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Present day Challenges to India's Foreign Policy

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1. Introduction

India's Foreign Policy has evolved over time to assume its character and present form. It has been molded and shaped by domestic compulsions and international events aligning them with its national interests. The Primary task of India's foreign policy has been to ensure that the international setting and power relations provide scope and conduciveness to India's development needs and transformation. India has spearheaded various movements that have had a global response and backing such as demand for UN Security Council reforms, more bargaining rights to developing countries in international summits such as Trade Summits (Doha, Bali), Environment summits (UNFCC, Paris Summit), articulating the need for disarmament and peaceful coexistence and many more. India has modified its foreign policy according to the necessity of time and has been able to deploy tactful diplomacy as per the changing challenges of the time. In the present day scenario the challenges are intriguing, varied and complex. The world as we see today is regarded as a "Globalized" village. This has made things more complex due to the fact that the interdependence of the time has led to a situation where neither dedicated engagement nor complete isolation is ideal. There are three broad challenges to India's foreign policy in the present day context which can be classified as follows:-

- Neighborhood Stability and Peace
- Balancing relations with USA, Russia and China
- Role in a Multipolar world

2. Neighborhood Stability and Peace:

It is pertinent to India's foreign policy that the neighborhood should be stable and peaceful. The shift in importance towards neighborhood is seen from India's Prime Minister Narendra Modi's diplomatic approach for a "Neighborhood first" policy. Neighborhood has therefore received top most priority by the present government one reason being to arrest and contain the growing influence of China in the South Asian region. China has flexed its influence in the South Asian region most prominently seen in the case of Pakistan. It has launched its 40billion$ economic project (China Pakistan Economic Corridor) as part of its Belt and Road initiative despite India's objections to it citing violation of sovereignty as the project passes through a disputed territory. Neighborhood stability is important also from the view that a violent occurrence in the neighborhood countries will have effect on the Border States who share a close and porous border with such neighbor countries. For example:

- During the 1971 Bangladesh liberation war the spillover to India had its effect in the form of influx of refugees; this has translated into ethnic conflict and violence in states of the North east.
- During the recent Rohingya refugee crisis in Myanmar, the mass fleeing of Rohingya Muslims into Bangladesh posed a major challenge in the event of influx into India due to India's Burgeoning population, and the stress on its natural resources.
- The 2018 political crisis in Maldives caused great concern to India. A State of Emergency was declared by Maldivian President Abdullah Yameen which witnessed the incarceration of two Supreme Court Judges after the Security forces stormed into the Supreme Court. It also saw the Parliament in Male being sealed and two members of Opposition being arrested. Yameen's Close proximity to China and anti-India rhetoric frustrated the Neighborhood Outreach of the Modi government. In September 2018 elections Ibrahim Mohammad Solih was elected as the new Maldives President. He has since reaffirmed close ties with India as well as his government's "India First Policy". This also saw India's reciprocation by its granting of aid to the tune of $1.4 billion dollars.
- In the case of Pakistan the issues have been regarding Kashmir and Cross border Terrorism. Indo- Pak relations is at an all-time low. Radicalization of Kashmiri youths, Terrorist attacks on armed personnel and civilian, Anti India rhetoric across the border threaten the stability of the Kashmir valley. The recent terrorist attacks include the Indian Air Force Base(Pathankot) in January 2016, the attack on the Uri Army Base Camp in September 2016 and the recent February 2019 Suicide bombing in Pulwama that killed 40 Indian security personnel. Besides terrorist there is also the controversial China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) that India has objected to citing sovereignty violation as it passes through the disputed Gilgit- Baltistan territory. Furthermore China has continuously been frustrating India's firm insistence on designating Jaish e Mohammad Chief Masood Azhar as an international terrorist under the UNSC sanctions by Vetoing any such resolution passed. It remains to be seen how things progress as it is in the interest of both India and Pakistan that the neighborhood should be stable.
- With regard to Nepal India has often been accused for meddling in the internal affairs of the small nation. In 2015 an economic blockade on essential supplies was imposed on Nepal following disagreements over its Constitution. China has been able to stretch its influence into Nepal following the uneasy relations between India and Nepal during the 2015-16 period of time. China has elevated its relationship with Katmandu to Strategic Partnership on Equal Terms and Nepal has signed on to China's belt and road initiative. India has since followed a more progressive and forward policy of ensuring its Himalayan neighbor of support, friendship and outreach. It has offered Nepal to join the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India Nepal (BBIN) Motor Vehicle Agreement, Building a rail connectivity between Katmandu and Raxaul in India, establish Inland Water Connectivity for movement of people and laying a Petroleum products Pipeline from Motihari in India to Amlekhgunj in Nepal.

