ISSN: 2348-7666; Vol.10, Issue-1, January-March, 2023

Impact Factor: 6.023



# CHANGING DYNAMICS OF INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY: RECENT TRENDS

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Abstract: Foreign policy is both static and dynamic. What do we understand as 'statism' in foreign policy? Basically, maintenance of the status quo, e.g., sending Indian troops for peace keeping operations in conflict zones, only under United Nations resolution and command. The main and first and foremost objective of India's Foreign Policy—like that of any other country-is to secure its national interests. The scope of "national interests" is fairly wide. In our case it includes for instance: securing our borders to protect territorial integrity, countering cross-border terrorism, energy security, food security, cyber security, creation of world class infrastructure, non-discriminatory global trade practices, equitable global responsibility for the protection of environment, reform of institutions of global governance to reflect the contemporary realities, disarmament, regional stability, international peace and so on. Energy security of India is something you must be all aware about, looking at the pump prices of petrol and diesel. Though there are alternate sources of energy available today, India's dependence on hydrocarbon sources such as coal and crude oil, continues to be very high.

**Key Words:** Foreign, Policy, India, Diaspora, Neighbours, Country.

### **Introduction:**

Foreign policy of any country, domestic policy. usually unlike is considered to be staid and stable not subject to revolutionary change. Foreign policy is both static and dynamic. What do we understand as 'statism' in foreign policy? Basically, maintenance of the status quo, e,g., sending Indian troops for peace keeping operations in conflict zones, only under United Nations resolution and command. Static foreign policy elements reduce risks. What do we perceive of as the dynamics in foreign policy? Changing dynamics in foreign policy would mean the ability to change or mould policy according to changes in the country's external environment or a revolutionary change in the country's domestic political scenario. A concrete example of such dynamism would be the presence of Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi at inauguration ceremony of President Ibrahim Mohammad Solih of Maldives in November 2018, in reversal of earlier policy of avoiding visits at level of President or PM to Maldives during the regime of former President Abdulla Yameen, who was known to be inimical to India's interests. A dynamic foreign policy

ISSN: 2348-7666; Vol.10, Issue-1, January-March, 2023

Impact Factor: 6.023



shows greater appetite for risk taking. Foreign policy of any country, including India, contains both static and dynamic features.

### **Evolution of India's Foreign Policy**

Next, let us examine briefly, what one could say are the three main phases of the global political and security order and India's Foreign Policy response to the same.

In the first period from 1947 to 1991, the world was dominated by two rival super powers, the USA and the USSR. The League of Nations had withered away, and the United Nations was born, moulded by the victorious World War II allies namely, the US, USSR, UK and France. Global economic and financial power was usurped by the western developed countries primarily the US and its European allies who developed the **Bretton-Woods** arrangement with the World Bank and IMF duo controlling the global financial system and the GATT/WTO shaping global trade. India's response was to adopt the policy of non-alignment. Being nonaligned meant not being identified with either super power, while aiming to get political, security and economic support from both camps so that the young nation could overcome its severe political, social and economic stress and degradation, after two centuries of colonial rule. This was the staid and stable phase of India's foreign policy, perhaps best suited for the times.

In the second phase from 1991 to 2008, two major events in 1991 kick started the process of change. The former Soviet Union collapsed and splintered into many independent countries, Russia being the largest among them, and successor to the USSR in the UN. The second was the foreign currency crisis faced by India, the likes of which we had never experienced before. We witnessed a changing world

order with only one country remaining as the major political, economic and military power, viz., the USA. Multiple other lesser poles of global power started sprouting from this period onwards in the EU, Russia, China, dynamic Asia including Japan and India and in south America, particularly Brazil. India responded to these catatonic changes by weaning itself away from non-alignment to a multipolar alignment, adjusted its previous, often adversarial relations, with the remaining major power, the USA, incorporated globalization and paid greater attention to its immediate neighbourhood.

