



**RESEARCH PAPER**

**Modi's New Foreign Policy Behavior: Transformations and Global Responses**

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**ABSTRACT**

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Paper explores linkages between Indian domestic and foreign policy aspirations with the rise of BJP government since 2014. Modi's hyper-active approach to expand domestic manufacturing capabilities and to achieve self-sufficiency in economic and military domains has limited scope due to unavailability of required infrastructure and technological skills. Paper also aims to examine shifting allegiances in Indian foreign policy behavior and global responses on this transitional move. The study is supported by process tracing method as a tool for analysis that makes easy to understand issues in Modi's aspiration to achieve global power status. Modi's domestic and foreign policies are not aligning to each other that may not produce desired objectives. At the same time, existing global powers do not find India an immediate potential challenger at regional or global level.

**Introduction**

India's foreign policy is transforming through a new phase since Bhartiya Jannata Party (BJP) leader Narendra Damodardas Modi assumed office in 2014. His long political experience as chief minister of Gujrat played a substantial role to introduce contemporary hyper-active mode in Indian foreign policy behavior essentially based on exaggerated Indian role in international politics. India is rapidly growing military capabilities, expanding ties with great powers and restructuring administrative loopholes in its defense forces. At the same time, Indian government promoted slogans like 'Make in India' and 'Zero Defect Zero Effect (ZDZE)' to establish concept of 'India as a manufacturing hub'. However the

ground realities are quite different as global economic and political conditions as well as domestic political complexities are not align with Indian aspirations of becoming an economic and military giant similar to China and US. Thus the question arises that how these developments are liked with Modi's new Indian foreign policy approach? How this changing behavior in Indian foreign policy will be responded by regional and global powers? Make in India is a campaign launched by Prime Minister Modi in September 2014 promoting business community and foreign investors to invest in Indian economy (Maps of India, 2019). Interestingly, within a year, Indian foreign direct investment (FDI) crossed statistics of China and the US (Jaffrelot, 2016). However, due to its focus on increasing domestic capacity to reduce country's imports, this campaign may also pose threats for traditional Indian exporting partners including Russia. Despite knowing these risks, Modi government expectations from this program are high.

This program does not attract any foreign investors and believes inefficient utilization of the country's available resources. It encourages domestic manufacturers to produce goods in the country by using factors of production like land, labor, capital, entrepreneurship, and technology, thereby generating employment opportunities for the Indian masses. If this program is promoted efficiently, it would recognize and endorse the Indian homegrown brands. It will provide the domestic manufacturers with a platform to compete with foreign products and raise the standard of their products (Srivastava, 2019). In continuation of problems in infrastructure, technology and capital, Indian economic conditions largely improved from 2014-2019 and maintained top position in South Asia. The GDP growth during this period fluctuated between 6 to 8 percent that indicates interest of investors. In 2019-2020, Indian is also expected to maintain 7.6-7.4 percent economic growth. But despite having these improvements in economic sectors, indigenous manufacturing and parity with developed world is unlikely in next few decades. There are several issues yet to be addressed including lack of competitiveness, labour, land, capital and market ( Dhiraj, 2018).

India needs high—and sustained—economic growth to overcome some of its serious developmental issues, such as pervasive poverty that afflicts 40 percent of its population, major deficiencies in health and hygiene, including 70 percent of Indians not having access to a proper latrine, and widespread malnutrition among about half the population (Snedden, 2016). Keeping in view, all these circumstances, there are two broader attributes of Modi's contemporary foreign policy approach with an inextricable linkage between domestic and external factors.

- a. To expand Economic and military power to maximize security and regional superiority to become regional hegemon.
- b. To create space for Indian assertiveness as global power candidate.

For acquisition of these objectives Prime Minister Modi introduced many concepts since his oath ceremony took place. As a part of strategy the rout to meet ends has two broader directions. First, to maximize domestic manufacturing

potential in all important sectors to minimize dependency in economic and military imports. Second, to build a global valuable position through revival of bilateral relations with major players in world politics including US, Russia, China, Japan and France.