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- A significant withdrawal of American troops from Afghanistan brings with it apprehensions of instability and tension in the South Asian region. The decision of US President Donald Trump to withdraw troops from Afghanistan and Syria is likely to have far reaching consequences spurring the Taliban's influence and impacting the security situation in the Kashmir valley. Pakistan has been criticized for its ineffective role in stopping cross border terrorism as well as harboring safe havens for the Taliban. This has brought India to assume an important role with regard in Afghanistan. A stable and peaceful Afghanistan is in the interest of India. India has been working in close coordination with the Afghan government of Ashraf Ghani and has opposed any outside interference in talks with the Taliban, asserting time again that "the peace process must be Afghan- led, Afghan owned and Afghan- controlled''. An Afghanistan influenced by Pakistan is detrimental to India's strategic interests in the region as well as a threat its ''Energy interests'' in the vast Central Asia markets.

3. Balancing relations with USA, Russia and China

a) India- US relations: India's relationship with the United States of America goes to the period after India gained Independence. The Cold war period saw a frosty ''Love-Hate "relationship between the two countries which denied cooperation in bilateral relations. However today the relationship between the two has been transformed into a friendly and cordial one. Bilateral relations between the two are seen elevated on all fronts characterized by unprecedented levels of cooperation in economic, strategic and diplomatic fields. There have been frequent US Presidential visits to India as well as Indian Prime Ministerial visits to the US. Recent developments such as India being declared ''Major defense partner", holding of 2+2 dialogue, Proactive engagement in Military exercises with the US such as Malabar exercise, Yudh Abhyas, Red Flag, renaming of the Asia – Pacific region as Indo Pacific region and the call for India's forward engagement in Afghanistan are a few such examples of how Indo- US relations has progressed and developed. However there are certain challenges that India faces that need to be highlighted:

- **The Iran Issue**: Iran is crucial to India's interests be it economic, strategic or political. Iran serves as India's third largest supplier of Oil and is important to India's energy needs. India has been able to sustain cordial and close relations with Iran. The issue gets complicated due to the fact that recently America has withdrawn from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action(popularly known as Iran Nuclear deal or JCOP) signed between Iran and the P5+1(five permanent members of the United Nations Security Council- China, France, Russia, United States of America, United Kingdom plus Germany)and the European Union. It has recently imposed sanctions on Iran that it had relaxed after the 2015 JCOP agreement. These sanctions threaten to disrupt India's progressive bilateral developments with Iran such as the Chahbahar Port development, Farzad B gas field project, Iran oil imports etc. India has been able to receive a waiver from the US sanctions but it remains to be seen for how long. The US sanctions on Iran would lead to costlier oil prices widening the Indian Current Account Deficit hampering the Indian economy. It is one of the biggest challenges in present day India- US relations.
- **India –US trade relations:** The Presidential victory of Donald Trump has brought in a new era of Challenges and problems to India's trade relations with the US. The US inward looking Policy characterized by increased protectionism is something that is likely to impact India's interest in the long run. The tension areas include disagreements at World Trade Organization level on issues such as India's food grain procurement at cheap prices, local content in solar panels to India's grievances towards the US tightening H1-B Visa rules and hiking the Aluminum and Steel tariffs. India has announced retaliatory tariffs on 29 US products worth $235 million. In a recent development the US has decided to end the Preferential Trade Treatment for India that allows duty free entry of goods for up to $5.6 billion in exports. India has greatly benefitted from trade treaty since the 1970s and ending it would signify one of the strongest punitive action by the US against India since Donald trump became President.
- **CAATSA Sanctions and India:** Countering American Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) was enacted on August 2, 2017 by the US with an aim to punish Russia by sanctioning persons who are engaged with the Russian defense sector in business transactions. India has been procuring defense equipment from Russia from past many decades. These have include fighter aircrafts, Multi role helicopters, Missiles, Submarine as well defense technological knowledge and expertise. Russia is crucial to India's defense and Strategic needs and CAATSA brings in a new challenge to the present day scenario where India is planning major defense deals with Russia such as purchasing the S-400 triumph missile system, agreement to jointly manufacture Kamov 226T helicopters, 3 billion dollar deal on Russia leasing a nuclear power attack submarine to the Indian navy – The Akula class submarine also known as Chakra 3, etc. India will need to use its diplomatic prowess in getting a waiver from the US as these defense equipments serves the purpose of deterrence from state as well as non-state actors that threaten to destabilize the Indian subcontinent.

