakness.

From its creation in 1947, the Pakistani state, with its Punjab and Sind Province in the west, and the Bengal Province in the east, separated by two thousand miles, looked vulnerable to a split, which eventually happened in 1971, with the third military clash between India and Pakistan. That it also created a new country, called Bangladesh, is an interesting tide of history. And the deep wound it must have caused to the Pakistani psyche will forever remain a sad chapter in Indo-Pak relations.

Sri Aurobindo, Indian philosopher and savant, is reported to have prophesied that, given the strong emotional and cultural bonds, Pakistan and India will eventually reunite to become the undivided country they formed before partition. But then, much water has passed under the bridge, and, given current attitudes and the tribal passions on both sides of the border, the chances of this prophesy becoming true, are zero, if not indeed negative. Its chief merit lies in the underlying optimism and positive spirit and we can only hope that these can be recaptured in relations between the two countries.

Another important factor that creeps into any discussion of Indo-Pak relations is the power structure in Pakistan, with the Army calling the shots, and the State and the Judiciary being silent partners. There is nothing right or wrong about this, it is just the reality, but it has a cost, in the way it can hamper the country's response to a changing world order. It can also expose the country to what historian Paul Kennedy called the IMPERIAL OVERREACH, referring to an empire's military ambitions being unsustainable by its economic capabilities, leading eventually to the empire's collapse(4).

That China is now an economic superpower, and is set to outstrip the US in GDP terms in the next few years, possibly as early as 2025, is now a reality. Tensions between these two countries have been growing, bringing to the surface a silent anxiety that the world may be in the cusp of a new cold war.

These two Titans, namely the US and China, working together in peace and friendship, can do much good to the world, and to themselves. On the other hand, if they choose to be at loggerheads, and compete for world domination, they would do much harm to themselves, and to the world at large, by re-igniting the cold war. It is important for the world that these two giants stay friendly, and work together for the good of the world. This becomes an important part of foreign policy for the rest of the world – ensuring that these two giants stay friendly and work together.

## **AVAILABILITY OF KEY RESOURCES**

### **Crude Oil**

With domestic production meeting just 40% of the country's needs, crude oil would top the list of resources for which India is critically dependent on the outside world, particularly countries in the Gulf, such as Saudi Arabia and Iran. It is no secret that these two countries are caught in an acute power play in the gulf region, and India often has to walk a tight rope in handling relations with these countries, without getting into the gun-sight of the big powers. That India has opened a rupee payment window for Iran, whereby the latter can pay for its imports from India in Rupees, is clearly a step in the right direction.

### **Remittances from Non Resident Indians**

Like many other emerging economies, India depends on remittances from its citizens living abroad. Inward remittances from non-resident Indians (NRI) amounted to \$83 billion during 2020-21, and India closed the financial year with outstanding NRI deposits of \$142 billion. The following five countries topped the list as source countries for these remittances:

Rank	Country
1	United Arab Emirates
2	United States
3	Saudi Arabia
4	Kuwait
5	Qatar

*(Source : Wikipedia)*

### THE UNSEEN HAND IN INTERNATIONAL RELATIONS

Recent years have drawn attention to an unseen hand influencing foreign policy in many capitals around the world. The reference here is to the Military Industrial Complex about which former US President Eisenhower warned the world in his farewell address to the nation in 1961, at the end of his two-term Presidency. Here is the warning, in his own words: "A vital element in guarding the peace is our military establishment. But in the councils of government, we must guard against the acquisition of unwarranted influence, whether sought or unsought, by the Military Industrial Complex." The reference here is to the growing influence of the world's large centers of defence oriented production. Here is a list of the top ten countries in the world, in terms of their military expenditure:

Rank	Country	Spending (US Dollar Billions)	Percentage of country's GDP	Percentage of Global Spending
1	United States	778	3.7	39.0
2	China	252	1.7	13.0
3	India	73	2.9	3.7
4	Russian Federation	62	4.3	3.1
5	United Kingdom	59	2.7	3.0
6	Saudi Arabia	57	8.4	2.9
7	Germany	53	1.4	2.7
8	France	53	2.1	2.7
9	Japan	49	1.0	2.5
10	South Korea	46	2.8	2.3

*(Source : Stockholm International Peace Research Institute)*

That, from time to time, the Military Industrial Complex throws a few crumbs at terrorist outfits around the world is something known to policy makers, but, as of now, it does not seem easy to put a complete stop to this practice.