### **Domestic Linkages and India's New Foreign Policy Approach**

In his 'make in India' policy, Modi government has identified and prioritized 25 sectors in first step to reduced imports (Srivastava, 2019). The top order includes aviation and defense manufacturing (Srivastava, 2019). To minimize imports and expand export sector India introduced 'Brand India' globally, for which government urged to manufacture highly demanding products at home with ZDZE policy (The Hindu Business Line, 2014). The Idea of ZDZE was initially discussed by Phil Crosby in 2<sup>nd</sup> half of 20<sup>th</sup> century that has been adopted by various companies in business sector. ZDZE was mainly concerned with non-damaging conditions for external environment, identification of defects, preparation of skills and expertise, minimization of production cost, keeping extraordinarily a perfect manufacturing under a visionary leadership (Parashar & Parashar, 2015). The most important element that ZDZE represents is manufacturing of products based on quality management system. Interestingly, much of the debate during the 2<sup>nd</sup> decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century with regards to Indian foreign policy discusses Indian role in world politics and economic growth as China did a decade ago (Parashar & Parashar, 2015). But a large portion of these commentaries are speculations rather than confirmed advancement. For a number of reasons, India is unlikely to pursue a proactive foreign policy and these assumptions are yet to be achieved. From 2009-18 India has been the second largest importer of arms around the world that covers 9.5% of the global arms imports (SIPRI Arms Transfer Database, 2019). Interestingly no other South Asian state stands at top ten importers of arms during the same period. Historically, India was purchasing nearly 70% of its total arms from Russia (Khan, 2018) but this dependency gradually decreased during last few years. As per SIPRI arms transfer database report of 2019, the major reason for this downfall was Indian shift in arms import policy. This deliberate change in traditional Indian arms import policy severely threatened Russian arms sales industry as Russia lost nearly 42% of arms exports to India in a short period of time (SIPRI Arms Transfer Database, 2019).

India's defence expo 2020 was a manifestation of emerging Indian aspirations to introduce country as 'manufacturing hub' of defense equipment (India Today, 2020). India is rapidly increasing its capabilities to ensure presence in space. On March 27, 2019 India claimed to hit a satellite in space (Chopra, 2019) that shows Indian desires to expand military power beyond continent. Defence Space Research Agency (DSRO) has been established to strengthen research and development to enhance outcomes of Defense Space Agency (DSA) (India Today, 2019). Whereas Defense Cyber Agency (DCA) is also part of same series that focuses on cyber security and warfare. In fact the expanding Indian defense and security structure has unprecedented implications on Indian foreign policy behavior. Kargil war truly demonstrates that South Asian nuclearization did not

actually reduced risk of traditional warfare between India and Pakistan. As a matter of fact, Indian contemporary modernization of military hardware and administrative reforms are rooted in realization of Kargil war lessons. Although, these changes in administrative and equipment quality remained slow however the emergence of new thinking in national security architecture increased this realization. The [Kargil] war affected the Indian security establishment in a manner little short of seismic. It galvanized the government to look within, identify lapses and implement remedial measures, including creation of new structures (Deb, 2019). In 2019, India introduced new reforms in administrative setup of armed forces and approved a new organizational structure with a position of the Chief of Defence Staff (CDS) having powers to coordinate all three forces i.e., military, navy and the air force within its domain. This superior function of CDS also establishes a changing nuclear decision making hierarchy in Indian defence policy. CDS will now enjoy the powers of an influential advisor in any nuclear or non-nuclear related policy. Centralization of administrative power through Department of Military Affairs (DMA) will not only reshape inter-armed forces coordination but also accelerate changing nature of Indian military trade policy.

