REALISM AND PM NARENDRA MODI’S FOREIGN POLICY: IDENTIFICATION OF GAPS

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The general perception is that PM Modi’s foreign policy has succeeded beyond the limits. When a realistic theoretical perspective is adopted as is the practice in the studies of the International studies to identify the real dynamics of the international politics, the picture is different about PM Modi’s foreign policy. PM Modi is a dynamic leader and has widely travelled after assuming the position but so far scholars have not attempted to find out the gaps in his foreign policy. The present paper is an attempt to identify these gaps. For this purpose the realist perspective is adopted.

Indian Prime Minister visited Japan in August-September 2014 when the bilateral relationship was elevated to special status. From maritime security to defense cooperation were emphasized. UPA government had already laid the basis of the maritime cooperation with Japan so it was not an achievement but was continuation of the already established policy framework. But the real test was in the field of civil nuclear cooperation where Japan has exhibited a negative action as the recent developments suggest. Japan seems to have put strong conditions for the deal including more tracking than the IAEA and will cancel the supplies, in case in future if India
goes for the nuclear explosion. This is hard condition considering the India’s problems with the nuclear China and Pakistan. Japan is aligned with USA and Australia on nuclear cooperation and may stop Indian leverage in Nuclear Supply Group. This development may cause delay in India–US civil nuclear deal as well. India needs close cooperation of Japan in the development of pressurized light water reactors but Japan has maintained a very strict policy on nuclear sector where it has opposed India since 1974. Japan has good hold over the nuclear components. Modi government is yet to find out a solution but so close cooperation has not altered the Japanese mindset.

India China relations also stand where UPA government had left. The agreements related to soft diplomacy have less importance due to their marginal impact in bilateral relations between two conflictful states. India and China are no exception. The boundary issue has shown no alteration. Recently Chinese foreign office representative in explicit terms stated that China had claim on Arunachal Pradesh, a part of South Tibet and the McMahon Line was illegal. Thus real message was conveyed to India what China demands from India. The maps diplomacy was played once again. During PM visit wrong Indian maps were available in the Chinese markets. This has a symbolic meaning, Nehru was also deceived in the similar fashion when China published wrong maps, on objections Chinese government attributed these to Kuomintang government but it had another thought in mind as history unfolded. With respect to China rhetoric has no meaning. China is not in mood to accommodate on the complex issues. Modi government has to work hard on the ground realities with China.

India- Australia have concluded the civil nuclear deal likely to be implemented in this year. The basis of the deal was prepared when in 2011 Australian PM had lifted ban on the supply of the uranium to India on the ground that there was no rational in supplying it to China but not to India, and to participate in the Asian century. Australia may conclude FTA with India in near future but its basis too was prepared in 2008 when both countries discussed for a feasible economic cooperation and for a comprehensive economic cooperation agreement discussions were initiated in May 2011. The major issue at present lies in the trade relations where India stands as 10th largest trading partner of Australia. The two-way trade needs to be improved for which Australia requires more free and liberal economy. The major foreign policy challenge is
yet to be tackled by the government. Modi government is yet to concentrate on the issue of two way trade.

India- France have maintained good relations. PM Modi’s foreign policy focused on France but the goal was not clear. His visit was not so much attractive for the locals as was observed in some other countries. France at present accords more importance to China than India due to changed politico-economic conditions. The Rafale deal was done with Government to Government route, a welcome development but deal is yet to take final shape and issue of lower price with Dassault is a thorn. India has already decided to take only 36 Rafales. The hype about France was hyperbolic. The crux of the relationship is that both countries have enjoyed very good relations in the past and the Rafale deal is yet to take a firm shape.

India and Russia are ages old friends. Putin visited India in December and India recognized friendship with Russia as a strong pillar. In the recent time Russia has exhibited inclination towards Pakistan. There is increased defense cooperation now. Russian defense minister visited Pakistan after a very long time. They have decided first time for the joint military exercises. New government in India has to take note of these developments. The gradual shift in the allegiance in Russian policy is due to its domestic and neighbourhood compulsions and India’s increased relations with USA. Indian government is yet to contain this shift albeit it is a difficult task considering the autonomy of Russian foreign policy but Indian diplomacy is not proactive on this development.

