

LECTURE-CUM-DISCUSSION

“IMPERATIVES OF INDIA’S FOREIGN POLICY” - 30th December, 2009

(Venue : PUMBA Auditorium, Dept. of Management Studies, University of Pune)

Chairman : Air Marshal S. Kulkarni

Main Speaker : Shri S.T. Devare, IFS

PAPER PRESENTED BY SHRI S.T. DEVARE

It is a great pleasure and privilege to be invited to address this distinguished audience in Pune composed of senior service Officers, academics & scholars, old friends and students. I am grateful that this event has been organized by the Centre of Advanced and Strategic Studies (CASS) at the University of Pune.

2 The importance of several institutions in Pune in national security and international relations cannot be over-emphasized. Be it global business, IT, world class educational and research institutions or leading defence institutes, Pune has been a centre of learning and excellence for decades. This forum is, therefore, a very fitting one for a discussion on India’s foreign policy even as India steadily emerges as a global player, an aspiring power on the international scene.

3 Today, I have been asked to speak on India’s foreign policy imperatives.

4 Briefly, foreign policy of country is an instrument of state policy primarily for the protection and promotion of national interests. It refers to the choices that a state makes in pursuance of its national interest as defined at that time. Lord Palmerston’s dictum about a nation’s permanent interest has, therefore, to be set in the contextual terms of time and geopolitical environment.

5. So far any discourse on foreign policy is largely premised in the framework of the Westphalian nation – state structure where sovereignty and independence are the key words. India’s decision making in foreign policy is obviously governed by this consideration. Of course, this also requires necessary correction and adjustment in the changing international circumstances so as to have the desired flexibility or manoeuvrability. Globalisation has undoubtedly impacted on the traditional foreign policy thinking. Today, there are a number of global issues on which the national interest concept undergoes change so as take into account the global or regional concerns, as evident in the WTO or Climate Change or energy discourses.

6. Traditionally, among the key and priority national interests which the foreign policy has to address, protect and promote is national security. It is the primary responsibility of the State. The State has a contract with its people to ensure their security. And in the context of security threats, it is subjected to, their nature and quantum and indeed its overall assessment - all become of paramount importance. In that regard, territorial integrity, both on land and at sea (as also in air), sovereignty, national values and the way of life that India stands for acquire primary consideration.

7. Today, national security is a particularly difficult task for India given the present security environment in South Asia. Our neighbourhood, namely Pakistan, Afghanistan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal and Myanmar are all in a state of ferment which creates vulnerability for India both in traditional as well as non-traditional security terms. In traditional security situations, the adversary is visible and has legitimacy, whereas in non-traditional areas, the enemy is borderless and has no territorial dimension.

8. Pakistan-India has been subjected to severe physical, traditional security threats all through the last sixty years since its independence. In recent years, especially since the late 80s when insurgency and cross-border terrorism in J&K became acute and highly violent, threats to the security of India have become sharper and more complex. Since 9/11 and now 26/11, the situation has aggravated much further. Today, the country finds itself in a very difficult position with the war in Afghanistan and a situation of a failing state and terrorist violence in Pakistan. While the US and NATO are preoccupied with fighting a war against the Taleban and Al-Qaeda in Afghanistan, they need Pakistan especially, its army and, therefore, seem to be turning a blind eye to what the Army and ISI are engaged in. Their support to anti-Indian terrorists including the Tehrik – e – Taleban of Pakistan (TTP) or Punjabi Taleban is well known. Whether democratic process will be allowed in Pakistan to take its own course needs to be seen. With the National Reconciliation Ordinance having been struck down by the Pakistan Supreme Court more than 8000 public servants and political leaders, exonerated earlier are now subject to legal action. It is no doubt a tricky security situation in which the likely beneficiaries would be the anti-Indian groups including TTP.

Afghanistan

9. India is engaged in helping the Karzai Government and the people to build a democratic and peaceful Afghanistan. India's main interest is to strengthen the anti-Taleban forces. Infrastructure development in Afghanistan is an urgent necessity in which India is making a substantial and useful contribution. India has committed a \$ 1.2 billion assistance programme for constructing roads, schools, hospitals, vocational centre etc. as also to help Afghanistan in capacity building in multiple fields.

