

## Indian foreign policy towards Pakistan during Janata party regime: Continuity and change

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### Abstract

Every sovereign state has its foreign policy. It refers to the sum total of principles, interests and objectives which a country promotes while interacting with other countries. The thrust of foreign policy changes according to the changing international circumstances. India's foreign policy is shaped by several factors including its history, geography, culture and economy. In the present study an attempt has been made to examine the pattern and style of management of external relations of India towards Pakistan under the regime of the Janata Party. It is focused on the objectives underlying the foreign policy of the Janata Party and the strategies and resources adopted to actualize the foreign policy goals. As regards the policy towards neighbouring countries and especially towards Pakistan, attempts were made continuously to develop friendly relations. There were certain issues on which the Janata Party Government laid particular emphasis viz. genuine non-alignment, good-neighbourliness, nuclear policy and human rights which reflects a difference of approach with the previous congress government. Foreign minister Vajpayee's style of handling the major bilateral problems with neighbours had also convinced them of India's sincerity in resolving mutual problems. It was the beginning of a new climate to develop mutual harmonious and beneficial neighbourly relations. This study analyses the reasons why a particular line of policy was followed and how far it succeeded in preserving and advancing national interest.

**Keywords:** Foreign Policy, National Interest, India-Pakistan, Janata Party, Non-alignment

### Introduction

Foreign Policy has been characterised as a tapestry of infinite complexities having unprecedented proportion. Horizontal and Vertical extension of international relations, epochmaking transformations in the field of Science and Technology, more sophisticated tools and techniques of influence building, multiple and complex linkages between domestic and foreign policies are some of the most notable contributory factors to this situation.

Roots of India's foreign policy can be traced since the existence of Indian National Congress in 1885 and Pt. J. L. Nehru has been the major voice of India in foreign affairs. There seems much continuity in foreign policies till 1977 and even after that also. The main objectives of Indian foreign policy since independence has been the national interest which includes within itself security and national development.

In India's security consideration, the frontier with Pakistan occupies an important place. On the extreme west of the northern frontier of the Indo-Pak subcontinent is the Pakistan occupied area of Kashmir. As regards the problem of development of the country, India adopted strategies of planned development wherein its external projection depended heavily on foreign aid and trade. The principle of non-alignment which is the soul and substance of our entire foreign policy is a strategy to attain these goals. India has not only professed it but practised it.

In fact till 1962, foreign policy remained Nehru's monopoly. The fundamental principles of India's foreign policy has been by and large constant throughout the whole Congress period upto 1976. As regards the policy towards neighbouring countries and especially towards Pakistan, though there seems some changes from time to time, attempts were made continuously to develop friendly relations with them. Nehru-Liaquat Pact (in Nehru period), Ayub-Shastri Tashkent

agreement (in Shastri period) and Simla agreement (in Mrs. Gandhi period) testified it.

### Emergence of the Janata Party

It becomes clear that before 1977, there appears a continuity in foreign policy not only because the same party had ruled the country but also because fundamentally our understanding of the world affairs and our role in it had not altered inspite of the some changes of regimes and policies occurring everywhere else. To understand the foreign policy of India during the Janata Party regime in general and with special reference to its relations with Pakistan, it is necessary first to look at those circumstances in which Janata party came to power.

After the war of 1971 with Pakistan, Mrs. Gandhi was on her way of unequalled glory and was adored and applauded all round. But somehow, the years between 1972-1975 proved to be most troublesome, unhappy and frustrating for her and the country. The party was finding it difficult to manage economic crises and threats of political instability even though it secured overwhelming support from the electorate in the February 1971 Lok Sabha elections.

In July 1974, Jaya Prakash Narayana launched the student's movement in Bihar against rising prices and corruption in general which was also inspired by a wide spread student revolt in Gujarat in early 1974 which culminated in the resignation of the chief minister and imposition of President's rule in Gujarat. In other non-congress state governments, the situation was not good.

Meanwhile, the two unexpected incidents: Allahabad High Court's judgement and the subsequent imposition of emergency, occurred to strengthen the anti-congress movement. Mrs. Gandhi's Government clamped emergency to meet the internal threats to the security of the nation. All prominent leaders who had been the party to this threat were

rounded up and put behind the bars in the night of 25 June 1975.

