Foreign Policy Making Process of Indian National Political Parties, Debates on Nuclear-Deal

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Abstract

India has emerged as a major political actor that had became more apparent and visible in global level. Particularly India has taken more active part in regional and global issues due to the fact that it has re-defined its foreign policy orientation and the country’s international priorities. Its foreign policy has diversified in many directions. It must be necessary to emphasize that this transformation, namely nuclear-deal and the India-US relations discourse will be analyzed from the perspectives of mainstream political parties, BJP and INC. This paper will explain ‘bipartisan foreign policy discourse’ by using FPA, and also reveal how foreign policy discourse became a tool of national political dialog. Additionally it tries to explicate relations between domestic and foreign issues, and aims, limitations and motives of decision-making process of national political parties about this subject. This work based on fieldwork, interviews and archive researches between 2010-2011, New Delhi.

Introduction

Main question of this paper is to understand the domestic sources of foreign policy and international politics by case of India. On who is in charge of the foreign policy—making process in India political structure? Who influences whom? What is the policy impact of societal actors and public opinion? Are public attitudes on foreign affairs manipulated by the national political parties?

Relations between domestic politics and foreign policy decision makers is related elites and masses interaction, literature on mass public opinion and decision makers undermines two different concepts. The pluralist theory, a bottom-up approach

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(describes mostly Western democracies) supposes that domestic actors have apparent effect on decision-making process. Second one is a "top-down" process; according to which popular consensus is a function of the elite consensus and elite cleavages trickle down to mass public opinion. As regards, the public is easily manipulated by political leaders, by reason of less-significance and low knowledge of foreign policy subjects comparing with economics or localized political life, preconception of foreign policy decision-making process as a vocation dedicated to élites, and the volatility of public opinion.

India has significance of that conducts of her foreign policy, since India’s foreign affairs, diplomatic and political machinery, is responsible to an elected legislature, and more importantly, Parliament imposes certain policies in defence of “national interest”, which cannot be easily to identify with wider national consensus, especially in democratic post-colonial country. Thus it becomes important to explain how India’s decision makers conduct of foreign policy within the framework of burden of political history, domestic problems and relations in existing international system.³

Thus I prefer to use Putnam’s “Janus face” to explain, in the two-level approach recognizes that central decision-makers strive to reconcile domestic and international imperatives simultaneously. (Putnam, 1998, pp. 460-461)⁴ And Indian example, political parties are very central role to represent domestic demands and reconcile state and domestic imperatives.

General understanding in India⁵ emphasis the role of élites and places foreign policy in high-level statesmen like politics, since the domestic structure approaches deal with the nature of the political institutions, mainly state. Established dialog between society and state and channelling demands into the political system and historical burden and cultural legacy such as British Raj, castes etc. limit meaning of politics and political subject (agent) as a state level. Although domestic requirements and

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³ In this paper, as focusing on domestic imperatives, mainly political parties, literature on international system would be ignored.
⁴ “The politics of many international negotiations can usefully be conceived as a two-level game. At the national level, domestic groups pursue their interests by pressuring the government to adopt favourable policies, and politicians seek power by constructing coalitions among those groups. At the international level, national governments seek to maximize their own ability to satisfy domestic pressures, while minimizing the adverse consequences of foreign developments. Neither of the two games can be ignored by central decision-makers, so long as their countries remain interdependent, yet sovereign.” (Putnam, 1998, p. 434)
⁵ Indian literature on foreign policy, and general ideas of my interview conducted in 2010-2011.
public opinion seems that have not prominent existence in the process, political parties create an important and indirect channel from public to parliament. Political parties, being a part of legislative, construct national policies that shape the contours. For that reason being a part of national decision-making process, they need public support and presumption of legitimacy at least every general election. In Indian case, for national parties, coalition with local parties and groups is vital arrangement that brings local politics to national level and also creates cultural, political diversity in a national party structure. That bridge goes both ways, one of them collects demands and discontent of public and the other hand it explains, indoctrinates, manipulates public opinion on the way of its ideas or interests that need to become “national”. Examining the policy differentials in India’s nuclear weapons policy conception, three streams of ideologies can provide a framework: 1. A secular, anti-imperialist and class-neutral nationalism and (Indian National Congress); 2. Pan-Indian, ethno-cultural nationalism (BJP and its brethren groups); 3. A secular class-oriented politics, anti-imperialist (communists and socialists such as CPIM CPI etc.) (Mishra, 2015), (Shyna and Wani, 2013).In this study, the three political parties INC,BJP, CPI-M, as unit of analysis are examined to how these three parties have influenced India’s nuclear weapons policy making process.