### SUGGESTED FRAMEWORK FOR FOREIGN POLICY

#### 1. SWOT ANALYSIS

The place to start is the section called THREATS in this analysis. In the case of India, these arise mainly from two sources – China and Pakistan. While the natural first response is to increase the size of the army and the defence budget – which India has done to the extent possible – the other, more challenging response is to improve relations with these countries.

#### 2. TRADING PARTNERS

It is interesting to see, from the following table, that the United States, European Union, China, and the United Arab Emirates, appear on both sides of the table, namely Exports and Imports. In

other words, these four countries account, respectively, for the following shares in India's trade with the rest of the world : United States (24%), European Union ( 24%), China (19%), and the United Arab Emirates (15%). That India should focus on relations with these countries, without necessarily neglecting others, is a natural corollary.

<b>Exports</b>	<b>Imports</b>
United States (17%)	China (14%)
European Union (15%)	European Union (9%)
United Arab Emirates (9%)	United States (7%)
China (5%)	United Arab Emirates (6%)
Hong Kong (4%)	Saudi Arabia (6%)
Others (50%)	Others (58%)

### **3. CULTURAL AND SOCIAL EXCHANGES**

In a recent paper on the emerging world order, I had argued for people to people exchange between countries, as a basis for improving understanding and relations among people. I reproduce the relevant section from that paper(5) :

“That there have been such exchanges between countries for many years is a known fact. They need to be strengthened and reoriented in the emerging world order, in a manner that they bring countries closer together and improve relations among them. Considering the magnitude of the present global challenge, the financial outlays on these exchanges need to be augmented.

I propose outlays of the order of .01% (one percent of one percent) of a country's GDP, which works out to an annual outlay of \$ 3 billion in the case of India. As this may seem like a quantum leap, we could start with a billion dollars. To the extent possible, this outlay should target India's major trading partners, and the following areas:

#### **❖ People to people exchange**

A thousand people each year sounds like a bold target but seems attainable. The idea here is for people to have first-hand experience of other countries, as also to look at their own country from a distance. This kind of exchange has the potential to dissolve deep-rooted prejudices and to improve understanding among people in different parts of the world.

#### **❖ Fellowships at leading educational institutions**

A thousand fellowships each year can be attempted, at India's premier educational institutions, such as the Indian Institutes of Technology (IITs) and Indian Institutes of Management (IIMs). These could be of the value of Rupees five hundred thousand each (approximately, US Dollars \$ 7000 each). Bright young people from other countries, spending a few years in this country, should do much good to both countries, much like the hundreds of Indian students travelling to the US every year for higher studies.

#### **❖ Visits to major tourist attractions**

Five thousand tourists could be targeted each year, for visits to places of tourist and cultural interest in India. A thousand of these would come from those resident in India on fellowships at IITs and IIMs, as a sequel to the immediately preceding suggestion.

Clearly, all this is blue sky thinking, and would need careful scrutiny before implementation “

#### **4. GOODBYE TO COLD WARS**

One hopes that the cold war may be behind us, but, as Henry Kissinger, historian and political strategist, has warned “The world may be in the cusp of a new cold war”. The last thing the world needs is another cold war, but, with China growing so fast, both economically and politically, and set to topple the United States from its top slot in the near future, the storm clouds, in the shape of another cold war, seem to be forming at the far horizon. Reinforcing this view are the present Russian overtures at the Ukrainian border.

A strange thought creeps into the mind – whether the Military Industrial Complex is now more active than before, as always silently, in the world’s leading capitals. Not an easy question to answer, for even experts in this field.

It becomes a crucial part of every country’s foreign policy, to steer the world clear of another cold war. In concrete terms, this means making every possible effort to keep these two giants, namely China and the USA, stay friendly and work together for the good of the world. How exactly this will happen is not too clear, but the world needs to move in that direction. It is bound to stretch the innovative skills of mandarins at the Foreign Ministry, but clearly, there lies the way forward, for individual countries and the world at large.

#### **TO CONCLUDE**

This paper has attempted a layman’s view of foreign policy – its objectives, guiding principles and policies. After two world wars, and a long cold war, the world looks set to reap a peace dividend. But the meteoric rise of China in recent years, and the way Uncle Sam, at the other end of the world, has received the news, seem to cast shadows of another cold war. It seems to me that the over-riding purpose of foreign policy around the world is to keep these two giants friendly and work together for the good of the world.

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