

DIPLOMACY, INTERNATIONAL DIPLOMACY AND THE INDIAN CONTEXT

BY

RANDEEP SINGH SURJEWALA, MEDIA INCHARGE, AICC

I.

It is a great honour to be invited to address the students of the International School of Bangalore. I am aware that the students of this premier institution are amongst some of the finest in their respective age groups.

I shall be speaking to you today on the importance of diplomacy, both as a tool for the advancement of national interests and as a means to secure international standing.

I will also explain the vitally important role India has played in developing and energising the larger comity of nations.

II.

Diplomacy

Diplomacy is the ability to tell someone to go to hell in such a way that they look forward to the trip – this is what Winston Churchill said a long time ago but that is the pun or light hearted way to define ‘Diplomacy’. I would say that ‘Diplomacy’ is ‘engage’, ‘engage’, ‘engage’, until you find a solution amicably or see the futility of non-engagement over a period of time, sometimes years, as many a times long period of engagement itself creates enough trust between two sets of divergent people or groups or nations to help them reach a solution. Most difficult solutions in the world have never been found through the barrel of a gun but almost always by engagement and diplomacy.

Diplomacy, International Law & International Architecture of Institutions

Often, my first recourse is always to the law. Since diplomacy has its roots in the developed nation state, it is worthwhile to examine the confines within which diplomacy today has to operate.

Under international law, there are four generally agreed upon attributes that a nation requires to be considered as a sovereign state:

The first is ‘Government’ – elected or nominated through some form of self-determination.

Second – ‘Declaration’ – It must declare itself as a distinct nation comprised of certain people.

Third-‘Territory’- It must have a defined territory with clearly defined borders

And Fourth ‘Acknowledgment’- by other nations of its status as an independent nation.

It is this fourth aspect – acknowledgement by other nations which requires the skilled use of diplomacy to develop. Your degree of engagement with other nations, your codes of conduct and the principles you hold out to the world-these are all important aspects which define how the world will perceive you.

Let us take an illustration; the last time a new nation was created was in 2011 when South Sudan was declared an independent nation from Sudan. And before that in 1999, some of you may be too young to remember, when the new country of East Timor was carved out of Indonesia.

Soon after, the new nations set out to establish diplomatic ties with the rest of the world. Because, in today's changed global context, a country or state cannot exist unto itself. They seek engagement with the world in a meaningful capacity by attempting to obtain membership of international bodies such as the United Nations, ASEAN, Common Wealth Heads of Government, NAM, G-5, G-20 and the list is endless. It must be pointed out that Indian engagement played a critical role in both countries- India deployed peacekeeping missions in South Sudan, and is assisting East Timor in its bid to become a member of ASEAN.

Even the sources of International law are products of diplomatic manoeuvring. The four sources as recognised by the world at large and enforced by the International Court of Justice at Hague, are-

Treatises- executed between nations,

Custom or customary practice that has existed for so long that it forms an accepted precedent,

Judicial Writings

And finally General Principles of International Law.

With the exception of judicial writings, all the other three sources come into existence by way of diplomatic engagement and mutual recognition of these sources.

For example, it was an act of diplomacy, not law that led to the declaration of the high seas, Antarctica and the moon as the 'Common Heritage of Mankind'. Free for access and study by any nation or individual without any restrictions.

III.

Let me now speak about India's Tryst with Diplomacy

Diplomacy and Creation of Indian Union

Diplomacy and diplomatic engagement were essential tools of the newly formed Indian Government in 1947-both domestically and on the world stage. You may have learned in

history class, about the unification of Indian states post-independence. All but two states were integrated peacefully into the Indian Union and without any loss of life.

So how was it that Sardar Vallabhai Patel and Pandit Nehru managed to convince these isolated princes and rulers that their best interests lay with India? It was diplomacy at its finest. Sardar Patel personally met with several leaders from states that no longer exist (such as Travancore, Saurashtra and Junagadh) to assure them that their best interests lay in merging with the newly formed nation. They convinced these rulers that only a strong and united nation state could protect their international interests and provide them with the forces needed to secure their territories.

This was a task made more difficult by the fact that we had a meddling neighbour who wanted this opportunity to foster a degree of unrest. However, Pandit Nehru was keen to ensure that India exists as a unified body and that the mergers be secured peacefully. The fact that, today we can move, without a second thought or inconvenience, from one corner of India to another without having to apply for travel documents, currency changes or permission is a direct result of that masterful series of internal diplomatic engagement. To anyone interested in reading more about this amazing period of Indian history I recommend VP Menon's 'The Story of Integration of Indian States'.