**Constitutional Decision-Making Mechanism in India**

India has an old tradition of a parliamentary like advisory council (village council or council of elders) and foreign relations mechanism. Diplomatic relations has existed between India and many countries from very ancient times. Trade was most important part of that, and, as we know from historical works, diplomatic missions and some elderly council on foreign policy issues had also existed. Ancient India and/or pre-colonial Indian idea about foreign relations derived from mostly religious understanding of world.

In the terms of British Raj, Government-General could correspond with the King, the secretary of state, the British Prime Minister, and the Governor-General of the British Dominions, outwardly communicated with foreign countries on behalf of the Indian Government. Thus in the field of foreign affairs, the authority of the Governor-General was definitely subservient to the Secretary of State and the British Cabinet (Mathur and Kamath, 1996, pp 25-26). Although, Indian independence movement’s
demands changed many things in administrative and legislative level, the Government of India Act 1935 left matters relating foreign policy, and defence in the hands of Governor-General until in 1946 when Prime Minister Attlee announced the British Government desire to transfer the Government of India into Indian hands.

On focusing after independence Indian decision-making progress is specified by Constitution. According to the Constitution, the responsibility of the conduct of India’s foreign policy rests with the President of India. But President is a nominal head of government, the foreign minister and ultimately the Prime Minister and the Cabinet as a whole are responsible for shaping the foreign policy (Granville, 1999) (Patagundi, 1987)\(^6\) Essentially Prime Minister is the most-important decision-maker. Especially during strong leadership terms, such as Nehru and Indra Gandhi eras, foreign policy decision-making were dominated directly by Prime Ministers.\(^7\) In spite of Cabinet responsibility for formulation of foreign policy, policy matters are discussed and decided in small committees formed by Prime Minister unless very important issues are referred to Cabinet.

Parliament composed of the Upper Chamber (Rajya Sabha) and Lower Chamber (Lok Sabha) has a supreme authority to control the executive. Theoretically both the Houses are authorized to control foreign affairs. Since, The Minister of External Affairs is responsible to only Lok Sabha, Lok Sabha has more powerful status on foreign policy. That is also important that Lok Sabha members are elected directly general vote and especially debates on Budget means discussion on foreign policy in every level.\(^8\)

In this constitutional framework, check and balance system, Congress Party mostly dominated functioning of the parliament till 90’s, because of leadership role, lack of strong, constructive opposition (Mathur and Kamath, 1996, pp 79-80). After 90’s changing environment of political life in India, coalition politics, effective smaller

\(^6\) The President role of Indian constitutional system is important, not just has both executive and legislative powers also had Emergency Power that has jurisdictional immunity.

\(^7\) Nehru himself held the portfolio of External Affairs Ministry till his death from 1947 to 1964.

\(^8\) About foreign policy issues, the question hour in the Parliament, in many occasions debates, taken part in both Houses, and also Consultative Committee of Parliament on External Affairs, which if properly worked, can be a useful instruments for Parliament to influence the Government’s decision making. (Jha, 2002:50-51) The most important advisory body to the Prime Minister is the Cabinet Committee on Political Affairs, consisting of four key cabinet ministers. After the nuclear tests of 1998, the National Security Council (NSC) was established in an effort to institutionalize further the decision making process in the strategic realm. (Frey, 2006: 48)
groups etc, debates on foreign policy have been more taken part in Parliamentary sessions.

Identifying Indian political system, R. Kothari argued its “distinct” and “complex” characteristic. (Kothari,1970) Critics views, however its democratic structure, it as centralized in nature, bureaucratic in form and capitalist in concept (Mishra, 2015:49) Although periodic elections are held and a “functioning democracy” has worked since independence, that democratic institutional structure is identified as élite centred. Although, Indian constitutional framework is very distinct about many subjects, domestic imperatives affect implementation in different ways.

Political Party System

The domestic politics under the nuclear weapons discourses, one need to have basic understanding on structure of Indian politics and its nuances. As mentioned above many writer see that Indian political sphere is same western examples in theory but totally different in reality. In general understanding for Indian political parties has differences from “interest group approach”, on the contrary government and party are intertwined.

The categorisation of India’s political parties into national and state parties is too broad to reveal their characteristic. Structurally a party system in India displays two features. There is a plurality within the dominant party, which makes it more representative, provides flexibility and sustains internal competition. It creates an environment to absorb groups and movements from outside the party and thus prevent other parties from gaining strength. Party represents historical and the present consensus as well. Second structural implication is that the opposition is fragmented and greatly divided. Because it consists of not parties of consensus but parties of pressure, such as many regional, tribal, various language parties etc. (Kothari, 2006:58-73). Thus system creates both consensus and national, regional or subject basis coalition and also opposition at the same time. Such a fragmented political demands can find a place national political parties agenda.