At the sidelines of these administrative reforms in military structure Modi government also paid attention to improve air power and materialized long awaited Indo-France fighter jets deal by resolving issues. After a political controversy on Rafale purchase contract, Modi's government successfully managed to sign a deal worth \$ 8.8 billion with Dassault Aviation France and received first delivery soon after the agreement. One of the most important aspect of this deal that makes it valuable for India is Dassault Aviation's acceptance for limited transfer of technology to Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL) (Air Force Technology, 2020) with a reinvestment plan putting half of the value of contract (Scimia, 2016). It is actually first step towards building an indigenous arms industry to fulfil domestic requirements and to achieve desired stage to export arms. The acquisition of modern aerial weapons and aircrafts is continuation of new Indian foreign policy to achieve parallel air force capability to China. Thus Rafale scope is not limited to South Asian security requirements as improvements India is less likely to achieve a credible advantage even on Pakistan during a traditional warfare due to unfavorable terrain and poor focus on military skill. A host of structural factors mitigate whatever advantages India may be gaining through military modernization: terrain and the deployment of Pakistani forces are not conducive to rapid successes in areas of significant strategic value, in the most likely conflict scenarios India is unlikely to achieve the strategic surprise necessary to make a limited offensive succeed, and there is no evidence that the Indian military possesses a sufficient skill asymmetry over Pakistani forces to overcome these two deficiencies through the use of advanced military technology. Despite a technological edge in some areas, Indian policymakers cannot be confident that even a limited resort to military force would achieve a rapid result, which is an essential pre-condition for deterrence failure (Ladwing III, 2015).

The acquisition of Rafale from Dassault Aviation conveyed a clear message to Indian traditional military exporter, Russia, that India is not satisfied with Russian technology and may expand option to improve military modernization. The losses to Russian arms industry with Indian smart diversion towards Western manufacturing hubs particularly in arms industry also confirmed changing Indian foreign policy behavior. Historically, Indian tilt towards Moscow never provided space for Indian aspirations to modernize its military with Western arms technology particularly with US. However, changing Indian foreign policy behavior also influenced military trade between India and the US raising from 7 % till 2016 (Weitz, 2017) to 12% by 2018 (SIPRI Arms Transfer Database, 2019). During the period only Indian Air Force (IAF) purchased nearly \$10 billion US manufactured weapons (Weitz, 2017). Similarly, during Modi's government India increased its arms purchase from Israel and France by 15 % and 9.5% respectively during last few years (Weitz, 2017). Whereas Indian military cooperation with Japan is also increasing particularly in naval warfare equipment trade (Thakker & Silverberg, 2019). Indian government is focusing on transfer of technology and skills to domestic arms industry to enhance indigenous manufacturing skills. Although India did not achieve a satisfactory level to secure full spectrum technological transfer however, new agreements with its non-traditional arms suppliers particularly with US and France increased Indian military capabilities. For example India purchased small artillery weapon known as M777 Howitzers, Chinook and Apache Helicopters, and anti-submarine aircrafts from US in last few years.

**Table 1**  
**Indian Arms Imports 2009-18**

<b>Exporter of Arms</b>	<b>%age of Arms Imports</b>	<b>Global Share in Arms Import During 2009-18</b>	<b>Trend in Purchase</b>
Russian Federation	58		Decreased
Israel	15	9.5%	Increased
United States	12		Increased
France	9.8		Increased

Source: SIPRI Arms Transfer Database, 2019 (Edited by author)

### **Responses to Modi's New Foreign Policy Behavior**

#### **a. The United States Response:**

During Prime Minister Modi era, India rapidly build bilateral ties with US however this cooperation do not have strong historical roots. Despite representing largest democracy, an attractive market of more than 120 million people, India cannot be assumed as a natural defense partner of US (Weitz, 2017). There are certain strategic condition on which contemporary Indo-US ties were promised (Rajagopalan, 2017). China's aggressive behavior and unmatched military power compelled India to make attempts to maintain regional balance of power (Rajagopalan, 2017). On the other hand US Asian quest has obstacles from China