Diplomacy, Diversity and Division of Power & Balance within India's Constitution

India is a country of many faiths, beliefs, rituals, languages and traditions. Can you imagine a day in the life of an ordinary Indian if he wasn't inherently diplomatic? No? Thankfully so. Anyway, it is important to understand the context of why diplomacy is integral in a democratic set up such as ours, more so because we have a strong federal structure. Where states maintain their strong identity despite being a part of the larger union of states that makes India. As you all would be well aware Article 1 of the constitution declares that India, will be a Union of States. Part XI of the Indian constitution defines the power distribution between the federal government (the Centre or union) and the States in India. This part is divided between legislative, administrative and executive powers. The legislative section is divided into three lists: Union list, States list and Concurrent list. The constitutional powers devolved to each state are not the same. The state of Jammu and Kashmir was accorded higher degree of federalism under Article 370 read of the Indian constitution. The Union Territories of Delhi and Puducherry are accorded lesser degree of federalism under Article 239A and 239AA respectively. The other union territories are directly governed by the union government. Similarly, many other States of the North East like Nagaland, Manipur, Mizoram, Arunachal Pradesh have been granted special status under Part XXI of the Constitution. Even for administration of tribal areas in the States of Assam, Meghalaya Tripura and Mizoram, India's Constitution have laid special provisions constituting autonomous districts, district councils and regional councils with special powers. All this has happened on account of assertion of right by sections, raising of demands, often through

democratic and semi violent movements which finally culminated in recognition of these rights and status through intense engagement and diplomatic efforts.

All this proves the need for role of and consequences resulting from diplomacy between various actors, states and non-states.

Diplomacy and Decision on Conflicts within States or the Union

Now comes the part of diplomacy and the role it plays to keep relations harmonious. Would anyone want to hazard a guess as to number of states in conflict with each other besides the one we read about recently? That is Punjab and Haryana over sharing of Satluj Yamuna Link waters and between Tamil Nadu and Karnataka over Cauvery waters. Or the bifurcation of Telangana and Andhra Pradesh.

1. Assam – Nagaland.

These two states share a 434 kilometre boundary, but Nagaland has behaved aggressively towards Assam ever since its inception in 1963 and has in fact encroached on vast tracts of land

2. Maharashtra-Karnataka

Five decades ago, under the States Reorganisation Act, 1956, some parts of Bombay, Hyderabad, Madras and Coorg were joined with the erstwhile state of Mysore to form Karnataka. In the process, 865 Marathi-speaking villages in Belgaum, Karwar, Gulbarga and Bidar were merged with Karnataka. This is the primary cause of dispute between the two states.

3. Gujarat – Rajasthan

The dispute between Gujarat and Rajasthan relates to Mangadh Hill, located on the border of the two states. Gujarat claims half of the hill, while Rajasthan claims the entire hill is theirs. The dispute is 40 years old, though the Rajasthan Government presently has control over the hill.

4. Karnataka- Kerala

In 1956, the Reorganisation Committee decreed that the district of Kasaragod, comprising mainly of Kannada- speaking people, be made part of Kerala. Since then, people in the district have complained of “step-motherly” treatment from Kerala Government.

5. Odisha - West Bengal

The dispute between these states has been going on for more than 30 years. This is a fierce territorial dispute between the states at all levels – points of skirmish are farmers disputing land at the border, land grabbing by both states to build government institutions and people living at the border holding dual voter ID cards to achieve political motives.

So can you imagine how the country continues to be a happy union despite some unhappiness over the problems that exist? Just one word- Diplomacy and engagement through multilayered channels of political leadership and administrative hierarchy besides a strong judicial framework to be able to tackle and confront these challenges in governance. If there wasn't a diplomatic framework we would have seen interstate wars and many seeking to break away from Union of India.

Regional co-operation, mutual respect of authority, making states equal partners in India's growth story, building an atmosphere of healthy competition and also acknowledging the contributions of states while motivating more states to do well through councils are some ways diplomacy amongst states and Union succeeds.