The third period is from 2008 to the present times. In 2008, the US and the global banking and financial systems were severely jolted, starting with the collapse of the Lehman Brothers. This led to a severe economic meltdown in the advanced economies of the world, and even among most of the then champion emerging economies likes South Korea, Taiwan and Thailand. In this period, the United States economic and military superiority is being chipped away, with most of the slack taken up by China, which is also becoming a more attractive political model for some developing countries. The rise of multiple poles in the EU, ASEAN, Russia, Japan, India, BRICS, IBSA, SCO, etc, has been much faster than in the previous period. The fulcrum of global power is gradually, but surely shifting from the West to the East, particularly to Asia. Indian foreign policy has responded vigorously to these changes with nonalignment dropped altogether. Today, Indian diplomacy is primarily focused on the USA, China, other P-5 member countries, and our neighbourhood. Look East has been expanded to Act East. Africa has loomed into focus and Latin America does not look so distant anymore. Economic diplomacy has taken the pole

ISSN: 2348-7666; Vol.10, Issue-1, January-March, 2023

Impact Factor: 6.023



position in India's foreign policy above that of political and security issues.

# India's Foreign Policy: Main Objectives:

The main and first and foremost objective of India's Foreign Policy -like that of any other country-is to secure its national interests. The scope of "national interests" is fairly wide. In our case it includes for instance: securing our borders to protect territorial integrity, countering cross-border terrorism, energy security, food security, cyber security, creation of infrastructure, world class discriminatory global trade practices, equitable global responsibility for the protection of environment, reform of institutions of global governance to reflect the contemporary realities, disarmament, regional stability, international peace and so on.

In order to sustain its growth trajectory, India needs substantial external inputs. To succeed, our on-going programmes such as Make in India, Skills India. Smart Cities, infrastructure development, Digital India, Clean India etc. need foreign partners, Foreign Direct Investments, financial assistance and transfer of technology. India's foreign policy's added focus on this aspect in recent years has resulted in Diplomacy For Development by integrating economic diplomacy with political diplomacy.

India has 20mn strong Diaspora comprised of Non-Resident Indians and Persons of Indian Origin, spread all over the world. One of the major objectives is to engage them and derive maximum benefits from their presence abroad, while at the same time protecting their interests to the extent possible.

In short, our Foreign policy has at least four important goals: 1. to protect India from traditional and non-traditional threats; 2. to create an external

environment which is conducive for an inclusive development of India so that the benefits of growth can reach the poorest of the poor in the country; 3. to ensure that India's voice is heard on global forums and that India is able to influence world opinion on issues of global dimensions such as terrorism, climate change, disarmament, reforms of institutions of global governance, and 4: to engage and protect Indian Diaspora.

## Principal Static and Dynamic Factors across the Globe

In all three phases, globally the Westphalian concept of the sovereign nation state has remained steadfast, despite some dilution in national sovereigntv issues voluntarily surrendered by member countries of the European Union. However, in majority cases, the interests of the nation state override that of any collective political grouping like the UN. Among other factors which have been statist in their influence in the last seventy years, are (a) **Bretton-Woods** global financial arrangements, (b) the continuous rise in total global population figures, though some developed countries are showing signs of negative population growth, (c) the availability of natural resources like land, water, air, sunlight and minerals, which are finite, prompting man to search for such resources beyond the earth's atmosphere, in other planets, and (d) global preference for the US Dollar despite efforts at various points of time, to promote other currencies like the Yen, the Euro and lately the Chinese Renminbi.

# The most dynamic aspects of the international system in the last seven decades have been:

The influence of technological changes on our day to day lives, the small internet connected hand-held mobile device of today, being an example of

ISSN: 2348-7666; Vol.10, Issue-1, January-March, 2023

Impact Factor: 6.023



how much has changed in the last two decades;

- Significant reduction in global poverty and distress levels, including in India; Rise in the number of member states of the United Nations, including new sovereign states like South Sudan and Timor Leste
- Increasing anxiety about the negative the effect of climate change and environmental degradation on our lives; and
- The upward curve in military expenditure, though country wise, including in India, defence budgets as a percentage of GDP, are declining.

# Stability and Dynamism in India's foreign policy domain

Turning our focus to India, the factors which contribute to stability in India's foreign policies are:

Relative political stability of the country, particularly as compared to India's neighbours in South Asia;

Socio-religious balance infused by the constitutional choices made by India's founding fathers in 1950;

Reduction and elimination of poverty as a continuous state-led endeavour; Strategic independence sought in foreign policy and practices as highlighted by the fact that despite giving up non-alignment as policy tool, India has been careful not to be identified with any camp or alliances directed towards a third country or group of countries;

The continuity provided by the India Foreign Service (IFS) which man's most of the posts in the Ministry of External Affairs and in all Indian Diplomatic Missions and Special Offices abroad.

