Chapter 4: India's External Relations

Exercises — Exercises

Q1 Write 'true' or 'false' against each of these statements. (a) Non-alignment allowed India to gain assistance both from USA and USSR. (b) India's relationship with her neighbours has been strained from the beginning. (c) The cold war has affected the relationship between India and Pakistan. (d) The treaty of Peace and Friendship in 1971 was the result of India's closeness to USA.

(a) True - by staying out of both blocs, India got aid and assistance from members of both. (b) False - relations with China began on a very friendly note (Panchsheel, 1954); strain with China arose later, from Tibet and the border dispute. (c) True - Pakistan joined US-led military alliances, which made it a factor in India's relations with the US and China. (d) False - the 1971 treaty was signed with the Soviet Union, to counter the US-Pakistan-China axis.

Q2 Match the following: (a) The goal of India's foreign policy in the period 1950-1964; (b) Panchsheel; (c) Bandung Conference; (d) Dalai Lama - with: i. Tibetan spiritual leader who crossed over to India; ii. Preservation of territorial integrity, sovereignty and economic development; iii. Five principles of peaceful coexistence; iv. Led to the establishment of NAM.

(a) - ii: Preservation of territorial integrity, sovereignty and economic development. (b) - iii: Five principles of peaceful coexistence. (c) - iv: Led to the establishment of NAM. (d) - i: Tibetan spiritual leader who crossed over to India.

Q3 Why did Nehru regard conduct of foreign relations as an essential indicator of independence? State any two reasons with examples to support your reading.

Nehru held that independence consists fundamentally of foreign relations: once they pass into somebody else's hands, to that extent a country is not independent; everything else is only local autonomy. Two reasons follow. First, sovereignty: a nation that decides its own external policy is free of outside control. India showed this by refusing to join either the US-led NATO or the Soviet-led Warsaw Pact, and by taking an independent stand, for example leading the world protest against the 1956 attack on Egypt over the Suez Canal. Second, national interest and security: foreign policy protects territorial integrity and promotes economic development, India's declared objectives. Staying non-aligned let India accept aid from both blocs, and India's free post-colonial voice was also seen in its support for Indonesia's freedom (1949) and opposition to apartheid. Had India followed a bloc, these choices would not have been its own.

Q4 "The conduct of foreign affairs is an outcome of a two-way interaction between domestic compulsions and prevailing international climate". Take one example from India's external relations in the 1960s to substantiate your answer.

The 1962 war with China is a good example. Internationally, the world's attention was on the Cuban Missile crisis between the superpowers when China attacked in October 1962; India had to turn to the US and Britain for military help while the Soviet Union stayed neutral. The Cold War climate thus shaped the war's course and India's options. Domestically, the war then reshaped politics: it dented India's image, Defence Minister V. K. Krishna Menon had to leave the cabinet, Nehru was criticised for naive assessment of China and poor military preparedness, and a no-confidence motion was moved for the first time. Congress lost key by-elections, the CPI split in 1964 over attitudes to China and the USSR, and the Northeast was reorganised (Nagaland statehood). Resources shifted to defence, disturbing the Third Plan. External events thus changed domestic politics, and domestic compulsions in turn shaped the foreign policy that followed.

Q5 Identify any two aspects of India's foreign policy that you would like to retain and two that you would like to change, if you were to become a decision maker. Give reasons to support your position.

Model answer (opinion-based). To retain: (1) Independence of judgment, the spirit of non-alignment. It preserved sovereignty and let India obtain aid and goodwill from all sides, and in a world more driven by economic interests, flexibility serves the national interest better than fixed alliances. (2) Commitment to peace and the Article 51 principles, including peaceful settlement of disputes, as in the Indus Waters Treaty (1960), and the 'no first use' nuclear doctrine with commitment to global disarmament. Both give India moral standing and keep scarce resources for development. To change: (1) Over-reliance on a single great-power relationship, whether the earlier Soviet tilt or a later pro-US tilt; policy should rest on balanced, interest-based partnerships. (2) Neglect of military preparedness and of neighbours' warnings, the lesson of 1962 when Nehru's assessment of China proved naive; I would couple diplomacy with credible defence and constant outreach to all neighbours, pursuing dialogue and trade even while disputes continue.

Q6 Write short notes on the following. (a) India's Nuclear policy (b) Consensus in foreign policy matters

(a) India's nuclear policy: Nehru backed science and technology; the nuclear programme began in the late 1940s under Homi J. Bhabha for peaceful energy. He opposed nuclear weapons and urged the superpowers to disarm. After China's tests in October 1964, the five nuclear powers (US, USSR, UK, France, China) pushed the NPT of 1968; India called it discriminatory and refused to sign. India held its first test in May 1974, termed a peaceful explosion. It opposed the NPT's indefinite extension in 1995 and refused to sign the CTBT. In May 1998 it conducted a series of tests, and Pakistan followed. India's doctrine is credible minimum deterrence with 'no first use', and a commitment to global, verifiable, non-discriminatory disarmament. (b) Consensus in foreign policy: Despite minor differences, Indian parties broadly agree on national integration, protection of international boundaries and national interest. Hence in 1962-71, when India fought three wars, and under different governments since, foreign policy has played only a limited role in party politics. Even after 1977 changes of government, parties sought better ties with China and the US rather than reversing course.