resulting convergence of its interests with India. Whereas India has limited options to balance China (Rajagopalan, 2017). Indian military strength, modernization and defense budget is not sufficient to reduce China threat due to its limited global influence as compared to China. For US, Indian support to counter China's strategic and economic threat was most suitable choice in changing orientation of Asian political landmass (Rajagopalan, 2017). A number of tangible reasons as well as lack of will power in Indian military bureaucracy will remain part of problem in Indian global desires. US interests also have some certain limitation allowing India as a time being partner. Nevertheless, the US strategic interests and Indian aspirations to play role as a great power parallel to US or China do not co-relate. Over the next ten years, then, the core difference between the United States and India regarding military competition with China is that the United States can feasibly pursue a strategy of fielding military forces superior to those of China – what defense planners sometimes refer to as a strategy of overmatch – while India cannot. Indian strategist and force planners must instead seek ways to offset their weaknesses and subvert Chinese strengths (Dougherty, 2019). US interest to contain China are obviously high however, any parallel global role to India is rationally unfavorable for US as it can harm US global influence. Whereas the potential economic and military power of India is yet not proven as fundamental structure for rapid manufacturing is extraordinarily weak. In response, US will never allow India to challenge her in any power vacuum particularly its economic and military interests based on manufacturing sectors.

During his recent visit to India, US President Donald Trump's discussions truly represent contemporary US foreign policy behavior towards India. Trump was warmly welcomed by the government of India as there were exaggerated expectations taking birth in political circles with regards to Indo-US strategic and political interdependence. BJP government was happy to arrange this visit with expectations of huge economic and political support by US. However the outcomes of the visit not only disappointed Indian government but also exposed fault lines in Indo-US convergences of interests. There was no such big economic or military deal signed between India and US neither any policy softness been announced by any side. Even Trump did not properly responded a question related to H-1B visa policy for India causing trouble for Indian IT industry and professionals in US. During the same visit, Trump called Indian tariff policy for US manufacturers as an unfair act. Moreover, for Indian audience, Trump's stance on Pak-US ties was unexpected. Trump appreciated Pakistan without ambiguity and praised Pakistan's role; Our relationship with Pakistan is a very good one. Thanks to these efforts, we are beginning to see signs of big progress with Pakistan. And we are hopeful for reduced tensions, greater stability, and the future of harmony for all of the nations of South Asia (NDTV, 2020). Even during his press conference question answer session, president again repeated his policy towards South Asia by endorsing his strong ties with Pakistan. Despite knowing intensity of Indian traditional concerns about Pakistan, Trump publically and referred that he has also discussed the same with Indian Prime Minister. We talked a lot about Pakistan. I

have a very good relationship with the Prime Minister Khan. Very good. We talked about it today at length, actually, and – Prime Minister Modi. And it's no question it's a problem, but it's a problem they have – they're working on it (White House, 2020).

In South Asia, US have been enjoying historical bilateral relations with Pakistan. US-Pakistan cooperation during cold war had already proved Pakistan a reliable strategic partner in the region. Currently, US is aware of Pakistan's deep influence in Afghanistan and thus, cannot afford to deteriorate peace plan by making any wrong turn. Pakistan played a key role to stream line US exit plan and peace proposal. This is second most curtail time for US after cold war when Pakistan has key geo-strategic and geo-political grounds to support US. Infact, Indian desire to create space for regional hegemony has serious challenges at structural as well as domestic level. Trump administration showed any extraordinary response over Indian changing behavior towards US that includes Trump's repeated proposals to India on Jammu and Kashmir issue. Simultaneously, a number of issues are still there at impeding Indian drafting of forging ties with US including IT technology trade, Russian arms imports and increasing Indian ties with Iran.

### **Russian Response**

As Prime Minister Modi announced self-reliance policy under make in India initiative, Russian defense exports to India gradually reduced. A large portion of Russo-Indian strong relations is based on military exports and assistance provided by Russian arms industry. India has been dependent on Russian arms including small arms, tanks, fighter jets, air defense and naval advancements. However, changing posture of Indian military trade policy can result a mistrust between Moscow and New Delhi. India has already diverted its attention from Russian fighter craft technology (Tewari & Gopalaswamy, 2017). Before revising this policy India was dependent on Russian made MiG-21 and MiG-27 fighter aircrafts. However, in post Kargil war, Indian shift in arms trade policy ultimately concluded that India must get rid of this technology. Indian bid for Rafale fighter aircraft was a clear message to Moscow that India is no more interested in Russian technology to meet its security challenges in the region. Finally, official retirement of MiG-27 from Indian Air Force (IAF) (India Today, 2019) and announcement of grounding MiG-21 in next few years (IDRW, 2019) stamped Indian aspirations to look forward for Western technology. Russia has a long history of strategic and economic partnership with India and even maintains its status as largest arms exporter to India (Khattak, 2018). On the other hand, contours of changing Indian foreign policy behavior towards US also alarmed Moscow. US supremacy in Asia and Europe is seen as a threat by Russian policy makers particularly in its near abroad. As a part of this understanding, Russia do not see Indian rapprochements with US as normal act of foreign policy and 'has already made clear that it will not assist India as the Soviet Union did in the past' (Ganguly, 2020). Contrary to this, 'India cannot afford to forge an anti-American coalition with China and Russia'