# What makes India's Foreign Policy process dynamic and responsive? These factors are:

India's geopolitical potential.

India is clearly the dominant power in South Asia and the principal player in the Indian Ocean region;

India's military might, which globally is the second largest in terms of manpower deployed and third largest in terms of our annual defence budget – a factor which contributes to flexibility in our diplomatic postures;

The demographic dividend currently enjoyed by India is posited on the ambition and drive of India's millennials who are generally anti status quo and dynamic;

The catch up with China pressure on the foreign relations establishment in India ensures innovation at every stage;

Rivalry among nation states, particularly for global resources and technological prowess, generates flexibility in handling policy issues and diplomatic practices;

The unmitigated movement towards digitization is ushering change in the way diplomats communicate with each other and with the public; Public services offered like passports and visas, are now increasingly digitized;

The Indian diaspora spread across the globe, estimated to be between 20 to 25 million in numbers, second only to the Chinese diaspora, adds to the dynamism injected in India overseas relationships and achievements;

The size of the growing Indian market is not only good news for home-based entrepreneurs, but also a great talking point for practitioners of India diplomacy, allowing for quid pro quo when negotiating difficult issues, particularly with regard to trade and economic diplomacy.

# Major Events that have shaped India's Foreign Policy

Key years in India's foreign and external security policies and the relevant events

ISSN: 2348-7666; Vol.10, Issue-1, January-March, 2023

Impact Factor: 6.023



are:

1947 - Invasion of Kashmir by Pakistan

1962 - India - China War

1965 - India-Pakistan War

1971 - Liberation of Bangladesh

1991 – collapse of the USSR; severe depletion in India's foreign currency reserves

1998 – India's nuclear tests at Pokhran; retaliatory tests by Pakistan 1999 – Kargil Intrusion by Pakistan

2001 – 9/11 Terrorist attacks in the US, including bombing of Twin Towers in NY; terror attacks on the Indian Parliament

**2008**- Terror strikes in Mumbai by Pakistan; Lehman Brothers collapse in the US and trigger for the US-led global recession

**2014** – PM Modi's Government infuses new life into Indian F.P. – unabashed about India's 'great power' ambition

# Foreign Policy Goals and India's Diplomatic Outreach

It is evident from the chronology of events that have directly or indirectly had an influence on the direction of India's principal foreign policy goals, that Pakistan, China, the former USSR (now Russia) and the US are the countries which loom larger than the rest in shaping our policies. It is therefore no surprise that our diplomatic engagement is focused on these countries and some of our largest embassies and diplomatic representations are located in these very countries.

Of course, relations with our immediate neighbours in South Asia and the region, are ongoing, almost on a daily basis. For example, with Bangladesh it is very much on issues such as the rise or fall of the water level of the river Ganga as it flows into Bangladesh, the daily streaming in and out of about 10,000 Bangladeshi visitors to India, and regular skirmishes between smugglers and the Border Security Force (BSF), because cattle and

other items are illegally transported across the border. In addition to the four countries listed in the earlier paragraph, India's foreign policy is very much geared towards our immediate neighbours like Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, Myanmar, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Maldives and Mauritius. The remaining P-5 countries, France and UK, and major powers like Japan, Germany, Brazil and South Africa also very much on our diplomatic engagement radar. Our second rungs of diplomatic missions are located in these very countries, and Indian Ambassadors High Commissioners and to countries are of very senior rank of the level of Secretary and Additional Secretary to the GOI.

Such hierarchical ranking India's foreign relations with various countries is only for reference purposes and does not imply that India's views its relationship with country 'B' or 'C' as inferior to that with country 'A'. It only signifies the depth of the country's bilateral ties. Since resources to pursue diplomacy, including diplomatic officers, is limited, any country including India, needs to allocate its available manpower and available budget, depending on the frequency of its dealings with different countries, leading to the phenomena of large, medium and small size of our embassies abroad. The number of such offices also depends on depth of the relationship and availability of human and financial resources. Today, India is physically present in 129 countries with resident diplomatic missions and is poised to open at least another 11 resident missions in African countries over 2019 and 2020. Thus, by 2020, India will be represented by a resident Ambassador or High Commissioner (as the Head of a diplomatic Mission is known Commonwealth member countries) and

ISSN: 2348-7666; Vol.10, Issue-1, January-March, 2023

Impact Factor: 6.023



its own offices in 140 of the 193 member countries of the United Nations. In the rest of the 50+ countries where currently we do not have resident embassies or consulates, the India Ambassador or High Commissioner in a neighbouring or close by country, represents India in that country and works through a prominent local resident who is known as the 'Honorary Consul' of India in that country. This worldwide presence of India in all countries with whom we have diplomatic ties, signifies the importance we attach to all our bilateral ties, irrespective of size, strength or distance.

