



Indian Council of World Affairs

Sapru House, Barakhamba Road

New Delhi

ICWA Sponsored

Event Report

on

ICWA-SIS Dialogue 2013 on

**“India’s Foreign Policy: Diplomatic
Breakthroughs and Critical Gaps”**

at

Sapru House, New Delhi

7-9 October 2013

The Indian Council of World Affairs (ICWA) in collaboration with the School of International Studies (SIS), JNU, organised a three-day Dialogue titled, “India’s Foreign Policy: Diplomatic Breakthroughs and Critical Gaps” from 7 to 9 October 2013. The Dialogue was inaugurated at the Sapru House on 7 October and academic sessions were held at JNU on 8-9 October 2013.

Inaugural Session

2. The inaugural session was chaired by Ambassador M. Rasgotra, former Foreign Secretary of India, and the panellists included Ambassador Lalit Mansingh, former Foreign Secretary, Ambassador Ranjan Mathai, former Foreign Secretary, Dr. Sandeep Chatterjee, Acting Vice-Chancellor, Jawaharlal Nehru University (JNU), New Delhi, Mr. G.S. Patnaik, Secretary to the Hon’ble Vice President of India, Ambassador Rajiv K. Bhatia, Director General, ICWA, and Professor Girijesh Pant, Dean, SIS, JNU.

3. In his welcome remarks, Ambassador Rajiv K. Bhatia expressed his gratitude to the panellists and the participants and highlighted three salient features of the Dialogue; (a) it was the first confluence of ICWA and JNU at the institutional level; (b) the event was taking place in the renovated auditorium of ICWA which was made possible due to the unstinted support of Hon’ble Vice President of India, Shri M. Hamid Ansari; and (c) the inaugural session included three retired Foreign Secretaries of India who ‘together stand for over 100 years of diplomatic experience’.

4. Ambassador M. Rasgotra recalled a number of interesting events from his foreign service career. He shared his thought on India-Nepal relations, the concept of Non-alignment in India’s foreign policy and a number of other issues. He concluded by saying that JNU and ICWA together constitute India’s foreign policy elite.

5. Ambassador Lalit Mansingh categorised India’s foreign policy into two parts i.e. 1947-1998 and 1998 onwards. The first period may suitably be considered as the Nehruvian Era in which idealism was a characteristic element. In this era, India under Nehru played the role of a mediator and peacemaker. He termed the second part of India’s foreign policy (1998 onwards) as the ‘New Foreign Policy.’ India’s decision to go nuclear in 1998 was the turning point in India’s foreign policy history which characterised India’s desire to become a proactive member of the international

system. While the first era was characterised by ‘global idealism’, the second and current era is dominated by ‘national realism’.

6. Ambassador Ranjan Mathai stated that global order has become extremely uncertain and it is important to have grand strategic vision as a backdrop to deal with them effectively. He outlined three features of India’s current foreign policy making process: (a) inclusion of federalism in foreign policy making including the relevance of public diplomacy and academic reach; (b) difficulty in defining national interest; and (c) small size of foreign policy apparatus in the country. He noted that there were a number of initiatives to help make India’s foreign policy by bringing expertise from outside of foreign ministry, giving greater emphasis to energy security and incorporating domestic compulsions in foreign policy making. He hoped that the conference would help in filling critical gaps in India’s foreign policy making.

7. In his special remarks, Dr. Sandeep Chatterjee, acting Vice Chancellor JNU, congratulated ICWA and SIS for the initiative. He reiterated that India needs to redefine its foreign policy goals and identify ways to achieve them.

Mr. G.S. Patnaik conveyed the best wishes of the Hon’ble Vice President of India to the gathering and said that the new synergy between the ‘two great institutions’ i.e. ICWA and JNU, is a welcome development. He also conveyed Hon’ble Vice President’s commendation over the high productivity of ICWA under the able leadership of its Director General, Ambassador Rajiv K. Bhatia.

Professor Girijesh Pant delivered the vote of thanks and acknowledged the presence of everyone present.