(Ganguly, 2020). Thus PM Modi's foreign policy attitude is facing a complex external environment. Russian response can also be traced by looking at increasing Russia Pakistan relations. Pak Russia reorientation of foreign policy behavior resulted new arms sales deals, joint military exercises and high level official visits. This reorientation brings worries in New-Delhi as Russia have been avoiding to criticize Pakistan for Indian propagated 'cross-border terrorism' (Raghavan, 2017). Similarly Russian softening stance on Jammu and Kashmir, support to Pakistan's Afghan peace plan and increasing interest in advance military cooperation between Russia, China and Pakistan will restrict ambitious foreign policy behavior of Modi's government.

Indian interests to indigenization of military requirements is not possible in a short period of time. Indian expectations to attain a status of global power pole till 2050 (Tellis, 2016) lack factual homework for example, gradual reduction in Indian interests to import Russian arms can strengthen Russian perceptions about Modi's government skeptical thinking about Russian arms technology. Russia keenly observed changing Indian foreign policy behavior as Moscow was 'suspected that the BJP did not give priority to the Russia relationship' (Tellis, 2016). Infact this will increase mistrust conditions between India and Russia.

### **China's Response**

In contemporary orientation of Modi's foreign policy behavior, Indian quest for global power status has been viewed as serious threat by Beijing. China's perceives that Asian landmass may be the 'key battlefield for shaping future international patterns (Yuyan, Weijiang, & Wei, 2020). Indian economic and military modernization as well as changing nature in global positioning from balancing to a leading power (Tewari & Gopaldaswamy, *Transforming India from a Balancing to Leading Power*, 2017) is predominantly challenging for China's view of regional and global power contestation. China is promoting connectivity diplomacy to expand regional and global influence. At the same time China's military modernization is far beyond from any other regional power including India. Although, China's relations with India have been improved as compared to cold war bilateral tie however, this cooperation did not abolish threat perceptions on both sides. Meanwhile, China is facing a new economic contestation and confrontation with US. A huge trade blocked through heavy tariffs by US increased tensions in Beijing. Trump administration imposed US \$ 250 billion of Chinese goods and announced to increase it up to 300 billion USD by the end of this year (Mohandas, 2019). India on the other hand is trying to increase economic cooperation with US that has reciprocal implications on China's foreign policy behavior towards India.

Modi's approach to "use foreign policy as a means to generate inward investment ( Chaudhury, 2015)" is not complete picture of Indian foreign policy behavior. Rather Indian reforms to restructure domestic manufacturing capabilities has also an outward impact. The new approach has also some political dimensions and China's response is based on one point agenda with regards to India, that is –



not to provide enough economic and political space for India to become a challenger in military, economic or political terms. To counter new Indian foreign policy approach, Beijing has improved economic and strategic ties with Islamabad. Under Belt and Road (BRI) plan, China's investment in Pakistan increased by 46 billion USD only in China Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC).