This global diplomatic presence also serves the interests of the India diaspora - Indian nationals' resident abroad (also called NRIs), temporary visitors from India such as businessmen, tourists, relatives, etc, and people of Indian origin holding OCI cards, who have an emotional, social and economic connect with the land of their birth or of their forefathers. Since the 20-25 million strong Indian diaspora is scattered over many geographies, regions and countries, servicing their consular, business and other needs is well served through India's extensive diplomatic network and reach. This network has also served India's friendly neighbours in South Asia whose nationals have been extended with diplomatic access, rescue and evacuation during times of crisis like in Yemen a few years ago and Lebanon about a decade ago. India arranged for the evacuation of nationals of Nepal, Sri Lanka and Bangladesh from these war-torn zones along with the evacuation of Indians. Such gestures have had a warm, positive effect with the people and governments of our smaller neighbours.

## Challenges to India's International Relations and Foreign Policy Goals

Now that we have fairly good idea

about the static and dynamic factors that shape India's foreign policy and how diplomacy is practiced through our representation abroad and whom it serves, let us look at the challenges posed in foreign policy making and practices.

Nuclear Weapons, Denuclearization & Weapons Control are issues that usually don't make news headlines, except when North Korea launches the odd nuclear capable missile. However, the danger posed by an increasingly weaponized world, including proliferation of nuclear weapons technology is a challenge which seems to have no immediate remedy. The US-Russia nuclear weapons roll back programme and the Iranian nuclear deal are in disarray. The effort to restrict such weapons and its technology from the hands of irresponsible states and nonstate actors is also not going anywhere. In such a scenario, India has no option but to take steps to review its nuclear weapons programme and policy.

Energy security of India something you must be all aware about, looking at the pump prices of petrol and diesel. Though there are alternate sources energy available today, dependence on hydrocarbon sources such as coal and crude oil, continues to be very high. While our coal reserves are comfortable, the fact that it is not a very clean source of energy and that we lack adequate amounts of high calorific value coal needed in crucial industries like steel making, makes us lean towards other available sources like oil and Unfortunately, India's dependence on imports of oil and gas, in the absence of large recoveries at home, has only grown over the years. Such a dependence on imports has exposed our economy to the oil price and availability shocks that take place from time to time. India has set ambitious targets for energy from cleaner

ISSN: 2348-7666; Vol.10, Issue-1, January-March, 2023

Impact Factor: 6.023



sources like solar and wind power, and extraction of greater quantities of oil and gas from within, but reaching these goals are some years away. Meanwhile, foreign policy has to tread carefully so that our supplies of crude oil from the Middle East and Iran are not upset. The current unilateral US restrictions on sourcing of Iranian and Venezuelan oil has proved to be particularly tricky with India conscious of its strategic dependence on the US and need to keep its centuries old relations with Iran and its friendly relations with Venezuela on an even keel.

Water, it is said, will be the principal source of conflict in this century. Stressed water situation across the globe is increasing day by day, the problem being more acute in large emerging economies like India with its growing population and ever-increasing demand for water. Foreign policy and diplomacy ensure that India's legitimate claims are surrendered when negotiating not multilateral or global water sharing agreements. Earlier, I had given the example of how the fall or rise of the level of water in the river Ganga affects our relations with Bangladesh.

Food security is a term you are all familiar with. Many of you may have not been around or were too young to remember the ordeal of food shortages we faced till about the late 1970s, when queuing up weekly at the neighbourhood ration shop or the 'Food Control Order' limiting the consumption of certain items in public functions like marriages, was something that was etched in our minds. Thankfully, India has crossed that hump, but the steady rise in the global population, finite resources like land and water, and anticipated future decline in food productivity increases, means that we have to be alert to this problem and the global scramble for food that may occur in

the future.