On the morning of 26 June 1975, censorship was imposed on the press. In August 1975, an important thirty-ninth Constitution Amendment bill was introduced in which the powers of the judiciary relating to the elections of President, Vice-President, Prime Minister and the Lok Sabha speaker were curtailed. The amendment facilitated the Supreme Court judgement on November 7, 1975 in favour of Prime Minister Mrs. Indira Gandhi. In such a situation, after releasing from detention on health grounds in May 1976 Sri Jaya Prakash Narayan announced that Congress (o), Bhartiya Lok Dal, Jana Sangh and the socialist party had decided to form one party which was later known as the Janata Party under the chairmanship of Morarji Desai. In March 1977, the defeat of the congress party following the victory of the Janata Party marked a political watershed in the history of post-independence India.

The various constituents of the Janata Party had a distinctive approach on India's foreign policy before their merger. Yet, these parties had broadly supported the strategy of non-alignment which has always had a consensual basis in domestic politics.

The Lok Sabha elections of 1977 were mainly contested on domestic issues and foreign policy was not a matter of any serious debate. Regarding the foreign policy, Vajpayee promised to make the foreign policy of non-alignment as a 'genuine one', 'free from attachment to any power bloc' and to reflect the nation's enlightened interest and its aspirations and priorities at home by emphasising good neighbourly policy with the countries of South Asia.

#### **Difference of approach with the previous congress government**

There were certain issues on which the new government laid particular emphasis which also appeared a difference of approach with the Congress government. These issues were.

- Genuine Non-alignment
- Good Neighbourliness
- Nuclear Policy
- Human Rights

#### **Genuine Non-alignment**

Since the Janata Party assumed office in March 1977, it pledged itself to a foreign policy based on national consensus within the parameters of 'Genuine non-alignment' with no special stress to be given to one country over other. It was declared that change in the government did not entail any change in India's Foreign Policy.

The centre point of the Janata Party's commitment to genuine non-alignment was the restoration of India's unfettered freedom to judge world issues on merits. To prove the word genuine non-alignment, Janata Party tried to restore the balance. Janata Party spokesman said that the previous government had tilted too much towards the socialist bloc and was too much dependent on the Soviet Union. India's reputation as a non-aligned country was clouded by the conclusion of Indo-Soviet Treaty of August 1971. Therefore, to remove this impression, Vajpayee had reiterated non-alignment as a means for friendship with all.

However, in practice the new government had reinforced friendly relations with the Soviet Union in many ways

including exchange of visits at high level. Alongwith the Soviet Union, India continued to maintain relations with the United States without any anticipated tilt in its favour. India has continued to maintain close and cordial relations with it as before and firmly dealt with that country on the basis of equality and mutual benefit in respect of the supply of nuclear fuel which the U.S. was contractually bound to supply to India. Janata Government has not scrapped or even modified the Indo-Soviet Treaty.

Thus, at the end of 1977 strains and irritants, between India and U.S. were at their minimum which earlier caused tiffs and frictions between the two. President Carter arrived India on 1 January 1978 and hoped for an increasing "support and understanding" between the two governments and the people.

To sum up, Janata Party followed a new style of diplomacy with the super-powers. It proceeded to end India's special relations with Soviet Union and at the same time to strengthen friendly co-operation with the U.S. also.

#### **Good-neighbourliness**

India's relations with its neighbours since independence have been unduly influenced by what one may call India's sub-continental obsession, especially with China and Pakistan. Its attention and major resources have been directed to meet the tensions and challenges emanating from these two neighbours and to strengthen friendly relations with them. Janata Party also tried to develop friendly relations with near neighbours on the basis of beneficial bilateralism.

In practice, this policy of closer interaction and co-operation with immediate neighbours started manifesting itself at the very beginning of the Janata Party rule. It was exemplified not only by the numerous visits of Vajpayee to the neighbouring countries but also by the concessions made by the Janata Party Government to the neighbours. King Birendra's visit to India and a separate trade and transit treaty with Nepal testified this fact. It also offered Nepal substantial assistance for the development of its water resources.