9 “A tremendous concentration of power in the hands of a few and consequent elite-dominated political mobilization are the undeniable features of Indian democracy” (Jayal, 2007:137)

10 “Party politics in India displays numerous paradoxical features, which reveal the blending of Western and modern forms of bureaucratic organisations and participatory politics with indigenous practices and institutions” (Brass, 1994: 64)
In such a structure based on their ideological and organisational ethos, different political parties take different stands on different issues and proportionally influence national decision-making progress. (Mishra, 2015:54) A Political parties’ model for 60’s and 70’s formulated by Desai and Joshi, had explained those differences, herein below:

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<td>2. Decline of institutional politics and growth of populism</td>
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**Figure 1** (Patagundi, 1987:44)

**Indian National Congress (INC) Party**

Indian National Congress, established by A. O. Hume, in 1885 was not a political party but mostly a pressure group for conveying demands of Indian people to British government and mediating between them. With independence movement became a mass movement. After independence, it transformed a political party with all organization and ideology. Nearly two decades, Congress Party had dominated Indian politics. After 1967 coalition politics and non-congress solutions tried for an
alternative and also BJP, in that period, emerged as a right-wing national party, many of regional parties emerged as well.

Congress Party system can be explained as plurality in one dominance party. Some ideological features are firstly its historical baggage. INC started an interest group then transformed a mass movement and spread in large areas and along with hierarchy of levels. Secondly party has been democratic ideology from beginning that is differently western type, inspired of Panchayati Raj—democratic decentralisation. Similarly freedom of speech and tolerance of opposition are cardinal principles. There has developed over the years a conciliation mechanism within the party, at various levels and for different tasks mediating in fractional disputes, influencing political decisions in the states and districts. There is also tendency of towards avoidance of conflicts from taking an express form at certain levels, such as the All-India Congress Committee (AICC) or general meeting of the Pradesh Congress Committee (PCC). This has been made possible by the growth of several buffers in the form of smaller executive committees, informal consultative committees and inner groups, in the leadership. (Kothari, 2006: 65) Ideologically, the party considered as centrist, committed to democracy, minority rights, secularism, a centralised form of federalism and mixed economy. (Hasan, 2002:9)

For foreign policy decisions, process starts with proposal or discussion. All debates and discussions are made the committees, and brought the agenda of AICC. AICC represents all organisation of the Party. Generally proposals or policies prepared by foreign policy committee before and for the rest of the party members all process become informative. For some contradictive subjects, such as Nuclear Deal, or Pakistan, China relations etc., need grater consultative meetings, negotiation and mediation. Congress system works with principle of consensus. However system identified as democratic centralism in one way, Secretary of Party, leadership always has power to bypassing internal system. Since the last few decades, coalition making has been imperative of Indian politics, which has singularly influenced the functioning every political party including the Congress Party. Since 2004, the Congress Party led coalition concluded the Indo-US nuclear deal though left allies with draw support.

*Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)*
BJP is the reincarnation of the Jana Sang, the Hindu nationalist party established in 1951. For Brass 1989 and 1992 it emerged as the “most dynamic political force in Indian party system” (Brass, 1994:84). After split of Jana Sang, Party launched, therefore, BJP is viewed continuity with Jana Sang in discipline, ideology and organisational linkages.

The Bharatiya Jana Sang formed in 1951 as a party committed Bharatiya Sanskriti (Indian Culture), which for many of its members and supporters meant Hindu nationalism (Weiner, 2006:138) As the party has grown, it has moved towards the political centre, but it still remains more militant and more nationalist than other parties, on matters of defence and nuclear polity. (Weiner, 2006: 139) The Jana Sangh played an important role in forming the Janata Party in 1977.

