

# Value-driven Foreign Policy in South Asia and its Lessons for the West Asian Region

Dear Sir,

India's foreign policy was once a major anomaly of the Cold War system. Widely understood as to be driven by *Realpolitik*, the newly independent nation's foreign policy was deemed "immoral" by the United States and was met with sunken disbelief by democratic countries more often than not, within Asia and the wider world. India for many decades, from 1947 to Prime Minister Narasimha Rao's market-oriented reforms in 1991, was a highly regulated state capitalist economy. The country's first Prime Minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, was a Fabian Socialist MP in Britain and was psychologically not very close to his own country; so much so that the title of his most famous volume was to be "The Discovery of India" denoting, first of all, his own personal discovery of his native country. Subsequent Congress Party Prime Ministers and Foreign Ministers of India, from Krishna Menon to Rajiv Gandhi (Nehru's grandson through his mother PM Indira Gandhi – no relation to the Mahatma), based Indian foreign policy on a cosmopolitan understanding of the Nehru Legacy: State led development at home, "nonalignment" abroad. A founding member of the Non-aligned Movement and the budding Afro-Asian solidarity of the late 1950s/1960s, India still opened up to the USSR early on, in 1955, when Nikita Sergeevich Khrushchev and his premier Kosygin visited the country. By 1958, the two were trading arms. This corresponded with the anti-Mao shift in Soviet foreign policymaking from as early as 1958 when Moscow withdrew its advisors from Beijing. By the time of the 1962 Indian-Chinese border conflict, the Soviets were selling warplanes to India (to be used against their Communist comrades in China). India got so entangled with the USSR that in 1965, its conflict with Pakistan was resolved through negotiating in Soviet Tashkent. In 1969, when the USSR

clashed with China in its own border skirmishes, India was firmly embedded in the Soviet orbit. When West Pakistan's Army, in December 1971, started to bring genocide to East Pakistan, the latter allied itself with India, and India sought refuge in signing a 20-year Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation with the USSR. This was a military alliance in all but name between India, where most people were fervently attached to a plethora of subcontinental religions, and the USSR, the officially atheist empire. Only the collapse of the USSR put an end to this unacknowledged military alliance.

India's leadership under the Congress Party shifted domestically toward the left (Coca Cola was banned, international banks nationalized), and the Indian cultural character of the country's foreign policy seemed to be entirely forgotten. PM Indira Gandhi, although she showed deference in a private capacity to gurus such as Sai Baba, avoided meticulously to change the internationalist, and indeed, socialist leanings that characterized her party's foreign policy preferences.

All this changed with the Bharatiya Janata Party from the late 1990s onward, culminating in the current administration. Overtures to the United States started already in the 1990s. India detonated a nuclear device under the BJP's Atal Bihari Vajpayee as Prime Minister, and the United States subsequently recognized India's nuclear power status (without recognizing Pakistan's). While Congress and the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty lost its Indian rootedness, the BJP masterminded and managed a massive transition from socialism/state capitalism to a capitalist economy, while representing Indian interests with new found vigor. Underpinning these was a newly resurgent Hindu cultural awakening. Whereas in the 1970s, India's cultural values were more efficiently represented by pioneering organizations such as the *Krishna-Bhakti* movement ISKCON in the West than by the Indian state, this was to change in the 21<sup>st</sup> century. Under Prime Minister Modi, a new conservative wave emerged, one that guides India's foreign policy initiatives, some of which focus on bringing the benefits of yoga to the world. This does not mean that

Access this article online

DOI: 10.25079/ukhjss.v3n1y2019.pp83-84

E-ISSN: 2520-7806

Copyright © 2019 Lukács. Open Access journal with Creative Commons Attribution Non-Commercial No Derivatives License 4.0 (CC BY-NC-ND 4.0).

India abandoned old allies such as Russia (it makes use of Russian military technology, or the GLONASS navigation system), but it appears globally as a power that is conscious of its own history and values.

Possible implications for the West Asian region are manifold. Chief among them is the notion that success is more often than not tied to standing up for one's own values. In the context of Kurdish interests, the peacebuilding mechanisms of Naqshbandi Sufi Sheiks will be of major value. Regionally rootless ideologies that have found ways to give false hopes in West Asia, such as belonging to cynics and atheist forces,

are less efficient even in the practical sense. Certainly, such enlightened conservatism will help, in a situation where fundamentalisms threaten the peace, as today, North of the Persian Gulf.

**Eszter Lukács\***

*Széchenyi István University, 1 Egyetem tér, Győr, H-9026, Hungary*

\*Corresponding author's email: [lukacs.eszter@sze.hu](mailto:lukacs.eszter@sze.hu)

**Received:** 25 June 2019

**Accepted:** 28 June 2019

**Available online:** 30 June 2019