Session I - India’s Worldview

8. This session was chaired by Ambassador Kanwal Sibal who shared his perspectives on foreign policy making. Ambassador Latha Reddy opined that the foreign policy of nations has to be strategic in nature and stated that Nehru had built India’s foreign policy based on the civilisation history of the nations which was the demand of the time. She added that India follows a policy of non-interference unless India’s interests are adversely affected. Speaking on India’s worldview she noted that India needs to have a peaceful neighbourhood and it needs to define its relations with the

major powers. Relations with US, Russia, and China are important and India has to reinforce its relations with the extended neighbourhood.

9. Professor Manoj Pant explained that how the changes in global economies have an impact on foreign policy. In his schema, there were three phases of economic development in the 20th Century. Phase I started with the recession of the 1930s during which the world did not have any global institutions who could handle this situation. Phase II i.e. Post-1980s was the time of response by the developed countries to the oil crisis, which led to the idea of energy efficiency. There were new players such as the transnational organisations and corporations which came to play an important role. Phase III i.e. Post-2007 witnessed South-South trade. He concluded by stating that diplomacy is not just about international politics, international economics is also becoming an important component of foreign policy.

10. Professor Sreeram Chaulia opined that India has never intervened but has always provided assistance in democratic processes whenever it has been asked to do so. It has often stated its preference for a multipolar world and Asia. However, there have been questions on its capacity and willingness to achieve this goal. India seems to be bandwagoning with the US while it aspires for a multipolar world. This is a contradiction and a critical gap that India has to overcome.

Session II - Interface among Major Powers: Implications for India

11. This session was chaired by Ambassador K. S. Bajpai who observed that the world order is in transition and India's interface among major powers impacts on India's foreign policy.

Professor Chintamani Mahapatra in his presentation highlighted that in Asia, both the 'existing superpower' (the US) and the 'emerging superpower' (China) are trying to define a concrete role for themselves. The strong economic ties between them has led to the evolution of G-2, which is the 'condominium' of US-China relationship.

12. Professor Srikanth Kondapalli opined that 'cold confrontation' between US and China is not healthy for India and New Delhi needs to manoeuvre its approach to the US and with China it must adopt a "smart non-alignment" foreign policy based on national consensus.

13 Professor Anuradha Chenoy in her presentation stated that Russia has proved itself as a ‘re-emerging power’ in the international system which was reflected in its position on the Syrian crisis. India’s foreign policy towards Russia needs to be proactive and clear. The partnership should be enhanced by deeper engagement in the politico-socio and economic sector and also in the global and regional affairs.

14 Professor Gulshan Sachdeva, shared his views on India-EU partnership and opined that the relationship is still evolving. India-EU Strategic Partnership (2004) and Joint Action Plan (2005) has strengthened bilateral trade between the two entities. However, there is a slowdown in the bilateral trade due to complexities in the negotiations processes and lack of imagination from both sides to enhance this partnership. The Eurozone crisis has further slowed down trade between India and the EU. However, India and EU should move beyond trade and have engagements and cooperation in the fields of energy security and development cooperation.

Session III - South Asia: Indian Perspective

15 Professor S. D. Muni chaired the session and mentioned that India’s biggest achievement lies in maintaining status quo in the region. He made reference to a number of breakthroughs in India’s foreign policy such as the creation of Bangladesh, constitutional devolution in Sri Lanka etc. He opined that the breakthroughs in many cases later became breakdowns. There were a number of reasons for this: (a) India never had a long-term policy perspective; (b) personality based approach has guided India’s foreign policy formulation; (c) there have been too many stake-holders in India regarding foreign policy; (d) there is a sharp polarisation in the region; and (e) the role played by extra regional powers in the region.

16. Professor Uma Singh shared her perspective on ‘Pakistan’s Afghanistan policy’ and opined that Pakistan’s motives in Afghanistan have largely been strategic. Pakistan wants control over Afghanistan and is convincing Afghan government that they should reduce their dependence on foreign powers. She said that Pakistan is fearful of a stable Afghanistan, which may ignite Pashtun insurgency. Pakistan does not want any neighbouring country, particularly India, to be involved in Afghanistan.

Professor Sangeeta Thapliyal spoke on breakthroughs in India's foreign policy towards Nepal. For India, Nepal is a security concern and India prefers that no external power should interfere in the region. She talked about India's dilemma regarding Nepal, where India gives friendly advice to Nepal but does not realise, when the advice becomes interference.

