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Role of Parliament in Indian Foreign Policy

SHANOOB AP



Introduction

Indian Parliament, a fine blend of the legislature and the executive, a place for discussion, deliberation, and debate, has a central role in our system of governance.

In the borderless global village, the gap between internal and external affairs is narrowing down, and the matters of external relations no longer remain the exclusive business of the foreign office. The role of other governmental agencies is increasing gradually.

Among others, the parliament in a democratic country is expected to play a greater role in India's foreign policy. Further, the increasing emphasis for the democratization of foreign policy has paved a larger role for the Indian parliament in external affairs leading to greater parliamentary involvement in international developments.

With numerous stakeholders involved, the foreign policy decision-making in the modern world is deemed to be comprehensive and complicated. Though the ministry of external affairs (MEA) is the pivotal player in managing India's

external relations, other important agencies such as the cabinet, ministry of defense, ministry of commerce and industry, National Security Council, Prime Minister's Office, and the parliament also are contributing significantly for the planning and formulation of India's Foreign Policy.

Role of Parliament

The highest democratic institution in the country and the voice of the people, the parliament can influence the course of foreign policy decision-making by using various constitutional provisions. Article 246 of the Indian Constitution, which distributes power between the Union Government and the states authorize the Parliament to legislate on all aspects of external affairs of this country. Similarly, Article 253 of the Indian constitution empowers parliament to legislate or amend any implementation of international treaties, agreements, and conventions.

Government is accountable to parliament, which can seek information and clarification on policies and issues. During parliamentary debates, the opposition and the other members of the parliament point out the mistakes and give suggestions for better policies. The Parliament poses unparalleled power to withhold, pass or reject any bill or resolution that is directly or indirectly related to India's external policy. Members of the Parliament also move adjournment, No-Confidence or Cut-Motion, raise short or half-an-hour discussion on any specific or an overall issue of the foreign policy. Theoretically, by exercising budgetary control and passing necessary resolutions, parliament can force the executive to act as per the will of the house.

Similarly, by opening new offices and branches and neutralizing the performance through resource control of agencies that deal with the foreign policy activities, the parliament can indirectly control the external policy of the country.

Among its important oversight functions, parliament has a Standing Committee on External Affairs and a Standing Committee on Defense, which grill the officials on issues pertaining to foreign relations and external security. Parliament may also constitute ad-hoc committees to look into specific issues. Thus, the Consultative committees of the Parliament, especially the Standing Committee on Foreign Affairs have been playing a significant role in shaping India's foreign policy.

Actual Practice

However, despite all the authority it has, the role and influence of the Indian parliament in foreign policy decision-making are weak in comparison to other major democracies. In practice, the parliament has never been considered as one of the core actors of foreign policy decision-making. Though the parliament is empowered to legislate on any matter on foreign affairs, not many issues on the foreign and defense policies have been referred to the Parliament for legislation.

Unlike the United States or Australia, international conventions, treaties and agreements don't need to get approved by the parliament before coming into practice. Many of the treaties, such as India– China Agreement of 1954, the Tashkent Agreement of 1965, the India-Soviet Agreement of 1971, and the Simla Agreement of 1972 were not referred to the parliament before the conclusion.

The Parliament committees, which are supposed to guide the course of foreign policy, are often divided by the party ideologies, and the decisions are the product of negotiation rather than debate and discussion.