b) India- Russia relations: India's foreign relations with Russia dates back to the 1950s when both the countries found a common ground in challenging and opposing the American power under bipolarity right to 1980s. In the aftermath of the disintegration and collapse of the Soviet Union India found it cut adrift from Russia during the period of its economic crisis. Since then we have seen an improvement in the economic relationship between the two especially during the last two years. The relationship today is hinged on military technical cooperation where Russia is a major supplier of India's imported military equipment accounting for 60% of such imports. There are certain challenges in Indo- Russia relations that need to be highlighted. These include:

- **Evolving Geo-political realities**: For India its growing concern is Russia's increasing tilt towards Pakistan and

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Close ties with China. Today we see a change in Russia's regional priorities in South Asia. During the Six nation Speakers' conference held in Islamabad in December 2017, a joint declaration was issued and signed by Afghanistan, China, Iran, Pakistan, Turkey and Russia upheld the Pakistani line on Kashmir- that Kashmir is a bilateral issue between India and Pakistan and that it needs to be resolved under the United Nations Security Council resolutions. Russia views Pakistan as an important ally in the peaceful settlement in Afghanistan. In August 2018 Russia and Pakistan concluded an agreement for naval cooperation. This along with an accord signed in April 2018 to increase cooperation in the training of armed personnel forces in the naval field and conduct of joint military exercises has raised eyebrows in India at the alarming rate in which India's traditional partner has closely become proximate to Pakistan. This convergence of interest can be seen due US curtailing military aid to Pakistan and Russia's interest to find buyers for its military arms and equipment in the face of growing US sanctions such as CAATSA and India upgrading its ties with the US. Russia's growing closeness with China and its contentious relationship with the US is another area of concern for India. Russia has an opposite stand to the US in various regions in the world be it Afghanistan, Iran, Israel, Syria and Ukraine. This tension catches India as it is caught in the middle of a growing strategic partnership with the US and dependent on Russia for its defense technological needs. Russia and China relations have become stronger owing to the fact that the Russian economy being weak is over dependent on China for economic cooperation. This has got transformed to political and strategic domain making it a growing concern for India. The large Chinese market serves as a gateway to the Russian energy and military exports. Russia and China have been close cooperating to counter the US influence in the Asia- Pacific as well as in the West Asian region.

- **Growing India- US ties**: The India – US relations has witnessed progressive advance in key areas of strategic partnership such as Defense, Security, Energy, Technology and People to People contact. There has been a significant development over the past few years such as the US renaming the Asia pacific command as Indo Pacific command signifying an important role that India plays in the region. Furthermore India and US have conducted regular 2+2 dialogue involving the defense and external affairs counterparts. This has translated into the US designating India as a Major defense Partner. In the recent event of things India has signed two ''foundational agreements'' with the US on defense namely the : a) Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Understanding (LEMOA) and b) Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA). LEMOA gives access to both countries to designated military facilities for refueling and replenishment purposes. COMCASA on the other hand enables inter-operability between the two militaries by allowing shared secure communications and real time intelligence. India's has secured the US recognition and support for membership to the Nuclear Suppliers Group, Designation of JeM chief as an international terrorist under UNSC 1267 resolutions etc. However it is important to take into account the Russian factor in the evolving Indo US relations. Russia has increased its foreign policy proximity with China due to its economic compulsions and otherwise. It has also started the sale of arms to Pakistan and conducted military exercises with it. The frosty relations between the US and Russia cannot be overlooked in the present day context of India's foreign policy. The CAATSA legislation has a direct impact on India –Russia military deals. Russia has been India's time tested friend and ally. It would be in India and Russia's interest to break the current stagnation in ties. India must resist the US pressure and safeguard its strategic interests while Russia should reciprocate by not emboldening Pakistan's non pragmatic military ambitions.

c) India –China relations: India and China's relations have been shaped by the developments of the time. The 21st century particularly has seen major events unfolding such as border skirmishes, territorial claims particularly in the case of Arunachal Pradesh by China, China's growing influence and prowess in the South Asian region a phrase termed as " string of pearls'' as well bilateral cooperation and agreements at various levels both regional and international. There are many challenges to India's foreign policy with regard to China be it in the Economic, Geo political, Military etc. The Border issue with China continues to be a challenge to Indian foreign policy. Since the 1950s China has occupied the Aksai chin and it is considered a disputed territory. Furthermore a part of Pakistan occupied Kashmir had been gifted to China which India still claims strongly to be part of its territory. Recent border skirmishes include the Depsang plains transgression by China in 2013, the Doklam standoff which went on for two months in 2017, China's opposition to Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Arunachal Pradesh 2019 (which is a State under the Indian Union) etc. One hurdle to tackling the border issue is the improper demarcation of the Line of Actual Control between India and China making the territory demarcation a complex issue. However along with these problems there have been efforts on both sides to promote peace and stability along the Border States. Confidence Building Measures have been taking place along with Joint military exercises and drill.