Q7 India's foreign policy was built around the principles of peace and cooperation. But India fought three wars in a space of ten years between 1962 and 1971. Would you say that this was a failure of the foreign policy? Or would you say that this was a result of international situation? Give reasons to support your answer.

The wars were mainly a result of the international and regional situation, though some failures of assessment also contributed. Against the failure view: India did not initiate these wars. China invaded in October 1962 after the Tibet and boundary disputes; Pakistan attacked in the Rann of Kutch and Kashmir in 1965; the 1971 war followed Pakistan's internal crisis, the army crackdown in East Pakistan and some 80 lakh refugees. Cold War alignments added pressure: Pakistan joined US-led alliances, and the US-China rapprochement produced a US-Pakistan-China axis. Between wars India still sought peace, as in Panchsheel, the Indus Waters Treaty, the Tashkent Agreement and the Shimla Agreement. For the failure view: Nehru's assessment that Chinese attack was 'exceedingly unlikely' proved naive and India was militarily unprepared in 1962. Overall, the policy of peace was sound but was tested by hostile neighbours and superpower rivalry; the wars also showed that peace needs adequate defence.

Q8 Does India's foreign policy reflect her desire to be an important regional power? Argue your case with the Bangladesh war of 1971 as an example.

Yes, to a considerable extent. Given India's size, location and power potential, Nehru envisaged a major role for it in world and especially Asian affairs, and India has since acted as a leading South Asian state. The 1971 war shows this. When Pakistan's army suppressed the Awami League's election victory and arrested Sheikh Mujib, India bore the burden of about 80 lakh refugees and gave moral and material support to the Bangladesh freedom struggle. It countered the US-Pakistan-China axis by signing a 20-year Treaty of Peace and Friendship with the USSR in August 1971. In the December war, India attacked on both western and eastern fronts; the army, welcomed by locals, surrounded Dhaka within ten days and about 90,000 Pakistani soldiers surrendered. India then declared a unilateral ceasefire and later signed the Shimla Agreement (1972). The decisive victory created a new country and showed India's military capacity and regional influence, though India acted partly out of necessity, to deal with the refugee burden and a security threat.

Q9 How does political leadership of a nation affect its foreign policy? Explain this with the help of examples from India's foreign policy.

Leaders set the national agenda, interpret the national interest and choose the strategy, so their outlook leaves a mark on foreign policy. Nehru, who was both Prime Minister and Foreign Minister from 1946 to 1964, shaped India's objectives (sovereignty, territorial integrity, rapid economic development) and chose non-alignment as the strategy. He convened the Asian Relations Conference (1947), backed decolonisation, was a co-founder of NAM and signed Panchsheel with Zhou Enlai. His trust in China, against Patel's worries, also influenced India's China policy. Lal Bahadur Shastri ordered a counter-offensive on the Punjab border in 1965 and signed the Tashkent Agreement. Indira Gandhi's leadership in 1971 produced the Soviet treaty, support for Bangladesh and the Shimla Agreement. When the Janata government came in 1977, it announced 'genuine' non-alignment, correcting the pro-Soviet tilt. Leaders matter within limits, since international conditions and a broad party consensus also constrain policy.

Q10 Read this passage and answer the questions below: "Broadly, non-alignment means not tying yourself off with military blocs....It means trying to view things, as far as possible, not from the military point of view, though that has to come in sometimes, but independently, and trying to maintain friendly relations with all countries." - Jawaharlal Nehru. (a) Why does Nehru want to keep off military blocs? (b) Do you think that the Indo-Soviet friendship treaty violated the principle of non-alignment? Give reasons for your answer. (c) If there were no military blocs, do you think non-alignment would have been unnecessary?

(a) Nehru wanted to avoid entanglement in power politics and to be friendly with both the US and Soviet blocs without joining either. Joining a bloc would compromise India's independent judgment and sovereignty, drag it into the rivalry of the superpowers, and cost it the chance of aid and goodwill from both sides. India's priorities were peace, poverty alleviation and development. (b) Arguably it did not violate non-alignment: the treaty of August 1971 was a 20-year Treaty of Peace and Friendship, not a military alliance, signed to counter the US-Pakistan-China axis during the Bangladesh crisis and assure Soviet support if India was attacked. India still kept ties with other powers. Critics, however, saw it as a tilt towards the Soviet bloc, which the Janata government later sought to correct with 'genuine' non-alignment. (c) No. Non-alignment was more than staying out of blocs: it meant independent judgment on issues, friendship with all countries, solidarity among newly independent Afro-Asian nations and support for decolonisation and anti-racism. Even without blocs, these aims and the need to protect autonomy against stronger states would remain relevant.