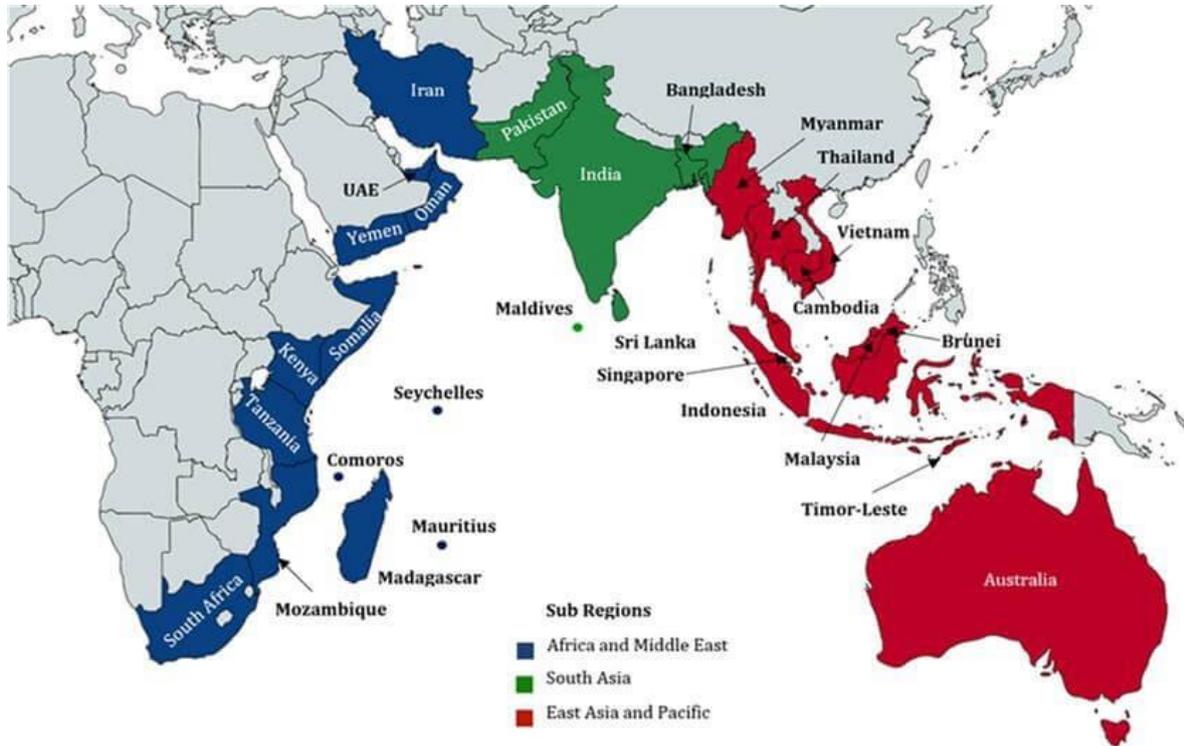
Examples and Conclusion

Despite this, on many occasions, the parliament has significantly influenced the foreign policy of India. Nehru's foreign policy towards China in the early period was soft despite several border violations due to the overwhelming support of the Parliament. But, following constant pressure in parliament, Nehru was forced to restructure his policies during the late 1950s. The parliament also successfully pressurized the Nehru government to disclose every single document on China, which was tabled in the form of white papers in the Parliament for discussion.

Another such example can be the 2008 Indo US Civil Nuclear Deal aka 123 Agreement. The proposed deal was discussed in parliament in November 2007. CPI(M) and CPI had warned against the deal and withdrew their support from Congress-led central govt. However, with the help of regional parties and independents, the UPA govt. won a trust vote in Lok Sabha with 253 members voting in favor and 232 against.

Therefore, As a conclusive note after proper analysis of the role of the Indian parliament in making foreign policy, one can say that the Parliament played a very minimal role in India's foreign policy decision-making until 1960, but with the emergence of strong opposition and other national parties, the influence of the Parliament has increased significantly.

India and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR)



Indian Ocean has been an economic and cultural reality for centuries. Before the arrival of Europeans, Indian and Arabs traded in the region for centuries. And the ocean holds key strategic importance even today. More than 40% of oil reserves of the world are located in Indian ocean. 50% of global shipment happens through it and two third of oil tankers in the world transit through the region. Given this, Indian ocean becomes important for everyone. And with each country having its own set of goals, it creates a challenge for India to maneuver its own space.

The importance of Indian Ocean Region (IOR)

For the USA, the region is important to sharing its burden in managing China. The stakes are high for China too, to demonstrate its naval capacities in the region. However, it is India for which the Indian ocean matters the most.

India is a nation with 7500km coastline, 1200 islands, and EEZ of 2.4 mn km. Its maritime reliance on trade and energy is near total. The IOR shelters 51 countries and around 35% of the world population. This is a region with growing economies and vast natural resources. Developing a strong Indian ocean region policy is the next logical step after our immediate neighbourhood (SAARC) and Act East (ASEAN).

There are also concerns about China's string of pearls strategy. A strong naval power, coupled with strategic presence in the region will have strong security implications for India. While India develops QUAD, it is also important to maintain good relations with littoral countries.