Dr. Rajesh Kharat noted that India's role in Bhutan is critical and New Delhi has supported development projects in Bhutan. It has also helped Bhutan in attaining membership of South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC). Dr. N. Manoharan talked about Sri Lanka and the Maldives in the framework of small state paradox. He said that small states try to get themselves together to counter a large state. Sometimes, these countries (Sri Lanka and the Maldives) play the China card to counter Indian predominance. But he noted that external linkages have their own limitations and India should try hard to win trust of these countries.

Session IV -India and Southeast Asia

17. This session was chaired by Ambassador Sanjay Singh who highlighted India's multifaceted partnership with Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN) under its Look East policy.

In his presentation on "India-Indonesia relations" Professor G. V. C. Naidu opined that both the countries are geographically close and enjoy cultural and historical ties. He asserted that Indian historians re-discovered Indonesia during the Independence movement and India's idea of 'Asianism' brought Indonesia closer to India. However, after a good start during the Non-Aligned Movement, bilateral ties witnessed some 'estrangement' phases. After the end of the Cold War, both countries took series of initiatives to improve relations such as Look East policy under which it designed a new diplomatic blueprint to revive political, economic and cultural ties in which Indonesia was the 'centrepiece'. Indonesia, which had ambitions of being a key player in the region, increased strategic and economic ties with India. He added that Indonesia will emerge as a centre point in the evolving East Asian economic and security order. In this context he suggested Indian foreign policy makers to engage India beyond the ASEAN framework such as the Indian Ocean and the Indo-Pacific.

18. Professor Manmohini Kaul and Professor Shankari Sundararaman identified different

variables that shaped India's policies towards Myanmar. They argued that connectivity between India's North East to Myanmar needs to be improved and cooperation on maritime affairs between the two will help in keeping Indian Ocean and Bay of Bengal free of hegemonic designs. As regards Myanmar's strategic location between India and China, they opined that Myanmar is trying to diversify its relations beyond China and argued that growing ties with India are critical for Myanmar to balance its relations with China.

19. Dr Vikash Ranjan opined that economy has been the prime mover of ASEAN-India relations. The signing of India-ASEAN FTA in goods boosted bilateral trade and which has reached US \$ 5.4 billion in 2012. However, he added that there is still untapped potential in economic relations and India needs to hasten bilateral Economic Partnership Agreement to realise the potential.

Session V - Re-imagining West Asia

20. This session was chaired by Professor Christopher S. Raj who highlighted the internal political and socio-economic conditions which propelled the Arab Spring starting from Tunisia and engulfing Yemen, Egypt, Bahrain and Syria. He opined that Shariat and Islam would remain a part of Arab democracy and it would be difficult to imagine that they would embrace European model of democracy.

21. Professor Girijesh Pant identified some markers around which India-Arab relations developed. He stated that during the period 1947-1967, which can also be termed as Nehruvian era, India engaged with the Arab world. However, 1967 changed the entire texture of West Asia which also impacted Indo-Arab relations. Organisation of Islamic Conference (OIC) was formed around that time and the region witnessed a transformation from 'Pan-Arabism' to 'Pan-Islamism'. He identified 1973 as yet another marker which witnessed political assertion from Wahhabism and the rise of Saudi Arabia which resulted in the decline of Cairo's influence in Arab politics. He briefly touched upon the Arab Spring and suggested that India should 're-set' its West Asia policy.

22. Professor A. K. Ramakrishnan in his presentation highlighted the internal dynamics of Arab

society and stated that the reassertion of the Arab society is not new in the Arab world. In 1925 the women in Egypt had formed a society and fought for their cause. Further there have been different Nahdas (Renaissance) in Arab world. Highlighting the recent Arab uprisings, he stated that these uprisings demonstrated the compelling urge of the Arab societies to place their demands for a democratic transformation. But the reassertion of military power in Egypt and overthrow of the elected government show how influential the State is. He opined that despite the reassertion of the State, the quest of civil society for dignity and democratisation is likely to intensify.