China

10. On the national security scene, China looms large. Today, it can be considered as one of the most important security imperatives for India. The aggressive posture that China has adopted on the border issue especially for over two years has raised considerable concern and anxiety in India. In 2003, Prime Minister Shri Vajpayee had stated that 'Tibet Autonomous Region is part of the territory of the People's Republic of China.' Prime Minister Manmohan Singh has also assured that India has not allowed anti-China political activities in India. Tibetans who have been living in India since the late 50s were here only on humanitarian grounds. China on the other hand has reiterated claims over Arunachal Pradesh. Last year China raised objections on the waiver that India was seeking at the Nuclear Supplier Group (NSG) on the India-US nuclear deal. India has spoken out about China's assertiveness. Furthermore, China-Pak nuclear cooperation has continued to be a

matter of great concern to India. How would India and China manage their relationship is a matter of geopolitical importance not only in Asia but all over the world.

11. Already China and India are engaged in a process to find a solution to the longstanding and complicated border issue. In 2002, political level Special Representatives were appointed by both sides to lead the dialogue process. In 2005, Political Parameters and Guiding Principles were also laid to facilitate the discussions on the Settlement of the Boundary Question.

12 Globalization is bringing India and China together. In the G-20, Climate Change Negotiations or in the WTO the two find several commonalities. India-China bilateral trade has crossed the \$ 50 billion mark and is poised for a major expansion. Investments are taking place on both sides including in infrastructure, power sector, IT, Computer hardware, pharmaceuticals, etc.

13 While there are a number of political and strategic differences that divide China and India, it is noteworthy that Foreign Minister S.M.Krishna said recently that ‘there is space for both to grow and to meet our aspirations’. It is clear that a bilateral engagement is a must and needs to be deepened. While the whole world is impressed with China’s phenomenal growth, it should be recognized that China also has its own vulnerabilities and India has its strengths. As for our capability to deal with China, we would need to continue to strengthen our vigilance and military preparedness. At the same time, quicker decision-making and implementation of our projects in South-Asia, South-east Asia or Central Asia would have to be ensured. If China is seen as a challenge, it can also be a major opportunity for India.

Nuclear Issues

14 Nuclear issue is another major component of foreign policy. India’s nuclear policy has a long background dating back to the 1940s. The nuclear tests in 1998 were a turning point. India showed confidence in declaring a unilateral moratorium and reiterated its call for general and complete nuclear disarmament. It also declared that it will follow a no-first use policy. Soon after the tests, India came out with its nuclear doctrine under which a minimum credible deterrent was proposed.

15 The tests sharpened relationship with China and Pakistan but opened a new chapter in India-US relations. There was a serious and intensive dialogue between the two which, *inter-alia*, led to the Next Steps in Strategic Partnership agreement. The US proposed exceptionalism with regard to India’s nuclear policy and agreed to make the necessary amendments to its own laws. The joint efforts of the US and India culminated in the historic India-US nuclear deal in 2008. During the recent visit of Prime Minister Manmohan Singh to the US, the warmth and attention shown by President Obama signify a new understanding between India and the US. On questions such as the reprocessing of fuel or export-controls, there is, however, a long way to go. Negotiations on the contentious issues such as CTBT, FMCT may also resume soon especially because of the upcoming NPT Review Conference. On CTBT, India has held the position that the US should first ratify the

Treaty. US is seen to be trying to get non-NPT countries to join NPT. The Nuclear issue is expected to remain a sticking point in relationship with the West.

South Asian Neighbours

16 On the issue of security, there are serious concerns with South Asian neighbours - Bangladesh, Nepal or Sri Lanka. With terrorists and radical Islamic extremists finding haven in Bangladesh, India believes that this primary issue needs to be resolved between the two. The helpful step which Bangladesh Government has taken recently, namely, handing over ULFA extremists to India is much appreciated in India and will help create a better atmosphere between the two countries.

17 The situation in Nepal is particularly worrisome. Maoists have been taking anti-Indian positions and an atmosphere of instability and uncertainty seem to prevail there. It is hoped that the Maoists in Nepal would follow a constitutional and peaceful path in the country's democratic march which could pave the way for adopting a new constitution and fresh elections.

18 In Sri Lanka, India welcomed the defeat of LTTE, the terrorist group which had been banned in India. However, the humanitarian concerns of the Tamil minority need to be addressed sympathetically by the Sri Lankan Government. Fears of large scale exodus of the Tamils from Sri Lanka are real. The forthcoming election in Sri Lanka would reflect the public sentiment in this regard.