Many non-traditional issues also haunt the region. Piracy has been a concern even for countries like the USA and China. The sea lanes are used for human trafficking of which India is also a victim. A huge maritime transport also creates biodiversity challenges. Thus maritime governance also needs to be strengthened in the region. And no country alone can achieve it.

India's vision of Indian Ocean

Historically, Indian Ocean was a highway, linking great multitudes across vast geographies. As our connectivity vision and capabilities expand, this critical role can be played once again.

For India, this is a mix of pathways of going down its own strategic rise while also responding to the compulsions arising from posture of others. And reconciling the two is the need of the time.

According to S Jaishankar, Indian Foreign Minister, following are the elements of India's policy on Indian Ocean Region.

- 1] Indian Ocean Region must be perceived as the further extrapolation of the Act East and Look East policy.
- 2] An affirmation that India will no longer be limited in the pursuit of its interests in its neighbourhood.
- 3] Maritime governance in the region – a part of a larger vision of rule-based world order.
- 4] Demonstrating strong capabilities in Indian Ocean, so that India's value to other global players will be greatly enhanced. And they will be more

enthusiastic to welcome India further east.

5] Advancing cooperation and using our capabilities for larger benefit would help India to,

- i) safeguard our mainland and islands
- ii) defend our interest
- iii) ensure safe secure and stable Indian Ocean and
- iv) make available our capability to others.

6] Deep economic and security cooperation with our maritime neighbours and strengthening their capacities.

7] Collective action and cooperation to advance peace and security and respond to emergencies.

8] More integrated and cooperative future for the region that enhances sustainable development.

Of course, various goals need to be **prioritized**. According to Mr. Jaishankar, **the list of priorities in Indian foreign policy in the form of concentric circles**.

The core is, maritime infrastructure of the homeland, development of island assets, connectivity with immediate neighbours with littoral implications. And developing capability that can be employed on a daily basis.

The next circle includes maritime space beyond its own borders. Island countries like Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, Seychelles. On land – restoration of connectivity to the extended neighbourhood to the east and west are important. Both have direct implications for the ability of India to safeguard waters on a larger scale, while ensuring economic consolidation of hinterland.

The next circle is a real challenge. It envisions revival of Indian Ocean as a community that builds on its historical and cultural foundation. However, without a strong strategic imperative, expanding the agenda is a challenge. So India needs to develop a stronger sense of purpose to achieve the objective. It is by shaping cooperation across the IO, that India can hope to significantly influence the events beyond it. All these challenges, though differing in nature and priorities, needs to be addressed in parallel as they're self-supporting.

The outermost circle takes India to Pacific. Engaging converging interests to ensure core security while promoting stable periphery. Developing policy

exchanges, capability exercises and cooperation mechanisms in that regard is work under progress.

It is interplay of these circles that will determine not only India's maritime future but its larger strategic posture as well.

The Indo Pacific is as much our past as it is our future. For Indian ocean to attain its true potential, it is important that India, which is at the centre of gravity, should play a leading role in the region.

Based on the discussions

<https://youtu.be/VRqpUWx7q5E>

<https://youtu.be/eSx4dbgiT2w>

India's options while dealing with Afghanistan

ADARSH JOHN MARCH 5, 2021



A Brief History

Kabuliwallah – the name still echoes in the corridors of Shantiniketan. A story about the life of an Afghan migrant in erstwhile Bengal, Kabuliwallah is one of the most praised works of Tagore and is a mere drop in the ocean that shows how Afghan history has been always a part of Indian History.

The relationship between India and Afghanistan dates back to the Indus valley civilization. Unlike most bilateral contacts between nations that pause over course of time, India and Afghanistan have been two inseparable entities who have shared familiarity from the Bronze age to the modern age. Harappans, Kushans, Scythians, Abdali, and British acted as a link between the two countries.

The modern relationship began when two countries signed the Afghanistan Treaty of friendship in 1950. The treaty paved way for diplomatic ties. Later India took advantage of the difference between Pakistan and Afghanistan regarding the Durand line and expanded its ties with Afghanistan.

Post-Cold War, under the Narasimha Rao government, India took a non-aligning diplomatic decision by asserting that it would engage with all factions within Afghanistan.

After the political reconstruction of Afghanistan under the Democratic government in 2003, India took a series of humanitarian and development measures to aid the ailing afghan. India was one of the first countries to come to the rescue of Afghan post the invasion of the US despite its bitter relationship with the Taliban.