Ideological set up of the party: Nationalism and national integration, hence it presented the theme of Hindu nationalism (Hinduvata\textsuperscript{11}, cultural nationalism) in careful terms; second one was a commitment to democracy and fundamental rights; and third was ‘positive secularism’; the fourth was ‘Gandhian Socialism’; and fifth was ‘value based politics’. (Graham, 2006:160)

The BJP could have accepted Jana Sangh ideology and resolutions but it chose to use it new organisation to justify a fresh approach\textsuperscript{12} Organisational structure of the party was as follows: at central level there was a National Executive consisting of the President and 60 members nominated by him, a large National Council, biennial plenary sessions of delegates, and layers in hierarchy are provided by the State Councils, Executives, District Committees, Mandal Committees and locals. But mainly the central leadership generates doctrine and policy. Therefore BJP have popular-based structure, but in reality organisation is weaker. (Adeney and Saez, 2005:71)

The support base of party is mostly urban-educated Hindu middle class. And in electoral terms from 1967 today party has become vital political force. BJP’s chief objectives is drawing inspiration from India’s ancient Hindu culture and values and

\textsuperscript{11} Basic idea of that “India is a Hindu country and that Hindus have a right to be proud of their history and culture and to draw the central symbols of national identity from them” (Brass, 1994:87)

\textsuperscript{12} After dissolution of Janata Party in 1977, because of party members ties with RSS, Jana Sangh group and its supporters held a convention and decided to establish BJP.
demonstrable military power is an essential component of its drive to create a great India.\textsuperscript{13}

\textit{Communist Party of India (Marxist)}

Background of the communist and socialist movement in India goes back to early 20th century. Rising of largescale industry, organisation of capital, the emergence of a stratum of rich peasantry in the countryside, castes and communities formed new movement.\textsuperscript{14} First form of movement was not just a anti-capitalist, also anti-imperialist sense with nationalist struggle.

Indian socialist, communist movement had many political parties, but in 1964 there were two major parties: CPI(M) and CPI. Besides of many reason, one of the important reason of fractions was foreign policy of parties, pro-China or pro-Soviet positioning. CPI(M)’s support base is middle and lower classes. The working class, agricultural labour, poor peasants and employees concentrated mainly in West Bengal, Kerala and Tripura are its vote banks.

CPI(M) organisational structure is reverted Comintern model as General Secretary, Politburo, Central Committee, State Committee, District Committee, Area Committees, Local Committees and Branch Committees. Politburo is highest body and its members elected by the Central Committee. Theoretically the principle of democratic centralism is still evoked, the state-party units function in a federal way. (Rodrigues, 2006: 228-229)

\textit{Indo-US Nuclear Deal Agreement}

Indo-US Nuclear Deal is very important example to show us India’s fractured domestic politics.(Kumara and Jones 2007)

The 123 Agreement signed between the United States of America and the Republic of India is known as the U.S.–India Civil Nuclear Agreement or Indo-US nuclear deal. The framework for this agreement was a July 18, 2005, joint statement by then Indian Prime Minister Dr. Manmohan Singh and then U.S. President George W. Bush, under

\textsuperscript{13} Hindu-Bomb argument of Vajpayee (Frey, 2006:73-75)
\textsuperscript{14} Wawed of strikes broke out in 1918-21 (Rodrigues, 2006:200)
which India agreed to separate its civil and military nuclear facilities and to place all its civil nuclear facilities under International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) safeguards and, in exchange, the United States agreed to work toward full civil nuclear cooperation with India. The Nuclear deal approved by the Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) in October 2008 symbolized a turning point in Indo-US relations, very significantly symbolized a turning point in Indo-US relations, very significantly changing the contours of India’s foreign policy (Hasan, 2012:193). The first steps of agreement started with BJP led NDA government in June 2004 Bush and Vajpayee signed the “Next Step for Strategic Partnership”. In terms of INC-led UPA government welcomed this alliance with the belief that India will become a great power both at the regional level and internationally. (Chenoy and Chenoy, 2010:117)

The Deal created political wrangling and fractured India’s domestic politics to withdrawal of support by the Left Parties from the UPA government. The Act has met with opposition for side of some political parties and activists in India.

**Congress Party and Nuclear Deal**

The Deal, as mentioned, was welcomed by Prime Minister Mahmohan Singh but also started broader debate over the shifts in Congress Party. One of them of these the party was freed from Left pressure. According to Raja Mohan, that shift started after Cold War era, from 1990’s(Mohan, 2005), but Nuclear-Deal was triangulation point. Mahmohan Singh was the greatest advocate of stronger arrangement with the US owing to economic, technological and security interests. Besides of economy, during this period there has also been large-scale migration of Indians to the US and they exert influence over India’s policy. (Hasan, 2012:195) India-US ties also served India’s power seeking position at regional and international level, especially, Indian demands on permanent membership at UN Security Council.

For Indian side, Bush administration’s willingness of lifting restrictions of Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) was the strategic and military payoffs were huge. Energy security was the prime reason of the agreement. And that point was one of the main discourses of Congress for public support. Other important payoff is that India has

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15 For Hasan, foreign policy has been not a major issue for Indian public, albeit integral.
16 Singh had also very important role of opening up Indian economics as he served as Ministry of Finance
been gain important position as a “Responsible Nuclear Power” within the non-NPT status.