Another major challenge is the issue of China's close relations with Pakistan. This grows into a major concern for India due to the fact that China and Pakistan have a convergence in interests threatening the stability of the Indian subcontinent. China's Belt and Road initiative (BRI) has transformed into a $ 40 billion project called the China Pakistan Economic Corridor. India has strongly opposed this project and the BRI citing territorial integrity and sovereignty issue due to the fact that this project passes by the disputed GilgitBaltistan region that India claims to be part of its territory. Also China has been thwarting India's efforts in designation of JeM chief Masood Azhar as an international terrorist by the UNSC. China has on numerous occasions used its Veto power when such proposals have been raised. This has time again frustrated India as it dents such effort to curb cross border terrorism and insurgency in the Kashmir Valley.

China's growing influence in the South Asian region is another area of concern for India. China has flexed its diplomatic prowess and influence into countries such as Sri

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Lanka, Bangladesh, Maldives Myanmar, Pakistan and Afghanistan. It has launched massive investment projects, provided a market for export to these countries, loans and advances, military arms and equipment. Slowly but gradually it has made inroads by setting up strategic points by investing in Gwadar Port in Pakistan, Hambantota port in Sri Lanka, developing ater multibillion dollar port in Myanmar 's Kyaukpu town, financing the container facility in Chittagong (Bangladesh) and many such initiatives. Popularly termed as "string of pearls" policy, India needs to follow up to ensure that its strategic interests are not threatened and influence in the south Asian region is not receding.

India's growing trade deficit with China has increased to 58 $ billion over the years. There has been the problem of barriers for greater access of Indian exports to China particularly in the Pharmaceutical, IT, Services, Agricultural products such as sugar, rice, fruits, vegetables etc. Added to this is the Anti-Dumping duties imposed by both these countries on each other's products of export. India needs to addressing this widening trade deficit as it will continue to grow owing to the stated facts that the India China trade is projected to cross the USD 100 Billion in 2019.

Despite the Challenges India and China have been able to find common ground on many areas. India and China recently held their first informal summit- Wuhan Summit, exchanging views on issues of bilateral and global importance and their respective visions and priorities for national development in the context of current and future international situation. Frequent bilateral visits by respective head of governments, Cooperative dialogue and agreements in BRICS, SCO etc as well as role in setting up alternative financial institutions such as New Development Bank, Asian Infrastructure and Investment Bank have provided grounds for better relations. Though contentious issues still prevail there is room and scope for further strengthening of relations and ties.

4. Role in a Multi-polar world

The end of the Cold war brought with it the end of a bipolar international arena dominated by the US and the USSR. It paved the way for an American dominated unipolar world. However with the passage of time many events have taken place such as the Asian crisis of 1990s, the 9/11 attacks, the subprime crisis of 2008 leading to a slowdown of the American economy and impacting the economic political set up. This has led to a rise of multiple power states that are influencing and dominating the economic and political international paradigm. What we call today as multipolar world can attributed to a rise of regional powers such as India, China, Japan, Brazil etc that are shaping the world today. India is regarded by the World Bank as the fastest growing economy in 2018. India has progressed forward since the post LPG reforms, growing in military capability and might, playing a proactive role in South Asian region as well as in the Indian Ocean region, advocating for more bargaining power to the developing countries, concluding many economic, political and strategic partnership agreements with many countries around the globe and earning the recognition as a major power in the present context.

a) Role as a regional power: India has always advocated for a peaceful and stable South Asia region. It has played its part well in negotiating agreements and cooperation with its neighbors. For e.g. In Afghanistan, India is regarded as indispensable to the Afghan peace process. It has contributed by building the Afghanistan Parliament at a cost of USD 90 million, building a 290 million Salma dam in Herat province, building the Zaranj- Delaram highway, Involving Afghanistan in the TAPI gas line project, training the Afghan police in India etc. Similarly it has been involved in constructive projects in countries like Bhutan, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, Myanmar. The Challenge springs up when the China factor is added into the picture. China has been flexing its diplomatic influence in the region concluding various multibillion dollar projects such as the CPEC with Pakistan, getting Nepal to join its BRI project, Port development projects in Sri Lanka, Myanmar etc. India has refused to join the BRI project. Moreover another challenge is reviving the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) summit which has not been effective owing to differences and a frosty relationship between India and Pakistan. SAARC will help find a common ground for mutual interests and benefit.

