

SIFA Special Lecture

by

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on

“Post- Nehruvian Indian Foreign Policy and The Rise of India”

at

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Ambassador Wiwatkunthonthien, Ministry of Foreign Affairs

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Senior Members of the Saranrom Institute of Foreign Affairs, Thailand

Ambassador of India, H.E. Shri Pinak Chakravarty

Distinguished members of the Faculty, members of the Diplomatic corps,

Dear Students,
Ladies and Gentlemen

There are few countries in the world with which India shares so much in common in culture, religion, language, customs and traditions. Thailand is one such country with which India's civilisational relationship goes back thousands of years. The universal message of peace, compassion and non-violence of Lord Buddha continues to guide and inspire both of us. The bonds are so deep and inextricable that no amount of outside influence or pressure can disturb them. In recent times we have again developed closer ties thanks to the enmeshing of India's Look East Policy and Thailand's Look West Policy. There are multiple ways in which we are forging links. I will come to that later. I wish to convey my deep sense of gratitude to the Director, SIFA Ambassador Surapong for his kind invitation to me to visit Bangkok and the honour done to me for delivering a special lecture on the topic "Post-Nehruvian Indian Foreign Policy and the Rise of India", from the rostrum of this great institution of learning, the Chulalongkorn University. This could not have been more timely and appropriate given the current geo-political dynamics in the Asia-Pacific region. In the socio-economic experiment based on democracy that both Thailand and India are engaged in, foreign policy has considerable importance. Indeed in today's world, foreign policy has significant impact even on domestic politics. We increasingly believe in India that nothing should be done in the realm of foreign affairs that could have negative consequences for peace and harmony among all the communities that form the diverse, multicultural and multi-religious Indian society. I, therefore regard this a valuable opportunity to put before today's learned audience my thoughts and perceptions about India's foreign policy.

The title of my presentation today is 'Post-Nehruvian Indian Foreign Policy and the Rise of India'. I will like to first go into a brief discussion as to what was Nehruvian foreign policy in the first place. During Nehru's time, India's profile on the international scene was large in which his personality had played a big part. India's foreign policy reflects the external outlook of a large, diverse and developing

country. As any sovereign State, India since its independence in 1947 had followed its own foreign policy which was based on the principles of sovereign equality, territorial integrity and above all driven by a set of values which were nurtured by India's age-old traditions and culture. An added factor to the distinctiveness of India's policy has been the inspiration it received from the long freedom struggle against the colonial rule under the leadership of Mahatma Gandhi. Freedom, independence and self-determination have thus been the guiding principles in foreign policy just as equality, economic development and social justice are in the domestic sphere. As the first Prime Minister of independent India, Jawaharlal Nehru had imbibed these values from the days of freedom movement. Anti-imperialism, anti-racial discrimination, de-colonisation, upholding the rights of the Palestinian people and demand for equality received priority in India's foreign policy in the early years. India found a common cause in these principles with a large number of countries in Asia, Africa and Latin America. Since foreign policy is basically about protection and promotion of country's national interest, an assessment of India's own self-interest required a policy of cooperation with other nations and goodwill for other nations. A creative policy which was developed by Pandit Nehru along with a number of leaders from developing countries meant that they will not be part of the contending blocs in the Cold War that had already set in. In formulating this policy which came later to be known as non-alignment, there were two main guiding principles, i) this policy should not restrict India's autonomy of expression or action in the pursuit of its foreign relations and ii) it should provide a suitable enabling environment at home which would help develop the impoverished colonised country. Keeping India outside the rivalry of the two major powers during the Cold War period was regarded as the key priority. In fact, it can be said that India escaped as a result of this policy, the trauma and domestic war-fare or violence that several countries witnessed during the Cold War. Nehru is often regarded as an idealist in foreign policy that he certainly was. But he was also a hard-headed realist. Non-alignment as an instrument for peace and stability was an innovative and realistic approach. One of the clear ideas in this regard was that India should not leverage for itself the rivalry of the power blocs but rather advocate peace and stability which was a sine-qua non for progress and development for a newly emerged independent country. If power is the primary criterion in influencing foreign policy decisions, India certainly did not possess it in a significant measure during the Nehruvian period. Perhaps that was a major weakness of Indian foreign policy at that time for which India also suffered especially during the Chinese aggression in 1962. Whatever power India did have in terms of economic or military capability was employed to persuade or desist other major countries from using their power.

