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A Study of foreign relations of India: Brics and India, brics in Africa

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Abstract

Since the 1990's, India's foreign policy has gone through a metamorphosis in tune with the changing global scenario. The disintegration of USSR, demise of the bipolar world and domestic economic problems prompted India to reassess its foreign policy and adjust its foreign relations of the earlier decades. Serious domestic and international problems compelled India to reorganize its foreign policy on the basis of more pragmatic considerations. In today's era of globalization, it has improved its relations with United States and other western countries, established relations with Israel and embraced multilateralism, to solve its major problems on the economic front. This is in sharp contrast to the earlier era of rigid bipolarity and East-West rivalry, which was marked by ambiguity among Indian foreign policy makers with regard to transnational cooperative arrangements.

Since the end of the Cold War and collapse of the Soviet Union, multilateralism has gained renewed salience in international relations as well as in Indian foreign policy. According to IR theory, multilateralism involves justice, obligations and a sort of international rule of law. For Keohane multilateralism is 'the practice of co-coordinating national policies in groups of three or more states, through ad hoc arrangements or by means of institutions' (1). Since 1990's, India has actively engaged itself in several multilateral forum like ASEM (Asia-Europe Meeting), BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-sect oral Technical and Economic Cooperation), G-8-05, G-20, IBSA (India, Brazil and South Africa), IOR-ARC (Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation), ACD (Asia Cooperation Dialogue), etc. India's active participation in the formation of Brazil, Russia, and India and China (BRIC) forum with these emerging powers shows its willingness for multilateral cooperative arrangements to solve shared problems and challenges of globalization.

Keywords: multilateralism, transnational cooperative arrangements

Introduction

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This article provides some initial perspectives on the evolution of multilateral forums like BRIC (Brazil, Russia, India and China) and also examines India's recent cooperation with the BRIC countries, to better understand its emergence and implications. It also examines BRIC's engagements with African countries and its implications. The India's Relations with the International Community

India's International Relations reveals a conventional nonalignment policy, which is strongly influenced by the ideology of Mohan Das Gandhi, who was the founder and father of the Indian freedom movement from the British Colonizers. Colonization influenced a major portion of Indian external and internal policies regarding relations with foreign countries as well as economic policies. Even before the freedom of India, Indian National Congress, under the

Leadership of legendary leader Gandhi, formed a small foreign department in 1925 to develop overseas relations for the publicity of the struggle for independence. In 1920 Jawaharlal Nehru originated congress's policy for international issues. In the year 1946, Nehru presented this policy in front of the whole world, as a member of the interim government.

During the year 1947-1964, with Nehru as the Prime Minister of India, all the basic policies regarding foreign relations took their shape and India emerged as a unified, integrated, secular and Democratic nation. India has a history of collaboration with several countries and among the developing countries; India is the keenest about expanding its relations with the international world. India's effort towards developing international relations had a positive effect on its position among the countries of the world and imparted today, India has the power to influence in the global affairs. India has got the privilege to be among one of the founding members of the United Nations and the non-alignment movement. In addition, India is active in various international organizations, among which the most influential and worth mentioning are WTO, ADB, SAARC and G20. India has been a keen participant in several UN peacekeeping missions.

India's foreign policy: 50 years of achievement

The foundations of India's foreign policy were laid during the freedom movement when our leaders, even when fighting for independence, were engaged with the great causes of the time. The principles of India's foreign policy, that emerged then, have stood the test of time: a belief in friendly relations all states, independence of thought and action as manifested in the principles of Non-alignment, and equity in the conduct of international relations.

Under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, India was the founder member of the Non-aligned Movement. India has played an active role in strengthening the Movement and making it an effective voice in representing the collective aspirations and interests of the developing countries on such vital issues as development, peace and stability. India hosted the 7th NAM Summit in New Delhi in 1983. In recent years, after the end of the Cold War, our foreign policy has been focused on strengthening the Movement by redefining its priorities in keeping with the changing times. India has also been in the forefront of the world community in the struggle against colonialism. Indeed, the Independence of India itself played the role of a catalyst in removing the vestiges of colonialism in other parts of the developing world, particularly in Africa. India was also the first country to raise the question of racial discrimination in South Africa in 1946. It was at India's initiative that the AFRICA (Action for Resistance to Invasion, Colonialism and Apartheid) Fund was set up at the 8th NAM Summit in Harare in 1986. India was the Chairman of the AFRICA Fund Committee, which wound up in 1993.

A notable feature of Indian foreign policy has been its strong advocacy of general and complete disarmament, with nuclear disarmament being accorded the highest priority. Towards this end, India has taken several initiatives within the United Nations and outside. In 1988, India presented to the 3rd Session of the UN General Assembly devoted to Disarmament an Action Plan for Ushering in a Nuclear Weapons Free and

Non-Violent World Order. In order to highlight international concern about the unprecedented nuclear arms race, India was also a member of the Six-Nation Five-Continent joint Initiative in the 1980s. But while India has, and will, remain committed to nuclear disarmament, to be achieved in a time-bound framework, it has consistently and in a principled manner opposed such discriminatory treaties as the Nuclear non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and Comprehensive Nuclear Test Ban Treaty (CTBT) and has refused to give up its nuclear options until all countries in the world including nuclear weapon states embrace the idea of nuclear disarmament in a phased manner.