China along with US, Russia and Pakistan has been pursuing a peace plan in Afghanistan that do not allow a definite maximum role for India in the region. This situation is also alarming for New Delhi as India is an isolated actor in this patch of global politics. Infact, China's foreign policy can be characterized by 'assertive, coordinated, and diversified across the instruments and targets of statecraft' (Blackwill & Campbell, 2016). China is also concerned about increasing India maneuvering through establishment of India-Vietnam strategic and military ties. Indian support to enhance Vietnam's military capabilities is actually the quest for initial markets to export Indian indigenous arms production. Credit line of \$ 500 million in 2016 (Wezeman, 2019) was a real time investment by Modi government to materialize outcomes of 'make in India' policy. Additionally, India is willing to export its home made missiles including Brahmos, navel surveillance equipment and petrol air crafts (Wezeman, 2019). The increasing Vietnam's military capabilities have been developing a sense of insecurity in Beijing. The sensitivity of China over South China Sea and Indian indirect interference in the region through arms sales to Vietnam catch a strong policy response from China. As a policy response, China has increased cooperation and investment in CPEC as well as in defense production project in Pakistan to contain India within South Asian premises.

### **France Response**

Indian preferential foreign policy behavior towards France is a recent development that has limited historical foundations as Indian economic and military cooperation with France did not flourish during cold war period. In 1<sup>st</sup> decade of 21<sup>st</sup> century both countries started military cooperation including joint navel exercise. Similarly, there was a valuable addition in India-France military cooperation by signing a deal to provide India Scorpene Submarines. However, Indo-France rapprochements gained a momentum with 2013 visit of President Hollande to India. Before this high level visit, France never followed an ambitious or preferential foreign policy behavior towards India.

In post Hollande's visit, a certain change emerged in France's foreign policy as India was interested to purchase high tech weapons from France. France foreign policy has similar attributes as the US policy with almost same objectives (Johnson, 2009). Thus the realization of a massive arms export market furnished way forward for France to engage with India. It was the first time when France occupied Russian market place by signing a tremendous deal with India. Rafale export to India has been viewed as a remarkable development by Indian policy makers. India also gained some political support from France during this period particularly over

France's Kashmir policy. Later in 2018, France and India also enhanced cooperation through a Joint Strategic Vision in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR).

Infact, current outlook of trajectory in framing ties with France and US has roots in India's new foreign policy behavior. The fundamental element of this foreign policy behavior is Modi's exaggerated self-imaging that resulted a strong tendency to engage with Western world. Contrary to this, France response is rationally calculated and based on economic diplomacy. A historical overview of France's Asian interest also denotes economic interests of France to get involved in India (Kang & Munro, 2018). France is aware of Indian fear of growing economic, political and military power of China ( Dempsey, 2019). As France is slight behind or roughly equal to China in global arms export parity (Raska & Bitzinger, 2020) but there is no comparison of China and France in terms of overall economic conditions. Thus India could be a 'golden sparrow' for France not only to ensure its strong presence in IOR but also to uplift exports and strengthen arms industry by incorporating Indian market.

### **Conclusion**

In 2014, as BJP hold Prime Minister's office, a wave of social and political turmoil emerged in Indian foreign policy behavior. Modi government rushed to make revolutionary statements and hyper-active policy decisions at home and abroad that shaped and exaggerated Indian foreign policy behavior. Unfortunately, India lacks fundamental requirements as other great powers have to prove an assertive position in international politics. On one hand, Indian efforts to expand domestic manufacturing capacity and goal to attract world by quality exports has insufficient infrastructural and financial resources. Whereas government has no plan to rescue people from social injustice, unemployment, illiteracy, health and sanitation demands. On the other hand same faulty foundations with exaggerated narrative is resulting limited achievements at global arena where India failed to proclaim perceived global assertiveness. There is no such evidence of Indian manufacturing or political power that could have been influential in changing decision making of great power. Nevertheless, Indian imports of military hardware increased to a great extent. The diversion of Indian foreign policy towards West and revival of military technology has also devastating implications on future policy trends between India and Russia. Similarly, changing nature of Indian foreign policy did not function as for as US, China and Russia are concerned. All three great powers do not consider India immediate potential challenger neither these states have any serious policy threat from India. Thus the foreign policy choices allow these powers to restrain Indian aspirations within South Asian landmass. Another important aspect is shift in allegiances that has been creating a considerable space for Pakistan to expand its posture in Eurasian region by increasing cooperation with Russia and China.

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