The Nehruvian foreign policy is often viewed in the context of non-alignment or sometimes mis-construed as pro-Soviet or as opposition to the West. Non-alignment was even termed 'immoral' by a US Secretary of State. As a matter

of fact, it was not pro or against any bloc but was entirely for India's own enlightened self-interest. It did not restrict India's independent position on a number of global issues such as Indo-China, Hungary, Korea, Arab-Israel conflict and so on. It served India well as it enabled the country not to be directly involved in the great power rivalry but instead focus on its priorities of peace, socio-economic development and institution-building within the country.

It may be recalled that the Asia Relations Conference in 1947 convened by Pandit Nehru under the auspices of the Indian Council of World Affairs had called for a Pan-Asian solidarity and in 1955 at Bandung Nehru and Afro-Asian leaders pressed for full independence for African and Asian countries and their economic development.

It is instructive to see how has India's foreign policy evolved after Pandit Nehru and where does it stand today. In this context, it is useful to analyse the phases through which it has gone and whether there were any sharp breaks or a thread of continuity. It will be opportune to analyse how Nehruvian international relations policy is seen today. Moreover, in today's Indian foreign policy how much of that frame-work still exists or regarded relevant. The Nehruvian policy in its essence remained India's foreign policy for a long time. Inevitably, it has undergone several modifications and changes with the passing years. If the balance of power was the principal mode of governing foreign relations, India's policy adapted itself suitably to it. India also started articulating more openly Lord Palmerton's dictum that a nation has no permanent friends or enemies but only permanent interests. As India progressively grew more powerful, militarily and economically, India's weight in global politics also began to have a growing impact. The Bangladesh war in 1971 which led to the emergence of a new country from the erstwhile east Pakistan, demonstrated that India, if forced by circumstances would not be averse to change the status-quo through the use of its defence forces. Simultaneously, India continued to build its domestic institutions thus establishing itself as a leading democracy while still being a developing country. India in that sense was unique in that no industrial nation had developed itself while being a democracy.

Three broad phases can be identified in India's foreign policy. There has been understandably considerable over-lapping and continuity. The first phase – the Nehruvian policy – lasted well past Nehru's time. The dimension of power began to influence in the second phase which largely coincided with Indira Gandhi's and Rajiv Gandhi's time. There was greater focus on national defence. The third phase in the post-Cold War period saw India's foreign policy more pragmatic and full of bold initiatives. It also coincides with the 'Rise of India'.

The period from the Nehruvian time till the early 90s when the Cold War ended can be broadly described as the second phase in our foreign policy. This was a long experience in which the basic foreign policy frame-work remained more or less the same though there were nuanced differences. Increasingly, in keeping with the changed international situation, the focus on issues of colonisation, imperialism, racial discrimination, etc. receded into background and development agenda came to the fore. The Cold War which impacted on the deteriorating security environment around India in the 70s and 80s brought into sharp focus the issue of power. There were successes as well as set-backs for India. The latter arose due to the lack of adequate experience or political will in exercise of power. It is not as if India's foreign policy was earlier based entirely on lofty ideals without regard to realism of power play or assessment of ambitions of major powers. India had developed its own foreign policy establishment; it has had a vibrant parliament and media and modern armed forces. In the same token, if domestic policy and the foreign policy are the two sides of the same coin, India's peaceful progress, its domestic stability and growth of institutions could not have come out without a sound foreign policy frame-work. As to the security situation around India, the war in Afghanistan following the Soviet intervention in the 1980s, growth of Mujahideen in Pakistan and Afghanistan, the break-up of the Soviet Union and the end of the Cold War were developments which greatly impacted on India. Relations with China and Pakistan have remained uncertain and insecure. If India suffered militarily in dealing with its neighbours, it was not out of any foreign policy miscalculation but mainly on account of defence unpreparedness. One of the key decisions in the post-Nehruvian period has been with regard to systematic strengthening of armed forces, mostly through self-effort and import substitution but also through a policy of acquiring military hardware from diverse sources. Increasingly, security environment in India's immediate and extended environment became, per force, a major pre-occupation in India's foreign policy.

The third phase came in the wake of the end of the Cold War and disintegration of the Soviet Union coinciding with the onset of globalisation and India's own economic reforms. India's foreign policy saw a greater emphasis on economic diplomacy and hard-headed pragmatism. India now perceives a new opportunity to attain its full strategic, economic and demographic potential through a more dynamic foreign policy. A series of decisions by India in recent years reflect this determination and confidence. They include India's creative and innovative Look East Policy, The Nuclear tests of 1998, the Indo-US Nuclear deal in 2008 and India's assertion for UN reforms, especially Security Council.