Since 2011, India has been officially supporting the Afghan-led reconciliation with the Taliban. India concluded a strategic partnership agreement with Afghanistan in 2011. Post-2014, India has been efficiently forming policies to establish its credentials as a regional leader in Afghanistan.

Present status of relations

Diplomatic Relations

Since the formation of the Quadrilateral Coordination Group in 2016, which had the US, Afghanistan, Pakistan, and China, India has been emphasizing that the peace process in the war-torn country should be Afghan-led, Afghan-owned, Afghan-controlled. Despite being kept out of the US- Taliban deal 2020, both the Afghan Government and the Taliban have reached out to India for assistance in negotiation. India's usage of soft power diplomacy in Afghanistan has an advantage over Pakistan.

Strategic Relations

An important provision of the US-Afghan deal is cutting ties with the terrorist organization. But India is still wary of the revival of Al-Qaeda and its impact in Kashmir in case the Taliban comes to power. Apart from this, India has a good strategic relationship with the elected government of Afghanistan. Delivery of Mi-24 helicopters and new development projects to the tune of \$1 billion under the Strategic Partnership Agreement are a few examples.

Commercial Relations

Till 2017, Afghanistan Pakistan Transit Trade Agreement was restricting India's full-fledged trade relation with Afghanistan. The inauguration of the Dedicated Air Corridor between Kandahar, Kabul and Delhi gave a fresh impetus in the bilateral trade. The Chabahar port, connecting India, Iran, Afghanistan, and Central Asia, will promote bilateral connectivity, investment, and trade between India and Afghanistan. Being a solar-rich country, Afghanistan has a huge role to play in the International Solar Alliance, the brainchild of India

Various possible outcomes of the present situation

There are three possible outcomes of the present situation.

1. Continuation of the Civil War
2. Emirate or Republic of Afghanistan
3. Ending of the Civil War

Continuation of Civil War

Without prior consultation with the Kabul government or other countries, the US administration has unilaterally signed the peace treaty with the Taliban. This has created apprehensions amongst the Ghani government, as well as international players. It is perceived that the Taliban does not possess the organizational discipline to implement such an agreement. Even after the deal, the Taliban has violated the ceasefire pacts and has attacked several officials of the Kabul administration. Hence, the Afghan government has been cautious. Withdrawal of US forces from the war-torn country may end up giving an upper hand to the Taliban in their zest for the formation of Islamic Emirate. With no options left, the elected Afghan government will be forced to fight the Taliban, again pushing the already struggling country into open civil war. The continuation of the Civil war will pose major challenges for India's foreign policy in Afghanistan. Instead of trade and strategic investments, India will be forced to balance its foreign policy between the Taliban and the elected government.

Emirate or Republic of Afghanistan

The Taliban remains staunchly committed to establishing an Islamic Emirate in Afghanistan. Over the years, Pakistan has forged close ties with the Taliban, so the Taliban coming to power in Kabul would favour Pakistan big time. A Taliban led Government in Kabul will make it difficult for India to foster its strategic and economic interest. Going by the current trend, while there is only a minuscule chance for the formation of the Republic of Afghanistan, a democratic government will efficiently engage in the reconciliation of Afghanistan. It will be much easier for India to develop its relationship with a democratically elected Government. The People's Government can also keep a check on Pakistan influence on the internal politics of Afghanistan and the Taliban

Ending of the Civil War

The ending of the civil war in Afghanistan is likely to trigger a new civil war. When neither party can establish control over Kabul, several warlords, the tribal chief, ethnic groups and political leaders opposed to the Taliban may coalesce around the cause of defeating a common enemy. This will lead to an intense civil war. While the US may stay out of this, other international players would be drawn into the conflict. A new civil war might bring unforeseen consequences for India's relation with Afghanistan.

Different options for India

India faces a complex dilemma in Afghanistan.

1. India must engage with all the regional players involved.
2. India can adopt the old diplomatic stance of recognising a regime without approving its conduct.
3. India can open a direct channel of communication with the Taliban without sabotaging its relationship with the current afghan political dispensation.
4. If the Taliban renegades the peace deal and develops ties with Al-Qaeda, India could double down its support for the Afghan government and shun the Taliban.

Regardless of who India chooses to collaborate with, India should make sure it has a presence in Afghanistan both strategically and economically. Afghanistan is of immense importance to India and it should work for its stability and growth.