In the same spirit, an agreement was signed with Sri Lanka. An adjustment was arrived at the island of Kachhativu which gave ownership of the disputed barren island in the Palk Strait to Sri Lanka but retained privileges for Indians who visit the shrine of St. Thomas during the festival.

Although it was conceded that relations with the neighbours during the Janata party regime were in much better shape, there was an undercurrent of concern at the tendency of the Janata Government to go on making concessions to the neighbours without any reciprocal gesture. The good neighbourly policy of the Janata government marked a departure from the earlier government's policy in the sense that our dealings with such small neighbours as Nepal and Bangladesh were to some extent marred by a touch of imperiousness. Thus, during the Janata party regime, India's relations with the neighbours were towards minimising the tension than ever since independence and to cultivate bilateral relations.

#### **Nuclear Policy**

As regards nuclear policy is concerned India has remained firm on the policy of not to manufacture nuclear weapons but has been engaged in search for the maximum uses of nuclear energy which is apparent from the peaceful nuclear explosion at Pokhran (Rajasthan) in 1974. Since then the United States

and U.S.S.R. have been pressing India to sign the NPT. The first statement of Desai on Nuclear Policy on 24 March 1977 was somewhat vague when he said that 'if it was not necessary to have nuclear explosions for peaceful purposes, then it should never be done.' Again on 15 May 1977, he said that if a peaceful nuclear explosion was necessary India will do it but we will not do it in hide and seek manner. Here seems a subtle change in the nuclear policy of Janata party regime and the policy was not clear about the utility of further peaceful nuclear explosions. At the same time, he reiterated India's resolve not to sign the NPT on account of its discriminatory character.

### Human Rights

Janata Party has also given much emphasis on upholding human rights. The absence of political rights breeds autocracy whereas the denial of economic rights leads to exploitation. Both lead the impoverishment of the human personality and impede the creation a just society. Human rights can flourish best in times of peace and such rights become the first casualty of conflict.

However, in several ways, India's foreign policy under the Janata party Government has been marked by success as, for example in relaxing tensions in the Indian sub-continent, in opening up a new dialogue with China, and in forging stronger links with the common wealth, India's relations with the two super-powers - the United States and Soviet Union have been marked by formal or routine cordiality. But both of them were not quite happy on account of India's refusal to sign the NPT. The government had done well to reiterate national policy with clarity and a measure of tactical flexibility.

In March 1977, the Janata party Government had inherited from the Congress regime some strains in relations with the neighbours especially with China, Pakistan and Bangladesh. It was partly due to several allied factors relating to the interpretation of India's national interests by the Congress governments headed by Nehru, Shastri and Indira Gandhi in succession. It was, therefore, endeavour of the new government to bring about some change to this situation. The main concern was how to harness solutions to the problems with the neighbours and insulate the subcontinent from future conflicts.

Janata Party had also declared the objectives of foreign policy as to create an atmosphere of peace and trust. The primary objective of Janata Government's foreign policy has been to establish what may be called credibility in the essential continuity in India's foreign policy irrespective of the change of government. As it has already been stated that the March 1977 elections were fought almost exclusively on domestic issues and foreign policy matters during the campaign receded into background. Foreign Minister Vajpayee maintained that there would be a continuity in regard to foreign policy.

The policy of good neighbourliness has been a constant factor of India's foreign policy but the Janata Government had given much emphasis to this policy. In practice, the policy of closer interaction and co-operation with immediate neighbours had exemplified from the very beginning of the Janata Party rule in the form of the visits of Prime Minister Desai and Foreign Affairs Minister Vajpayee to neighbouring countries viz. Nepal, Afghanistan, Bhutan and Pakistan.

Vajpayee and his colleagues in the South Block were convinced that unless India improve her image in the

immediate neighbourhood, it's policies towards major powers and the third world would not yield good results. Therefore, Janata Party Government after assuming office tried to remove fear and misunderstanding which had developed during the Congress rule. India tended to see South Asia in pursuit of their 'global illusions' during Congress Party regime.