19 It seems that in the states of South Asia as well as other neighbouring regions, our efforts need to be enhanced. Be it West Asia or the Gulf, Africa or SE Asia, there is significant transition in recent times which requires to be fully take into account. In all these countries, India can do a great deal with regard to capacity building. There are also best practices in these countries from which India can learn and gain. For example, the infrastructure development in the Gulf, or progress in services and tourism in SE Asia, or the record of social reconciliation programme in South Africa.

Multipolarity and India

20 In a fast globalizing multipolar world, what does foreign policy assume? Is the world multipolar in full sense? Surely, there is one hyper-power, the US and there are a number of emerging powers, India one of them. The rise of India as an economic and military power is well-recognized today. A question may arise, are we indeed arriving at a multipolarity or are we mainly seeing situations in which issue-based coalitions seem to function from time to time?

21 In the G-20, Climate Change Conference or WTO such adhoc coalitions of countries did come up. Today, ideological bloc formations are being replaced by groupings of countries formed for specific situations. For India, it is imperative to be part of major coalitions on global

issues. How to manage coalition relationships while preserving our core national interest will be a key challenge.

Defining Moments in Foreign Policy

22 In each country's foreign policy, there are defining moments. In India's case, from the time of independence, there have been many such moments. The list is long; but briefly, they can be described as:

- In the 50s, it was the expression and courageous articulation of India's independent foreign policy.
- In 1962, it was China's attack on India.
- 1971 saw the war which led to the disintegration of Pakistan and formation of Bangladesh.
- In 1988, Prime Minister Rajiv Gandhi paid a pathbreaking visit to China which led to a new beginning in India-China relations and laid the foundation for India's renewed engagement with East Asia.
- In 1990-91, India faced one of the worst balance of payments crises.
- 1990s Projection of India's Look East Policy.
- 1991 liberalisation of the economy and reforms.
- 1998 -Nuclear Tests.
- 2008-India-US Nuclear Agreement which was a culmination of a very imaginative and bold foreign policy initiative by India and the US.

23 Today, challenges to India are manifold. In addition to the security concerns vis-à-vis Pakistan, China or countries in South Asia, there are other challenges such as :

24 Climate Change, Energy security, Food security, WTO, global financial crisis, etc.

25 A number of issues mentioned above are due to the inadequacies or failure of international governance (or poor governance in some of the most affluent states which causes world-wide repercussions). For addressing these problems, closer coordination with key emerging powers including India is necessary. Without these countries being represented as Permanent Members in the UN Security Council, this will not be possible just as the Climate Change deal would not have happened without the participation of BASIC (Brazil, South Africa, India & China) countries. G-20 as a consultative mechanism has become operational; but it is still not fully empowered. Moreover, G-20 will not have the same powers as Security Council which is a UN organ with universal membership of 192 States.

26 **Resource Scarcity** - To secure resources on a long term and sustained basis through cooperation and diplomatic efforts is a major imperative before India. Energy resources of which uninterrupted and affordable supplies are a necessity include oil and natural gas, coal, Uranium, etc. However, their availability might meet with competition (as in the case of oil from China in Africa) or hesitation from Bangladesh with regard to natural gas or supply of Uranium by Australia. For

securing these resources on a sustained and assured basis, intensive diplomatic efforts will be necessary. While seeking resources from African or Central or Southeast Asian countries, India should also support these resource-rich but otherwise socio-economically developing countries to build their capacities. In general, India, as a rising power must keep its relationship with developing countries as an equal partner and not just a recipient of natural resources.

27 In building our own economic strength which is the password for effective and respected foreign policy let us not forget the historical past when the present day developed countries grew. In the 19th century, there was a great deal of protectionism which these countries had created through their political and military power. Today, India has to battle several trade protectionist hurdles or constraints arising out of considerations of environment, climate, etc. In other words, the challenge before India to grow at 8%-9% with all these global constraints and protectionism is far greater than what the West had faced in earlier times.

28 For effective foreign policy, it is imperative that there is better coordination and implementation with regard to foreign policy decisions. This is particularly relevant in our economic diplomacy, trade, investment etc. However, India's foreign policy machinery is still relatively a small outfit. It needs to be expanded and strengthened substantially. It would also require to be constantly equipped to deal with new challenges before India.

29 The next ten years would be crucial for India's foreign policy as the forces towards universalism or greater integration on the one hand and growing nationalism on the other could come to clash from time to time on different issues. How to navigate through this conflicting landscape will be the test case for Indian diplomacy. To me, striking a mature and sagacious balance between these two demands is the main imperative before India's foreign policy and I do believe that we have the necessary capacity and resolve.

Thank you

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