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### **EFFECTIVE DIPLOMACY FOR INDIA**

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***“A nation’s foreign policy impulses are shaped by its external experiences” - Kenneth Waltz***

In India the citizens do not vote on the basis of a candidate’s foreign policy assurances and objectives but the visions to ameliorate domestic policy. As a still developing nation it has a huge uneducated population that can only focus on the management of bread and butter. The political thought where one might ponder over the future of one’s nation vis-a-vis the world and the nation’s role in the international system, is a luxury only for the elite. However, this does not mean that India lacks in the culture or understanding of foreign policy and its importance. From ‘Non-alignment’, and ‘Panchsheel’ to ‘Look East’ and ‘Act East’ are exemplary foreign policy initiatives. But at the hand of politics where domestic challenges champion external difficulties, the gap in the understanding refrains India from fashioning a long term thinking of itself and the world. Because of this, Indian foreign policy is a subject understood at best in retrospect and from moment to moment, as India does not have a concrete doctrine or foreign policy guidelines for the diplomats or stakeholders to follow.

If a leader does not have a vision for his people, the nation might never progress. But if the leader has not thought of the global order and his own nation’s place in it, it might lead to a poor defense policy. The foreign policy of a nation is an almost clear expression of its priorities in the neighborhood and beyond. These priorities may be based on an economic acceleration, anticipation of a conflict, paranoia , etc.



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While formulating the strategy to strengthen national security, following needs to be kept in mind:

- **Periphery**—the countries which have direct influence on the nation's 'power' calculation and global goodwill but indirect on its national security, for reference, great powers with no immediate disputes, which are also physically far off; US, Australia, Europe, Japan etc.
- **Core-immediate neighborhood**, regional powers crucial for national security and maintenance of internal stability; Indian Ocean Region (Sub-continent), and China and Afghanistan.
- **Distant-countries** or regions with potential crisis that might spark instability for external/internal security; South East Asia, Middle East, West Asia.

The idea behind such a geographical break down is to put region and countries into perspective according to the nation's demands and needs. The 'priority' list gives a graphic image of the world as it stands for a nation. The 'periphery' in the foreign policy is very important for the economic value and in achieving an advantageous stand in the system. It is also crucial in the unipolar world where there are no checks and balances.

India cannot develop in isolation, nor can it defend itself against the growing nexus between India's neighbors, without having favorable relations with a much more powerful nation(s). To remain in the calculus of the superpower (and other great powers) a nation must highlight its own strategic importance in the region. Once it has managed to persuade others of its strategic presence, a nation will not only benefit while facing external challenges, will also receive a support system to fall back on.



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**O**n several occasions countries depend on their global reputation for winning disputes, in such cases a nexus of powerful partners can deter any hostile entity from encroaching upon the 'self-interests' of the nation in question. In South Asia, India can be seen as a regional power, but in the presence of China, that position is ambiguous. For China, India, due to vast territory and population, would be a potential threat. This is an inevitable consequence for India whether it measures itself as a competitor for power in the region or not. Thus, relations with the other great powers should be welcomed in the light of future security for securing a hierarchy in the international system.

**H**owever, India must remember no one interferes in the matters of others without any prior interest. Hence, while promoting itself as the linchpin of stability in Indian Ocean or a balancer for any rising power in the region, India should reciprocate to the needs of the other powers. This is not to say that India should depart from its policy of strategic autonomy, instead it should be seen as an opportunity for dictating the terms of a 'mutually beneficial arrangement'.

**T**he 'core' has the power to bring in instability and use diplomacy against the interests of a nation. When the smaller countries of the Indian Ocean Region started to tilt towards China, it sent shock waves in India. India was neither prepared nor was it aware that such practices can paralyze its security network if used against it. To maintain 'primacy' in one's region is extremely crucial for gaining maximum security. To take India as a case in point, Pakistan and China both pose a threat to long-term national security of India and stability in the region. Now, if India loses any more members of the region to the other side, it will become very costly for India to manage its external and internal security.

**T**he 'distant', however, brings in the long-term vision in the making of foreign policy. The regions and countries, which perhaps do not signify much at the moment, can become threatening or



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indirectly crippling. A classic example of this would be Malacca Straits. The bilateral relations between Singapore and Malaysia are just as important as internal and external stability of the individual nations of the region, failing which the busiest passage for trade will come to a stand still. India should be watchful of South East Asia, the regions dynamics with China to help it chart its future course of action in the region.

**W**ith the coming of the new government in India, foreign policy seems to have taken precedence for Prime Minister Narendra Modi. His visits to a series of nations signify India's position in the region. His first visit was to Bhutan, one of the two countries with disputed land borders with China. Then he went on visits to Nepal, Japan, the US, Myanmar, and Australia. Each country is of geopolitical importance and relevance for India. If we see China as the center of gravity for PM Modi's visits this might clear the picture further. He also visited Indian Ocean countries, vis Seychelles, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Singapore, and Bangladesh. In the backdrop of China expanding its maritime capabilities in East China Sea and South China Sea, it seems realistic and logical for India to rejuvenate the intimacy with the Indian Ocean Region, to stand out as a South Asian power and bring the countries together under its leadership. In the second leg of the journey PM Modi visited China and other Asian countries—all China's neighbors—Mongolia, Uzbekistan, Kazakhstan, Russia, Turkmenistan, Kyrgyzstan, and Tajikistan. These countries, except Russia, have never emerged as significant players in Indian foreign policy. However, this particular time, the visits not only got immense coverage, but also hinted at an underlying sentiment that India understands the reality of great power dynamics and potential of the 'China threat'. To reach out to neighbors during this time when a belligerent China is on the rise, India is starting to understand the matrix of international relations, partnering with the one's left behind. This holistic approach by the present government shows signs of the need to understand the importance of international relations and thus, foreign policy. This practice will now need permanency. Now that this administration is looking at things realistically, calculating its 'friendships' with the other members of the system, the government should introduce their vision to



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the diplomats and foreign officers, to help them get a sense of what India wants from the world, where it sees itself, as only these guidelines can help in effective diplomacy.

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