In contrast to the Congress Policy of confrontation, Janata leadership had contributed in modifying the policy towards co-operation and in looking at the neighbours afresh. The Janata Party regime took a number of measures to present India's dominant power profile rather in a low key and reassure the smaller neighbours that India was willing to accept them as they were rather than measure their credibility and friendship- worthiness in the scale of its own ideological preferences and power calculus.

The coming of the Janata Party in power was a watershed in the domestic politics of India as well as it had profound impact in the political circle of Pakistan. When the Janata Party assumed office in March 1977, there was widespread feeling in Pakistan that India's foreign policy might undergo some changes and would follow a foreign policy based on aggressive national chauvinism since some constituents of the party in power, representing extreme nationalism were previously critical of at least some of the aspects of foreign policy since the days of Nehru.

But the various statements of Vajpayee and Desai on good neighbourly policy and on continuity in foreign policy lessened the fear of Pakistani rulers and the people. Statements gave the impression that the country's foreign policy would not be changed as the foreign policy of India is based on certain fundamental principles and national interests which could not be subjected to radical changes just because of a change of the ruling party in New Delhi. These were also meant to satisfy Pakistan about the good intentions and a strong desire of India to improve relations with Pakistan. The Janata government adopted the bilateral approach for the resolution of political problems through diplomatic visits and the policy of non-interference in the internal affairs of Pakistan.

When General Zia-ul-Haq staged a coup on 5 July 1977 by overthrowing Bhutto's regime with the avowed objective of ending political instability and the threat to the country's survival, the Government of India took it as an internal affair of Pakistan and avoided issuing any critical statement on the trial and execution of Z.A. Bhutto despite strong domestic pressures.

From one standpoint, this policy was a continuation of the predecessor government's policy of normalising relations with Pakistan following the Simla Agreement of 1972. The Indira Gandhi regime had also reconciled itself to the military regimes in Pakistan and Bangladesh. From another point, however, there was a component of change. The Nehru government had appeared to nurse the notion that it was more advantageous for India to deal with Civilian rulers in Pakistan than with the military Junta. The example of this notion is Nehru's outburst against the military takeover in Pakistan in 1958. However, the Janata party government though had declared commitment to support the forces of democracy and human rights accommodated itself happily with the military regime in Pakistan instead of criticising or disapproving the military takeover in Pakistan. This, perhaps, facilitated the conclusion of the Salal Pact in a few months after Zia-ul-Haq

became Pakistan's President. The new military regime in Pakistan had also conveyed to India that it would continue to honour the agreements reached with India by the Bhutto government.

Adhering to the policy, it made consistent efforts to establish a meaningful relationship with Pakistan. Vajpayee, as Foreign Affairs Minister paid three days goodwill visit to Pakistan from February 6 to 8, 1978. The visit was significant in the sense that he was the first Foreign Minister of India visiting Pakistan after a lapse of ten years. It was historic in the sense that an Indian leader with R.S.S. (Rashtriya Swam Sevak Sangh), Jana Sangh background, speaking to Pakistani leaders with mutual goodwill and confidence.

Vajpayee's visit resulted in several concrete advances in Indo-Pakistan relations such as the decision to station Indian and Pakistani Journalists in each other's country and the agreement to exchange teams of officials for trade negotiations and to study each other's agricultural systems.

During the period, India & Pakistan attempted bilateral approach to solve bilateral issue- the most important is Kashmir. Both the countries attempted to establish a lasting peace in this region and promote co-operation during this period. They paid full attention to solve the Kashmir problem as any progress made in other fields cannot be purposeful and meaningful without a satisfactory solution of this basic problem that stands in the way of their friendship and goodwill.

To conclude the political relationship between India and Pakistan, it appears that it was indeed a period of attempts at arriving greater understanding, mutual relationship, greater co-operation and cordiality. There seems certainly an improvement in Indo-Pak relations. The Pakistani picture of India as big brother and a dominant power in the region and necessarily hostile to Pakistani interests has been an obstructive theme running through the complexities of the two countries which cannot be removed overnight. The attempts which were made for improving relations since the Simla agreement remained continue during the Janata Government also.