The Congress faced severe problems in selling the nuclear deal to the country; especially the separation military and civil uses issues and US ties. Left had done withdraw their support but regional level; there was not strong position on the issue. Regional parties in coalition stayed with Congress. The Swajwadi Party saved the UPA government by offering support when Lefts withdrew even though it was strongly opponent discourse.(Shyna and Wani, 2013:47-48)

Inside of Congress Party, several leaders railed against and labelled “pro-US policies”. Mahmohan Singh faced questions from senior leaders. (Hasan, 2012:201) Sonia Gandhi was under pressure also especially the idea that deal was against the part’s heritage of non-alignment. This impression gained ground because she maintained a studied silence on matter for several months after Joint statement 2005. (Hasan, 2012: 202) “This put the party on the defensive as it did not sufficiently highlight that similar deals were to be signed with France and Russia.” Besides of leaders position, pro-US stance affected the party Muslim base. Muslim Participation in protest rallies against Bush was a matter of concern that the foreign policy debate was being “communalized”. (Hasan, 2012:204)

Leaders and Muslim groups in Party were convinced that nuclear deal had no important effect on voters in 2009 elections. Middle class and Indian capital’s support of the Congress on the deal was more important that Mahmohan Singh had a chance to explain that for only economic reasons on media.

BJP Opposition

The BJP, having been the driving force behind the Indo-US rapprochement, described the deal as great and terrible mistake. Party outlined three areas of concern: effects of nuclear deterrence, sovereignty of India’s foreign policy and future independence of nuclear policy. (Why Does BJP Oppose It, 2008) BJP had great afford to build ties with US after Nuclear Test in terms of NDA government. And in 2004 reach an

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17 Even Former External Affairs Minister Natwar Signh highlights Sonia Gandhi’s early misgivings on the issue. And also Singh and Aiyar, critical of strategic embrace with US, had to change their positions.
agreement as a road map. Different from Left, party supported nuclear programme in military way. BJP though supported UPA’s governments policy of forging a strategic partnership wit US, viewed as a trap more discriminatory treaties like NPT and CTBT. BJP was divided on entire issue; a section of party, closer to RSS, oppose the deal as “capitulation of country’s sovereignty and national interest” The other section of party found themselves closer to UPA politics, grudgingly. Consequently main reason was over a provision in the treaty.\textsuperscript{18}

BJP opposition was lack of credibility because its past politics had not difference from UPA. That was related about “being a opposition party” for many scholars and gaining discontented groups, people’s support for election. For H.K. Dua, it could have been possible making the same deal in BJP governments terms. Economic reasons of treaty was very valid for BJP’s voters.

\textit{Left Opposition}

Left opposition on treaty different from others had more ideologically. Main arguments of Left were that the Deal was not in India’s national interest and also against the non-alignment, anti-imperialist heritage. (Pande, 2007) The fact that India gets tied to the US military interventionism worries the left. And also about nuclear energy and mainly nuclear weapons Left were different from the other parties, for Left the deal was unnecessary, immoral, imperialistic arrangements.\textsuperscript{19}

The nuclear deal talks between UPA and Left broke down after several stalemated rounds. On these grounds the Left withdrew support to UPA in 2008. However Left ranks in Parliament there were a lot of confusion. Left had given support to UPA because of the forming a front against the Hinduvata ideology and BJP led government. Domestic politics, ideological features and movements against the treaty created different coalitions under the UPA government.

\textbf{Conclusion}

The vote was the culmination of a major public debate and deal-making that divided all the leading institutions involved in the formulation of foreign and national security

\textsuperscript{18} Separation of civil and military uses, and mostly dependance on US for supplies and equipments.

\textsuperscript{19} Interview with Prakash Karat
policy and parties which eventually had to take sides. Nuclear deal talks had taken part in Parliament from 2005 to 2008. Finally during the trust vote for government August 2008, Left and BJP had put forward their arguments, which had been debated publicly for 3 years.

During the debates, political parties had a major role for making policies and arguments about the deal and creating public opinion for justifying them, all that process needed negotiation and mediation with all groups, taking different part of the issue. Conceptions of foreign policy as a élite vocation, in the Nuclear Deal case had different dimensions. First of all agreement was an outcome of longstanding efforts of Indian External Affairs Office under the Executives. But after all preparations, for getting trust vote of it was necessary to explain and convince public or represents. Thus it becomes important to explain how India’s decision makers conduct of foreign policy within the framework of burden of political history, domestic problems, ideology relations in existing international system, while providing wider national consensus.
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