India's foreign policy in the last two decades has been conceived to deal with the new challenges as also to develop a new vision in the 21st century even as India emerges as one of the influential economies on global issues. The

back-drop for the Indian foreign policy today is the basic Nehruvian principles calling for equality, goodwill and cooperation with other nations while retaining independence of action. It can be seen that with regard to the latter India stands by its long-held position. For example, on the question of nuclear non-proliferation, India has all along held a principled position of not signing the non-proliferation treaty (NPT) which it regards as discriminatory and unequal. On the issue of climate change, India along with several developing countries have called for an equitable and just share of obligations. On world trade, India has called for the need for developed countries to assume due responsibilities so as to enable developing countries to have food security. There are a number of areas such as energy security, environmental security, reform of the international financial architecture including that of the inequitable Bretton Woods institutions and of course the United Nations itself and its Security Council. In all these India has emphasised urgent reforms.

Rising India is a new term which has come into vogue in recent times. Perhaps, the word “rising” came into parlance more on account of the rise of China that the west started talking about since over a decade. Rising or emerging India is in some ways a misnomer as India has been rising in one form or the other from historical times. In 1820, India accounted for nearly 20% of global GDP. India’s emergence as an independent country in 1947 was itself a major rise. Its vast population rapidly coming out of poverty through democratic means can also be described as another form of rise. Rise of India perhaps implies a large and rapidly growing Indian market and its technological powers, especially in Information Technology. Since the end of the Cold War which was almost co-terminus with the on-set of globalisation there has been a tremendous transformation within India itself. India’s own economic reforms and liberalisation have created a new trend in which the Indian economy has grown consistently over 6-7% and in recent years even at 8-9%. The resilience of the Indian economy along with its huge economic market helped India to withstand the after affects of the global financial crisis of 2007-08 as also the earlier Asian financial crisis of 1997-98. The projection of independent financial agencies suggests that India will be the third largest economy after China and the US in two decades. Inclusion of India in G20 as also the formation of the grouping BRICS (Brazil, Russia, India, China and South Africa) and India’s acceptance as a core member in WTO or climate change negotiations points out to a new recognition of India as a major economic entity.

Rapid economic growth and emergence of India as a market are thus principal factors for India’s rise. After all, India’s other attributes such as a democracy of one billion people were already there. The question arises whether economic power alone would give it a strategic capacity or capability to function as a power.

Just as China is rising so also are a number of other powers. India's rise along with that of Brazil, South Africa, Indonesia, Vietnam, Thailand, Nigeria etc. is creating a new multipolarity in the world. Multilateralism is emerging as a new power game. How to manage multipolarity while promoting a country's own interest by drawing on strength of major powers of the region is a new feature of diplomacy and India's foreign policy.

Rising India seems to create new expectations and possibilities in the area of foreign relations. India's rise is no doubt looked upon as benign and non-threatening. In terms of India's foreign policy projection, this new situation demands greater introspection within India and a readjustment of its priorities and objectives abroad. India's emerging status is being recognised in the foreign policy field. In recent times, India has signed strategic partnership agreements with as many as 30 countries which includes most major powers. Indeed, today India is privileged to have friendly and cooperative relations with almost all countries of the world. India has also signed free trade area or comprehensive economic cooperation agreements with an increasing number of countries. The Indo-US nuclear deal of 2008 in which the US agreed to provide nuclear technology and equipment to a non NPT state like India is itself a significant recognition of India as a responsible and emerging power. During his visit to India last November, President Obama of the US gave a clear expression to this effect. On the one hand there is a new assessment of India and at the same time there is no sign as yet that the developed world is prepared to part with the preponderant position that they continue to hold in the portals of power, be it politico-strategic or economic. The demand for restructuring of the UN Security Council and inclusion of India as a permanent member has been before the UN for the last several years but without success. The international financial institutions continue to be headed and guided by the developed world. While a shift of economic power from the West to the East is discernible, there is still no restructuring of the global economic order. The Doha round in WTO still remains dead-locked. India's foreign policy imperatives would, therefore, in the coming years be expectedly oriented towards removing the anomalies which have marked the global political or economic order. This is driven by the considerations of equality and justice which all developing countries today yearn for.

Thus, in many ways the agenda on foreign policy for India and several developing countries would be similar to what it is to be in the early years of our independence demanding equality, non-discrimination and fairness.