The past three decades of Indo-Pak relations have been a period of instability and hostility. As a result, in place of the emergence of a positive interaction in political, social and economic terms they have moved exactly in opposite direction and their economic relations always remained in a low key. The trade relations which were suspended in 1965 were recovered in 1975 after a gap of ten years by a protocol signed in December 1974 for the resumption of trade on government to government basis and its subsequent extension to private trade one month later in January 1975. During this period between 1965-75, Pakistan's economy and its import needs had undergone a great change. Some of the changes were the consequences of the creation of Bangladesh. The second factor influencing the trade between the two neighbouring countries was the rapid economic activity in Pakistan. This is evident from increasing imports by Pakistan. In March 1977, the Janata Party Government also continued this process of normalisation of relations. The visit of Vajpayee in February 1978 and the talks on trade there had paved the way to improve economic relations between the two. Janata Party Government, on the other hand, wanted a balance between its loyalty to the trading classes and the obvious need to give the public sector the commanding height in trade relations with

Pakistan. For this purpose, India had agreed to examine the possibility of importing more goods from Pakistan such as industrial alcohol, gypsum, rocksalt and dry and fresh fruits. In this spirit the commerce secretaries of the two countries met at Islamabad from 6-8 May 1978 to review trade relations. The result of the talks was only that both the sides were agreed to seek on orderly marketing arrangement which could be adopted to bring about the necessary improvements in the nature and direction of trade. However, the talks failed to arrive at a new trade agreement primarily because of Pakistan's concern with ensuring an equal flow of goods in both directions.

In July 1978 Pakistan had also unilaterally decided that the trade between the two would take place only at Governmental level with immediate effect. Indeed, India was willing to extend trade relations with Pakistan but Pakistan's problem of imbalance trade became a hurdle. Pakistan's argument was that while it had 438 items on the 'Open General Licence List', India had only 16 items on its Open General Licence List. The reason was that India produced an enormous variety of goods. This was not an evidence of Pakistani liberality and Indian illiberality, it was just a reflection of the state and level of the two economies. Pakistan's attitude can only be understood in the context of its often expressed fear of being swamped by India's economic power which in turn stemmed from a deeper psychosis bedevilling Pakistan's attitude to India. The greatest achievement in the economic field in the year 1978 was the conclusion of Salal Hydro Electric Project during Agha Shahi, Presidential Adviser on Foreign Affairs, Pakistan visit to India in April, 1978. The Salal Hydro Electric Project on the Chenab in the State of Jammu and Kashmir was planned by the Central Water and Power Commission. The negotiations for this dam were first sent to the Pakistani Commissioner in accordance with the requirements of the Indus Water Treaty. India, then also gave the permission to Pakistan officials to visit the site and see for themselves the designs of the project. Since then, a series of talks, both at technical and political levels were held to resolve the differences.

Finally the agreement between India and Pakistan regarding the design of the Salal Hydro Electric Plant on the river Chenab Main was signed in New Delhi on April 14, 1978 after eight years since the Salal Hydro Electric Project was built. Thus an important and a difficult problem had been resolved to the satisfaction of both the countries. It underlined the fact that there was political will at both sides to normalise relations. The Salal project was the first major scheme to come up on the western rivers since the signing of the Indus Water Treaty. It was also the first power project envisaged on the river Chenab and has a potential of generating more than 5 million KW of power.

In continuation to improve bilateral relations between the two during the Janata Party regime, an agreement was signed on 31 August, 1977 providing consular facilities to the airlines personnel's operating services between the two countries. On October 1, 1977 a telecommunication agreement was signed which also provided a direct satellite link between the two countries. On 30 December, 1977, another accord on goods traffic was signed between the two countries.

All these steps, illustrate the fact that a fresh wind of understanding has begun to blow over this sub-continent. Despite the best efforts to normalise relations from both

countries, Pakistani rulers often remained unenthusiastic and therefore, drastic changes could not be expected overnight. Vajpayee's style of handling the major bilateral problems with neighbours had also convinced them of India's sincerity in resolving mutual problems. It was hoped that the beginning of a new climate has been generated whereby the two countries could mutually respond to develop more harmonious and beneficial neighbouring relations.

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