Terrorism hardly respects international boundaries. Despite the best effort nationally, without international cooperation, it is impossible to stamp out global menace. Sharing intelligence, choking the sources of weapons, technology and funding, bringing perpetrators to justice, are some of the measures that have to put in place through regional and international negotiations. It is something Indian foreign policy and diplomacy have been very active about for three or four decades now.

Climate change and environmental degradation is not in any one's interest. However, the highly industrialized countries which have had centuries of head start in their growth and prosperity path, are the principal cause for today's situation. India has just about come to the take off stage of its economic Unfortunately, without deft growth. diplomacy, the traditional polluters seek to curb the growth path of emerging and developing economies by imposing mitigation measures, which are unfair to those who started industrialization late. India is fully committed to resolving the negative aspects of climate change and environmental degradation, but cannot be forced to accept the same conditions as those imposed on the more developed countries.

Pandemics, drug trafficking and human trafficking are among the other major problems that the international community needs to work together to curb the fallout of these issues. India's foreign policy has been revised to take into account our role in the global war against these problems and our diplomats have been very active on this front.

ISSN: 2348-7666; Vol.10, Issue-1, January-March, 2023

Impact Factor: 6.023



### Unique Foreign Policy Features of the Governments under Prime Minister Narendra Modi

Now that you have got a fairly broad picture of the changing dynamics of India's foreign policy particularly after 1991, we could close this lecture with a look at the main elements of foreign policy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi since May 2014.

In its 2014 Election Manifesto, the BJP had envisaged, and I Quote, "The vision is to fundamentally reboot and reorient foreign policy goals, content and process, in a manner that locates India's global strategic engagement in a new paradigm and on a wider canvass,", Unquote [The Modi Doctrine, Editors, Anirban Ganguly, Vijay Chauthaiwale, Uttam Kumar Sinha, Page 4]. Using political diplomacy, as also keeping India's economic, scientific, cultural and security interests in mind, both regional and global, the aim such a foreign policy paradigm, based on the principles of equality and mutuality, is to make India economically strong and to make sure its voice is heard in the international arena. The distinguishing elements under Prime Miniter Modi, which are different for regimes, - Neighbourhood First Policy - all SAARC leaders at swearing in ceremony in 2014 and BIMSTEC leaders in 2019; SAARC Satellite: Act East Policy: - Relentless push towards, trade, FDI and 'Make in India's contributing to India's economic development and growth; - A 'leading role' globally for India, rather than just as a 'balancing force' - India as "pole" in its own right - A greater role for military and defence diplomacy - willingness to participate in the global arms market as a supplier rather than as a major buyer only - Connectivity, commercial ties and cultural bonds are the three 'Cs of Modi's Foreign Policy mantra – the huge public boost in bonding with the diaspora is unprecedented;

- According to Modi, the three 'D's which drive India's ties with the countries of the world are, democracy, demography and demand:
- Enhanced role for personal friendship and bonding which has been highlighted by the 'Modi hug' we have witnessed time and again despite not very polite comments from some quarters; and An active role for States in the making and practice of foreign policy in India since 2014, when a separate 'States Division' was set up in the Ministry of External Affairs

A Challenging Foreign Policy

Although India's foreign policy remained true to its position of strategic autonomy, it underwent gradual shifts, especially as New Delhi navigated its relations with great powers. An unabated war in Ukraine tested the resilience of India's great power relations, particularly with the United States and the European Union. As the West sought to impose economic sanctions and politically isolate faced Russia. India increased international pressure to halt Russian oil imports.

Nevertheless, in the true spirit of autonomy, India carefully strategic Russian balanced buying oil while sustaining relations with  $_{
m the}$ regardless of the political pressure. As the war progressed and India showed little intention of cutting ties with Russia or curtailing its energy dependence, the United States showed maturity its decision to accommodate India. In this regard, the past year showed the strength and flexibility of U.S.-India bilateral ties and New Delhi's commitment to forging its own path forward.

ISSN: 2348-7666; Vol.10, Issue-1, January-March, 2023

Impact Factor: 6.023



U.S. The position opened additional avenues for India to engage with the European Union. Prime Minister Modi's visit to Germany, Denmark, and France in early May 2022 further cemented India's resolve to expand relations with its European partners. Modi's travels followed the visit of Ursula von der Leyen, President of the European Commission, to India in April 2022 for the Raisina Dialogue. These efforts lay the path for engaging European countries despite impediments that have long hindered closer ties.