23. Dr. Sameena Hameed in her presentation stated that about 65 per cent of India's oil imports come from West Asia and India's dependence on West Asia would grow further as it embarks on industrialisation and urbanisation. But given the turbulent political situation in West Asia, India needs to protect its supply chain. She suggested that India needs to take some measures including 'establishing partnership with the Gulf countries in their investment in the upstream and downstream sectors in third country or India and the Gulf'.

Session VI - Sunshine Region, Central Asia, Africa and Latin America

24. This session was chaired by Ambassador Deepak Bhojwani who highlighted that Central Asia, Africa and Latin America have emerged as vibrant economic regions and need special attention from the foreign policy makers.

Professor Ajay Dubey and Dr. Vidhan Pathak in their presentation assessed India's capacity building efforts in Africa. They stated that India's capacity building efforts has been the core of India's engagement with Africa, but it gained momentum following India-Africa Forum Summits held in New Delhi (2008) and Addis Ababa (2011). India at the two summits committed 1.2 billion dollars for capacity building in Africa. This contribution has generated India's goodwill in the recipient countries. They, however, added that Indian foreign office has no mechanism to monitor the aid disbursement and since the aid is channelled through an agency set up by the African Union, India cannot expect reciprocity from the individual countries.

25. Professor Sanjay Pandey and Professor Ajay Patnaik in their presentation highlighted that India is taking a slew of measures to connect with Central Asia. They highlighted that India's

growing energy needs have propelled it to launch the Connect Central Asia Policy. India has initiated energy pipeline project including the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) and is also building ports in Iran through which it can reach Central Asian countries via Afghanistan where it is building highways and roads. They suggested that this policy should rather be named as 'Look North Policy'.

26. Mr. Sarang Shidore in his presentation stated that India had minimal historical interactions with the Latin Americana and Caribbean countries and there had been limited visits by Indian leaders to these regions. But after 1991, India has started political and economic engagement in this region. India's interactions with Brazil and IBSA forums have increased manifolds. He also highlighted the economic successes achieved by Venezuela, Chile, Peru and Mexico and in this context suggested that India should try maximise its relations. He, however, pointed that India does not have expertise in Latin American language and India should initiate process to teach these languages on priority basis. He also noted that India has to increase air connectivity to these regions.

Session VII - Panel Discussion on Federalism and Foreign Policy in India

27. This session was a panel discussion on "Federalism and Foreign Policy in India" which was chaired by Professor Girijesh Pant and the panellists included Ambassador T.P. Sreenivasan, Professor V. Suryanarayanan and Ms. Kalyani Shankar. The panellists were of the views that following the emergence of coalition politics at the centre, the states, especially those bordering neighbouring country/countries, have been vigorously asserting their position on foreign policy issues which at times contradicts the official stance adopted by the government at the Centre. With particular reference to Teesta Water and Teen Bheegha corridor issues they noted that the West Bengal government took a different view than that of the Centre which impacted on the bilateral negotiations between India and Bangladesh. Kachchatheevu and fishery issues between India and Sri Lanka are other examples where state government differ with the Centre. They also highlighted that the state governments keep raising the issue at times to score political points for vote bank politics. They were of the view that foreign policy issues should not be politicised. They, however, suggested that the Centre needs to take regional aspirations into account especially while taking

decision on trans-boundary and trans-national issues.

In view of the ongoing stand-off between states and Centre over certain foreign policy issues, there were a number of suggestions from the audience to overcome the problem. One suggestion was to set up a Centre-State Council on the line of National Integration Council and National Development Council consisting of those states which share boundaries with India's neighbouring countries. Another suggestion was to set up Special Cell by state governments which could coordinate with the MEA and offer their suggestions and views on the issues that concern them. It was also suggested that since federalism and foreign policy is an evolving issue, a separate seminar dedicated to this issue should be organised in which ICWA could take the lead.

Concluding remarks and recommendations

28. At the end of the conference Dr. Vijay Sakhuja, Director (Research), ICWA and Professor Chintamani Mahapatra, JNU in their concluding remarks thanked the audience and presenters. They also noted that the next ICWA- SIS (JNU) Dialogue would be held in 2014. The participants suggested that similar seminars with specific centres of SIS/JNU to include PhD scholars could also be explored.