Diplomacy and India's Position on International Stage

Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru was acutely aware of how India defined its place on the international stage. He had previously travelled extensively (as did Gandhiji) to secure support for India's cause of independence. The idea for independence gained much support from these visits and people lined the streets of Britain to catch a glimpse of Gandhiji when he visited in 1931.

In fact, it is a testament to Pandit Nehru's diplomatic acumen that even after independence, India chose to stay on as a member of the Commonwealth of Nations (which hitherto contained only nations under some form of rule by the British Monarchy). The idea behind this was clear – India will be a proud member of the Commonwealth of Nations, but on its own terms.

Furthermore, in a world that was still recovering from the wounds of the Second World War, Pandit Nehru developed his famous Non-Alignment Policy. As one of his first acts of diplomatic stewardship, Pandit Nehru was one of the founding members of the Non-Aligned Movement and laid out its founding principles at the Conference of Heads of State or Government of Non-Aligned Countries first held in 1961. The term “non-alignment” had already been used by Pandit Nehru in a 1954 speech in Colombo, Sri Lanka.

This would be a wise decision since soon after, the Cold War would end up putting an iron wall between much of the East and the West. As a result, India did not participate in or fall prey to any of the proxy wars, such as the ones in Korea and Vietnam.

Pandit Nehru had described the five pillars to be used as a guide for Sino-Indian relations called Panchsheel (five restraints). These principles would later serve as the basis of the Non-Aligned Movement.

The five principles were:

Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty

Mutual non-aggression

Mutual non-interference in domestic affairs

Equality and mutual benefit

Peaceful co-existence

This was a remarkable display of diplomacy and leadership. They are still relevant even as of today.

Even the seeds of Bangladesh's creation were laid by acts of diplomatic restraint and engagement by then Prime Minister Indira Gandhi following the India-Pakistan War of 1971. It was diplomacy that drove Indiraji to not occupy Bangladesh but instead, assist them in their process of self-determination and in acquiring international recognition. She toured many countries in a bid to create awareness of the Pakistani atrocities against Bengalis. This effort was to prove vital later during the war, in framing the world's perception of the war and to provide support to India's involvement. Also, following Pakistan's defeat, it was India that ensured prompt recognition of the newly independent state of Bangladesh.

An interesting diplomatic policy, conceptualised and launched in 1992 just after the end of the Cold War, was India's 'Look East' policy – It is a remarkable example of how diplomacy can be intertwined with the economy to prevent a country from falling into a financial crisis.

The policy was given an initial thrust with the then Prime Minister Narasimha Rao holding talks with China, Japan, South Korea, Vietnam and Singapore and helping India to become an important dialogue partner with ASEAN. In hindsight, international financial analysts regard the Look East Policy as a bold diplomatic move which ultimately led to India becoming an integral driver of the region's economy.

Here, it is also important to cite two strategic decisions of former Prime Ministers, Smt. Indira Gandhi to develop Nuclear Weapons in 1974 and again a nuclear test by Shri Atal Behari Vajpayee in 1988. This invited America and rest of the world to impose sanctions on India for the violation of the Control Test Ban Treaty (CTBT). However, India held firm and continued to use diplomacy as a tool to stamp out our isolation as a nuclear power under former Prime Minister, Dr. Manmohan Singh. India was finally recognised as a responsible nation when it came to the use of nuclear weapons, particularly due to its 'no first use' policy. The United States as also other countries removed the sanctions levelled against India. This was yet another example of diplomatic engagement at its finest.

In the last twelve years India has made great strides on the World Stage. India has been the largest troop contributor to UN missions since its inception. So far India has taken part in 43 Peacekeeping missions with a total contribution exceeding 180,000 troops and a significant number of police personnel having been deployed.

In 2014 India was the third largest troop contributor with 7,860 personnel deployed with ten UN Peacekeeping Missions, including the first Female Formed Police Unit under the UN.

History is full of such examples of how India has, in such a short amount of time, played an enviable role in the development of several international narratives founded upon diplomacy and emanating from its spirit of engagement.

Let me end by saying that India has neither been isolationist nor has it sought to foment conflict. It is a country that prizes peace and development above all else and that is the core of its diplomacy.

I hope that this talk inspires in some of you a keen desire to pursue diplomacy and engagement as fundamental tools for a new world order and building a nation's state i.e. aspirational yet constructive, aiming high yet cohabitative seeking to expand yet only the frontiers of humanity, cooperation and peace.

Thank You,

Jai Hind

