



GEOPOLITICS
DIPLOMACY

INDIA IN A GLOBALISED WORLD

The MEA's policy planners will have to cast India's foreign policy in a new perspective and come up with an inclusive mapping exercise. **SREERAM CHAULIA** takes a close look...

THE REVIVAL of the long-dormant Policy Planning Division of India's Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) in September 2009 through the initiative of the then Minister of state for External Affairs Shashi Tharoor is a positive step for a country that wants to climb up the rungs of global status and power.

Policy planning bureaus have played a vital role in foreign ministries of great powers by providing broad direction, outlook and blueprints that percolate through the veins and arteries of the system. The famous Cold War doctrine of containment, for instance, was the brainchild of George Kennan, the first Director of Policy Planning in the US State Department. His 'X' article in the journal *Foreign Affairs* (July 1947) recorded his acute observations on the wellsprings of Soviet conduct and laid out the parameters of a global response to the USSR's "expansive tendencies." Encouraged by his mentor — the powerful Secretary of State George Marshall — Kennan and his team of researchers produced the fundamentals that became the bedrock of American foreign policy for decades to come.

India's policy planners must always bear in mind that power of any kind is relative in international relations, and accordingly come up with power-enhancement plans that factor in the prospects of other states in a dynamic environment. For instance, if India keeps growing at around 8-9 per cent for twenty years and China stays the course with double-digit growth, both states will be absolutely better off but India will be relative-

ly weaker. If India's nuclear deterrent improves through our scientific community's efforts (the latest figure is that we have the capacity to assemble a 200-kiloton nuclear device) but falls below the shifting definition of 'credibility' due to the even more rapid weapon experimentation by other powers, we will continue to be subjected to blackmail and bullying.

Decisiveness about what kind of a power China is and where it is heading has to be a key formulation for the MEA's policy planners. Just as Kennan instinctively grasped the reality of Stalin's USSR and made a value judgement that it was characteristically aggressive, India has to make up its mind about its northern neighbour one way or the other and compose a broad set of measures to manage this relationship. At present, vacilla-



tion and ambiguity about China's motives, behaviour and future trajectories predominate in Indian policy circles, leading to a confusing approach that is neither fish nor fowl.

While some degree of open-mindedness and flexibility, to some extent, are definite assets in the highly unpredictable and volatile social world, Indian foreign policy planners cannot be paralysed with a wait-and-see attitude



Winning over Africa: MEA under S M Krishna faces a formidable task; (left) former junior minister Tharoor during his Africa visit



towards a China that is undertaking a rapid revolution in military affairs and has a predatory commodity exports and foreign investment-promotion strategy.

Even the booming bilateral trade between India and China must be tempered with comparisons to China's trade equations with other countries. This will help New Delhi foresee longer-term tensions and avoid a scenario where Beijing can convert thick economic exchanges into unacceptable political domination through lobbies or infringement of India's foreign policy autonomy. How and through what means China might attempt to parlay its ballooning trade surplus with India (which stood at \$16 billion, as of 2009) into a superior-inferior power relationship must be closely monitored and countered. Comparative examples of China's relations with Taiwan, South Korea, Russia, Japan, the EU and the USA must be studied extensively by Indian planners before crafting appropriate defensive and offensive mechanisms.

Unlike the days of the 'Indira Doctrine', when domination of South Asia was a transparent and suffused aim of Indian foreign policy, we now live in an interconnected world where we must register our strong presence in far-flung parts of the world to be

recognised as a genuine, global power. Indian policy planners have to revisit lessons from the gradual displacement of New Delhi by Beijing as the pre-eminent Asian power in Africa: first by means of Mao Zedong's radical "Afro-Asianism" and later through proactive loans and natural resource-centric infrastructure building sprees.

Be it the 1960s or the 2000s, India has been passive and lacking in concrete tools for courting and winning over African nations and people. It is largely due to foreign policy neglect and underestimation of Africa's economic and human potential that New Delhi has been left with a tough mission of playing catch-up with Beijing. Given the high priority of gaining traction in Africa, the MEA's policy planners must devise quick-impact projects, funds and programmes on a war footing that would reconnect African states and societies with their Indian counterparts.

Contemporary India is not known for 'thinking big' on foreign policy thrusts despite the legacy of Nehruvian globalism. The narrow educational and experiential backgrounds of the current Indian political class and the obsessive media focus on just the country's immediate neighbours have



IN TUNE WITH NEHRUVIAN GLOBALISM: Mrs Indira Gandhi with Richard Nixon; (left) Manmohan Singh with G-8 leaders

reproduced a frog-in-the-well mentality that discourages knowledge accumulation and production beyond a certain geographical radius or comfort zone. There are, for example, countless Pakistan and Sri Lanka hands in and outside government in India but hardly anyone who has a masterly grasp of the politics and predilections of the Caribbean or Bolivarian America.

The revived Policy Planning Division should have the luxury of not being entrusted with one particular brief and instead should have the whole world as its horizon. It must acquire the acumen to interpret the direct or indirect ramifications for India of a disputed election in Ukraine, a coup in Côte d'Ivoire, or a flared up boundary dispute between Thailand and Cambodia. Inputs do come into the MEA from different embassies and consular missions around the world, but more than collating in-house diplomatic cables and emails is required to arrive at comprehensive estimates and policy adjustments that keep relating back and forth to the refrain of pre-eminent doctrinal foreign policy principles. Intellectual talents that are outside the charmed circle of power holders will have to be mined extensively for situating Indian concerns within larger contexts.

MEA's policy planners should embark on their historic mission with the basic presumption that the entire world is or soon will be India's backyard. While the primacy of some regions or issues may demand greater attention at times, Indian foreign policy must be ready with doctrines and deeds to exert influence in the remotest of corners. Since all of planet earth and outer space are India's theatres, a robust and competent foreign policy planning arm to execute this challenging role becomes a pressing imperative.

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