With China the aim of Indian foreign policy has been of developing a relationship of friendship, cooperation and good neighbourliness, exploiting the potential for favourable growth wherever it exists, even as we seek to find a fair, reasonable and mutually acceptable solution to the outstanding border issue. Towards this aim, a series of high level visits have been exchanged, bilateral trade and economic cooperation is growing, and an Agreement on Confidence Building Measures, as part of a wider dialogue on security, has been signed.

India and the US: A dialogue between two great democracies

India values its bilateral relations with the US. As democracies, both countries have many shared ideals. Relations have also continued to grow with the 15 countries of the European Union, and with Japan. These countries are important economic partners of India, especially in the wake of our economic reforms. However, in pursuing bilateral relations, we have sought to preserve the independence of our viewpoint and protect our national interests from the pressures of conformity.

As many as 20 million people of Indian origin live and work abroad and constitute an important link with the mother country. An important role of India's foreign policy has been to ensure their welfare and well-being within the framework of the laws of the country where they live. The strength of any foreign policy depends also on the professional abilities of those who implement it, both at Headquarters and in the field. With a view to ensuring this, the Foreign Service Institute was established to undertake specialist training for entrants into the Indian Foreign Service, and conduct several other specialist courses for Indian and foreign diplomats.

It is difficult to enumerate the achievements of a country's foreign policy in exactly quantifiable terms. With this as a qualification, it would be a fair assessment to make that Indian foreign policy has sought to preserve, with conviction and consistency, the principles that were enunciated by the founding fathers of the Republic, both in the development of bilateral relations, and in international forums, where our views have won recognition and respect. A significant factor underlying this achievement has been the consensus, cutting across political divides, within the country, on what the basic aims and objectives of Indian foreign policy should be.

Bric

The acronym, BRIC, was coined by Jim O'Neill of Goldman

Sachs way back in 2001. He predicted that by year 2050, Brazil, Russia, India and China would become bigger than the six most industrialized nations in dollar terms and would completely change the power dynamics of the last 300 years^[2]. The first Summit of BRIC was held in Yekaterinburg, Russia in 2009, in the midst of the profound global crisis^[3]. The Summit was intended to be a space to officially announce the creation of this loose block at a time when the G8, consisting of the advanced industrialized countries, was increasingly becoming bereft of legitimacy, with the foundation of their domination trembling.

Despite a range of differences between the four countries, BRIC has outstripped most expectations in recent years, in forming a promising political grouping. On the foundation of other meetings between newly-emerging powers, most importantly the trilateral Russia-India-China (RIC) arrangement, the BRIC foreign ministers met in 2006. Co-operation among BRIC countries was preceded by two finance ministers' summits, leaders' meetings, and a stand-alone BRIC leaders' summit in June 2009, which was marked by a joint communiqué. Russia and Brazil have together been the driving forces that have transformed BRIC from an abstract financial notion into a genuine political grouping.

Although there seems to be a broad consensus within BRIC about the probable changes in power dynamics, there is much less agreement about how the process will unfold. There is speculation and debate among scholars about the possible role of BRIC's member states – whether the forum would like to challenge the existing world order or challenge the United States collectively.

In fact, the BRIC countries are deeply concerned that USA's dominant power position will allow it to behave as it pleases and damage their fundamental interests. However, there is very little evidence that any of the BRIC members would prefer a hard-line anti-USA coalition^[4]. As evident from the statements and deliberations of the BRIC Summit meetings, the purpose is not really to challenge the 'hegemony' or to emerge as the new "hegemony", at least in the immediate future, but to protect and secure safe places within the current hegemonic order, which is, however, far from absolute.

Establishing an anti-hegemonic political front is not the main focus of BRIC countries. In fact, they accept the hegemonic stability theory which states that international system is more likely to remain stable "when a single nation state is the dominant world power or hegemony". They believe that when a hegemon exercises leadership, either through diplomacy, coercion or persuasion, it is actually deploying its "preponderance of power". Thus the dilemma of the BRIC countries is that, although they are the newly emerging powers and are becoming a powerful group in international politics, they are not questioning the fundamental global order of US supremacy^[5].