China stood out as the greatest challenge in India's foreign policy over 2022. Continued tensions along their shared border elevated threat perceptions and the risk of conflict escalation as the two faces off more broadly in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific. To address concerns over potential conflict with China on the Line of Actual Control. India advanced its multilateral approach in the Indo-Pacific, primarily through its partnership with the United States. China objected to the joint exercises between India and the United States under the Yudh Abhyas framework of military exercises. In December, Chinese forces crossed the Sino-Indian border in Tawang, marking the most recent clash in a series of incursions across the LAC. The incursion in Tawang was likely a reaction to the U.S.-India joint exercises. As tensions escalate, this retaliatory cycle warns of a re-emergence of the fateful triangle in the region's geopolitics.

### An Emerging Net-Security Provider?

India's China dilemma encouraged New Delhi to expand its multilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. Over the past year, the Quad – comprising India, Australia, Japan, and the United States – took several steps to align internal differences to better

collaborate in areas of strategic overlap, like regional prosperity, health, and education. For instance, in its objective to achieve sustainable economic growth in the Indo-Pacific, evolving discussions the Indo-Pacific **Economic** Framework (IPEF) and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) show different opportunities for India to recognize its goals. While New Delhi did not sign on to all pillars of the IPEF, India and the United States are returning to the negotiating table in February 2023

During 2022, India showed a greater embrace of its role as a netsecurity-provider role in the Indo-Pacific. However, two obvious constraints remain for India to fully realize this position. First, India remains uncertain regarding the scope of its role in the Indo-Pacific. While India has stepped up engagement in the Indian Ocean, New Delhi lacks a robust and justifiable rationale for an expansive security role in the broader Indo-Pacific. New Delhi has little interest in spreading its navy thin to cover the entire region. Second, India lacks the capacity to play such a large role in the short term. Although India has moved rapidly in recent years to strengthen its naval capabilities and reorient maritime strategy, nuanced differences between its regional outlook and that of the United States and its non-NATO allies create difficulties in aligning the Quad's views from time to time. The Quad will need carefully navigate differences to continue its momentum.

Looking closer to home, India's neighbourhood policy told a cautionary tale last year. The Taliban's leadership in Afghanistan, political instability in Nepal, near economic collapse in Sri Lanka, and brewing unrest in Bangladesh all challenged regional relationships. Additionally, India continued its policy of

ISSN: 2348-7666; Vol.10, Issue-1, January-March, 2023

Impact Factor: 6.023



absolute neglect towards Pakistan. As terror incidents increase in Afghanistan and Pakistan, New Delhi fears spillover effects from both countries. Yet, India's accidental **BrahMos** missile test into Pakistani territory in March 2022 is a stark reminder that New Delhi cannot forget about its western neighbor. Following the launch, Pakistan placed frontline bases and strike aircraft on high alert as it gathered information. Absent de-escalation mechanisms. the unprecedented event holds serious implications for crisis stability on the subcontinent. Had the launch occurred during a period of heightened tensions, the incident could have escalated to a dangerous place.

As New Delhi embarks on global leadership at the G20 this year, many of the dynamics that shaped 2022 will persist. India will continue to face pressure navigating great power relations, while terrorist groups warn of instability. Competition in the international system will continue to stress diplomatic ties. In this uncertain environment, India will take its place on the international stage, and as New Delhi solidifies its strategy, the world will be watching.

### Conclusion

We now have a broad canvas of the evolution of India's foreign policy through the three historical phases. Policy has evolved and changed over the last seventy years, usually at a steady pace, but sometimes drastically to respond to fast changing global or regional scenario. Fortunately, foreign policy evokes greater consensus across the Indian political spectrum and therefore, has been easier to mould and change, than domestic policy on which governments of the day have faced vehement opposition. Foreign policy can only go so far and diplomacy can be that effective, to the extent of a country's

political, social and economic health. India has been fortunate to enjoy good growth and prosperity for the last three decades. This has provided greater leverage to India's foreign policy, and allowed far greater resources to be allocated for the conduct of diplomacy, including consolidating and strengthening our diplomatic presence all across the globe. Under the present regime, India has clearly demonstrated its will to play a leading role in the global arena and be counted as 'pole' in its own right. Continued stability and prosperity at home and political consensus on broad foreign policy parameters, will help India reach this goal.

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ISSN: 2348-7666; Vol.10, Issue-1, January-March, 2023

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