India has been proactively engaged in BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi sectoral and Economic Cooperation) summit and negotiations. BIMSTEC includes countries of South Asia and South East Asia with the exception of Pakistan. India has modified its earlier policy of ''Look East'' to ''Act East''. We are today seeing a significant shift in India's foreign policy with regard to South East Asia. India today conducts military drills and exercises with major South East Asian countries, it has increased its investment in these countries as well as adopted a more liberalized approach, and Trade has also seen an increase over the years. India also takes part in the East Asian Summit and is a member of the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) a proposed Free Trade Agreement between ASEAN countries and 6 Asia pacific states. India is strongly supportive of the decision of the UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on Law of the Sea) with regard to South China Sea. The South China Sea is viewed by India as vital for is strategic interests. The Challenge comes from China's assertive and aggressive stance claiming the South China Sea as part of its territory. The Strait of Malacca is one of the most important shipping waterways in the world both from an economic and strategic perspective.

b) Role in the International Arena: India is a major role in the international setting. Today India is looked upon as a key player whose influence and bargaining power cannot be ignored. One of India's guiding foreign policy is its role as a representative of the developing countries. As the world's largest democracy India has been advocating for more benefits and bargaining power to the developing countries. In this way it has promoted a policy of South – South cooperation, it has demanded for more transparency and representation for the developing nations in international bodies such as the International Monetary Fund, World

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Bank, World Trade Organization (WTO). At the WTO India has argued for the continuation of the Special Safeguard Mechanism that benefits the developing countries. India shares the concerns of the developing countries. At the Climate Change summits India has been pressing upon the major developed countries to provide financial aid, technology and expertise to enable them to tackle the challenges of climate change and global warming. Such demands were advocated at summits such as Kyoto summit, Copenhagen summit, Paris summit and the recent Katowice summit 2018. India has been voicing the concerns and fighting for the rights of the least developed countries and the more vulnerable small island nations in the climate change summits.

However the Challenges are plentiful. The economic slowdown in major countries, the US withdrawal from the Paris summit and Trans Pacific partnership, the growing protectionist policy being advocated in the major economies of the world, limited role that Non Alignment Movement (NAM) is playing in the present day context and the global problems that the world as a unit is facing – Terrorism, Climate Change, Recession and Bankruptcy, Cyber Attacks etc are such challenges.

India as a major power has gathered support for its strong demand for introduction of reforms to the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). At the same time it has increased its support base for becoming permanent member of the UNSC. However it remains to be seen how this would be actualized owing to the stiff resistance from China. India is now part of the major export control regimes – the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), the Wassenaar Arrangement and the Australia group. These have strengthened India's credentials as a responsible nuclear power. India was able to receive a waiver from the Nuclear Suppliers Group in 2008 as a result of which it could conclude the Indo- US civil nuclear agreement. The US has designated the Asia pacific region as Indo Pacific clearly indicating the importance of India in the region. As of April 2019 the Prime Minister of India Narendra Modi has made 41 foreign trips visiting 59 countries on 6 continents. This indicates the proactive role that India is playing is reaching out to the world. India has been actively participating in multilateral summits such as Shanghai Cooperation Organization, BRICS, BIMSTEC, G20, ASEAN regional forum etc. It has strengthened its relations with major powers such as US, Russia, China, Japan, Israel, EU. The challenges include the growing rift between the US and Russia, the trade wars between US and China, the threat of civil wars to Indian diasporas in the western countries at the same time tackling domestic challenges such as rupee depreciation, growing trade deficit with China and demands of a growing population at home.

5. Conclusion

India's foreign policy being a dynamic one has undergone a transformation over the years in keeping up with new responsibilities of being seen and recognized as an emerging power in the world. The End of the Cold War, beginning of the LPG reforms and the impact of Globalization has shaped and modified India's foreign policy into what it is in the present day context. The world today sees India as an economic powerhouse and militarily strong nation. India has been able to balance its strategic interests and wield influence in countries where it otherwise did not have a traditional footprint on. Today we see India's proactive engagement with countries of Africa, Asia, Europe and America. The challenges are plentiful no doubt and only time will tell how they shape up in the future. India has been pursuing its foreign policy as per the requirements of its national and strategic interests and this dynamism will continue to be seen in the years to come.

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