Till now, co-operation and accommodation have been the strategic approach of BRIC. In the past couple of years, the member-states of BRIC have formed a more formal political pressure group from an abstract perception of Goldman Sachs, regularly convene official BRIC Summits and issuing joint communiqués. According to the Chinese Foreign Ministry official, Wu Hailing, "Four-country [BRIC] co-operation is

open and transparent co-operation, not aimed at third parties."^[6] In fact, a previous attempt by Russia to form a strategic triangle between China, Russia and India in 1998, was rejected by both India and China, both of whom agreed only to trilateral co-operation, based on the principles of "no alliance, no confrontation, and not targeted at a third country." It may be recalled that in the first Summit of BRIC countries held in Yekaterinburg in 2009, the Group directly attacked Breton Woods institutions and talked about reform of international financial institutions in the backdrop of changes in the international system. Russia had even called for developing new reserve currencies to complement the dollar, and also to explore the possibility of settling bilateral trade in local currency. However, all this did not find any reference in the final statement issued at the Summit. Instead, the cautious wording appeared to reflect China's concerns that any anti-dollar statements could erode the value of its currency reserves, given that its dollar reserves had touched \$2 trillion by the end of 2008^[7]. The BRIC countries have proposed a greater role for IMF's quasi-currency, Special Drawing Rights (SDR), as a multilateral substitute for the dollar. The joint communiqué called for the active participation of emerging market economies and developing countries in decision-making process of the financial institutions, in line with their relative weight in the world economy^[8]. These challenges have been significant, but they do not necessarily foreshadow more aggressive moves to undermine and destroy the existing international order.

The other area in which BRIC has challenged the international order has been in drawing linkages between its willingness to provide more funds to the IMF to help other countries recover from the crisis and demand that the April G-20 summit endorse changes in IMF and World Bank voting shares^[9]. According to an Indian official, BRIC countries are willing to contribute to the IMF, but they won't contribute heavily to longer-term fund resources until the world body increases their voting shares substantially. "They don't want to get locked into providing more money until they get their (shares) increased". In this case, also although it seems to be a clear example of BRIC pressuring the western powers, it is far from the frontal assault on the existing order that others worry may come soon.

While the first BRIC Summit mainly concentrated on eliminating the negative effects of the financial crisis, the second Summit, held in Brasilia, Brazil, on April 16, 2010, stressed on the issues of enhancing the role of BRIC countries in IMF World Bank, and on coordinating energy and resource policies among the members' states. The leaders of the 4 BRIC countries also discussed whether to toe the US line, although this issue is not much of a challenge to the United States^[10].

Under the circumstances, let us get an overview of India's perception of the scope and role of BRIC.

India and Bric

Recently, India's Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, was in Brazil to attend both the second Summit of BRIC and IBSA Summit, held in 2010. For India, these two groups are extremely important, considering that both aim to collectively

boost bargaining power and clout on global issues, and also strengthen economic and political ties among the member-countries on the lines of South-South co-operation. In fact, India took the initiative to call for improving the importance of BRIC and IBSA as groups ^[11]. Dr. Manmohan Singh called for closer co-operation in the fields of energy and food security, as well as tapping into the potential of other sectors such as trade and investment, science and technology, and infrastructure. He added that pooling together each other's experiences could lead to more inclusive growth. "We are four large countries with abundant resources, large populations and diverse societies. We aspire for rapid growth for ourselves and for an external environment that is conducive to our development goals" ^[12].

Co-operation on the economic front is one of the focus areas of India's policy towards BRIC. It believes that global challenges can only be addressed by co-operative effort, with the full and equal participation of major and emerging powers and economies. For India, on the one hand, cooperation with other BRIC member-states provides an excellent opportunity to share its development experiences with them as well as learn from their experiences. This is more so since they share common challenges as developing countries and global challenges often affect them in a similar way. In addition to discussions about how to respond to the financial crisis, India exchanged ideas and experiences on food security, agriculture, disease, foreign aid, energy and global warming.

Sharing these experiences not only helps the BRIC member-states themselves, it also allows them to share experiences and "best practices" with the developing world and thereby expand South-South cooperation. Moreover, India has also tried to use BRIC as a forum to engage China as the latter has become the largest market for the fast-industrializing countries of East Asia. The volume of China-India trade has soared in recent years, and is likely to reach \$60 billion by the end of 2010. ^[13]. Not only that, India also wants to resolve the age-old mistrust and complicated relationship between the two countries since the 1962 war between them. India shares land border with China, Pakistan and Bangladesh and faces many potential threats. Although Sino-Indian relations have improved in recent years, India is threatened by China's expanding presence through bases in Myanmar, Pakistan, Bangladesh and Sri Lanka, leading to a possible encirclement around the Indian subcontinent as well as potential competition in the Indian Ocean area. By improving relations with China and by co-operating in a multilateral forum like BRIC, India would like to stabilize the regional environment by neutralizing China in the simmering issues between India and Pakistan.

Conclusion

India was Russia's close ally in the Cold War years, with the latter even helping India in its war with Pakistan in 1971. India wants to strengthen its ties with Russia within the multiple co-operative networks, given that it depends on its support in its efforts to counter terrorism emanating from Pakistan. India believes that Russia being a great power can influence the conduct of Pakistan. According to India's Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh, "Russia's influence will be

utilized to convince Pakistan that the strategy of using terror as an instrument of state policy is counter-productive." (14) India seeks co-operation with Russia to devise effective counter-terror strategies by co-coordinating intelligence and information gathering systems between the two countries. On the other hand, there are immense opportunities to expand trade, investment and technology flow between the two countries. Co-operation in the fields of energy, nuclear energy program and defence are the other important aspects of co-operation between the two countries, besides shared views on issues like economic slowdown, climate change and global governance.

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