India US relations have moved on right direction. US President Obama’s visit was important; and adoption of shared vision document, clarifications on civil nuclear deal are noteworthy developments. US seems to have included India in its Asia-Pacific balancing policy. This may appear attractive at present, but may push India into an alliance with eastern countries Japan, South Korea if the tensions grow in South China Sea. USA thinks India as an important ally in Asian politics not only in economic terms but also as a partner in balancing the emerging China. Indian government appears though not in the trap of USA on this issue at present but equally true is that new government has moved towards USA, Israel quite fastly without taking care of its interests with Russia and Arab world. The shift on Palestinian issue is an impact of attraction towards Israel. India on these counts loses its autonomy in foreign affairs as too fast move towards USA and its allies are difficult to be understood and do not bode well.
On the issue of Afghanistan where India can play a direct and important role, its activity is restrained and was never made parallel to Pakistan by USA. India-US relations with respect to Afghanistan have always remained dwarfed. Recently USA has contemplated to sell Pakistan the 15 Bell AH-1Z Viper attack helicopters, showing that US maintains a policy of supporting Pakistan and developing relations with India to use it according to needs. USA at present has emerged as largest defense supplier to India replacing Russia. Russian concentration towards Pakistan may be an offshoot of this development. Modi government is yet to grasp the reality of US foreign policy. PM Modi’s foreign policy success with US will be measured to extent if it succeeds to reduce US tilt towards Pakistan, so far with little success.

Modi government started a proactive neighbourhood policy. It has yielded limited results. The aid diplomacy in Nepal has produced some negative result. Indian media was criticized for over activism. PM himself stated many times that India was the first to inform Nepalese PM about the earthquake. It was self praise and did not go well with many. Indian over activism prepared the base for entry for China in effective manner. China is in full mood to exploit the post earthquake opportunity. Indian efforts at the bilateral level have been well contained. China is the largest investor at present. Indian diplomacy was much highlighted by the Indian media but real story is that China has received more accolades from Nepal than India. Truth is that Indian foreign ministry failed to manage the over activism of Indian media.

Relations with Pakistan stand at the level where UPA had left. The foreign secretary talks were called off and Pakistan diplomacy kept India under pressure on the issue of talks. The issue of Lakhvi and Dawood remains unattended by Pakistan. Pakistan has treated India’s regional activity as a challenge to it. Pakistan-China relations have been boosted and will continue to do so. This challenge is yet to be dealt by the Modi government. PM Modi’s South Asian Policy is partial extension of Gujral doctrine but with more aggression. This causes imbalances as it has activated Pakistan as a reaction.

In Maldives the former President Mohamed Nasheed’s issue and increased Chinese influence well supported by the current regime are yet to be contained. Maldives and China have recently entered into a military agreement. Water diplomacy in Maldives satisfied the immediate needs of the Maldivian government but its impact to restore the influence of India in the island is limited. India has to devise a more impactful policy for Maldives.
Afghanistan is an important country in the region. The new government of Ghani has adopted a new policy of courting China and Pakistan. India is not allocated equal importance on the key issues. The visit of Ghani to India suggested that for Afghanistan India was a lesser partner than Pakistan. He had even gone to China earlier than India. Modi government seems to be in a fix to deal with the changes at policy level in Afghanistan. A coherent policy with increased Indian role in Afghanistan is yet to emerge. Indian responses are based upon the Afghan actions. In fact India needs to be proactive as Pakistan and China have become more aligned with Afghanistan.

PM Modi has attempted to develop a specific Indian Ocean policy in which smaller island countries may play an important role. Sri Lanka is an important component of the strategy but India is yet to succeed here, mainly on the issue of devolution of power to Tamils and to restrict Chinese influence. His success will be measured on these two issues although he appears to be committed on supporting the cause of Tamils.

One important area where PM Modi’s foreign policy is somewhat impressive is in the economic foreign policy area. Though India acted in BRICS, IBSA but in other areas more activity is desired. The free trade pact with European Union is still far away. There is no sign that India is attempting to develop a Look West policy concentrating the Middle East and North African countries in economic terms. In the similar way Central Asian countries oriented foreign policy is yet to take a concrete shape. Though India has adopted the sector/area approach in its foreign economic policy. Look East has only been changed as the Act East but substantial gains are limited.

**Policy recommendation**

In conclusion it can be stated that PM Modi started well on the foreign policy fronts but this area is too complex, hence desires more coherent efforts when dealing with any country. PM Modi’s foreign policy activism needs to take notice of the gaps as well in its operation otherwise its impacts will be adverse enough.

India should devise more mild neighbourhood South Asian policy otherwise the smaller states may raise their objections. Nepal is case in point. Maldives is another country which needs specific attention.
India also needs to take care of Russian interests. It also needs to devise a balanced Israel-Palestine policy. Top dignitaries will soon visit Israel. India needs to be more balanced in this respect.

Finally there is greater need to engage Pakistan which has not responded well in the past. PM Modi attempted to engage Pakistan but its behavior is quite complex. Indian diplomacy needs to restart the talks at different level.