India will be increasingly called upon to accept and undertake more responsibilities which its size, population, economy and physical and soft power warrant. India must not look upon this obligation in any intrusive or patronising manner. On the other hand this is an opportunity which India can ill-afford to

miss. Today India seeks to utilise its foreign policy instrument to provide comprehensive security to its people. As you are aware, comprehensive security includes not just physical security and defence but also economic well-being, sustainable development and social justice. In order to do that several measures would need to be continually pursued. India's relations with its neighbours in its immediate as well as extended neighbourhood, as also in Africa, in Latin America and elsewhere need reassessment and a more dynamic expansion. India regards its security neighbourhood extending from the Gulf of Aden to the straits of Malacca and beyond. Economic diplomacy would have to be given high priority. India's policy need not be and should not be in competition with other powers. India has several strengths and capacities to offer to fellow developing countries of Southeast Asia, Africa or Latin America. Just as India would seek resources for its development and energy needs from around the world it can also provide education, vocational skills, information technology, health facilities, entertainment opportunities and so on. India has trained thousands of students and experts in developing countries over past five decades. With India's growing expertise in software and generally in soft power, India can now add greater value to its economic cooperation programmes. Indeed, knowledge partnership and capacity building can be India's USP. India should be happy to share its growing knowledge power in fields such as computer technology, pharmaceuticals, space technology, management etc. with countries of Southeast Asia. Agriculture is another field in which India's experience and knowledge can be useful. The recent visit of Indian Prime Minister to Africa for a summit meeting in which India offered \$ 5 billion to African Union countries by way of assistance is a significant development.

India's Look East Policy pursued since the nineties is an integral part of India's foreign policy initiatives. India remains committed to expanding its bilateral relations with all countries of Southeast Asia as well as North East Asia and also work very closely and in cooperation in regional groupings and organisations such as the India-ASEAN Summit, ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), ADDM+ and recently established East Asia Summit(EAS). Indeed India looks upon the EAS as a very promising forum where the issues of peace and stability, security and development, trade and investment can be brought under one ambit for the entire Asia-Pacific region which is home for more than 3 billion people and accounts for nearly half of the world's successful and rapidly growing economies.

The evolution of India's international relations has enabled India to create higher level of economic growth and earning greater global influence. However, India still grapples with a number of important political and security challenges at home, regionally and globally.

In India's external relations, it appears that China and Pakistan will continue to remain principal challenges. With China, India has a multilayered

relationship which has widened in recent years. However, on the critical and long-standing border issue, there is still no satisfactory progress. China's assertive and objectionable stand on the border issue have created serious differences. On the border question, talks at the level of special political representatives appointed by the two governments continue. China's transfer of nuclear weapon technology to Pakistan in the 80s and 90s is well-known. The continuing nexus between China and Pakistan on nuclear questions as also on several strategic issues of importance to India remains a major security concern for India. So also China's political and military support to a number of governments in South Asia.

China-India economic relationship on the other hand has expanded rapidly. Today the bilateral trade is over \$60 billion and China has become India's leading trade partner. Similarly, there are large scale investments on both sides.

Today, for India, managing this complex and complicated relationship with China is a principal foreign policy challenge. Optimally, it will be desirable for India to expand the relationship in areas such as trade and investment, culture and people-to-people exchanges, international negotiations such as climate change, WTO, BRICS etc., while remaining vigilant and strong in defence capability to guard against any apprehension of Chinese intervention on the long mountainous border. In the meanwhile the dialogue between the two should continue unimpeded to address all outstanding issues.

With Pakistan, the relationship is equally complex. On the one hand the two share common ethnic and cultural characteristics on the other hand the situation over the past decade has become very difficult and uncertain because of the deterioration of peace and security within Pakistan. The latter seems to have adopted an approach based on suspicion and hostility against India and continues to use terrorism as the main pressure point on India.

The terrorist attack on Mumbai on November 26, 2008 supported and backed from Pakistan has exposed the Pakistani involvement in cross-border terrorism which India had been pointing out for nearly two decades. There does not appear any clear indication whether Pakistan will revise their strategy of terrorism as a weapon against India. India continues to be a target of terrorism as evidenced by the recent terrorist attack on 13th July in Mumbai. India has agreed to have a comprehensive dialogue on Pakistan on all issues including Jammu and Kashmir and several such rounds have taken place. Another round is due to be held next week. As long as Pakistan does not alter its attitude towards India and accept to live in peaceful co-existence, the relationship might regretfully remain tense and not get normalised.

Afghanistan is another neighbour of India where war has been continuing for the past three decades. With American and NATO forces in Afghanistan fighting the Taliban, the situation continues to remain uncertain. Pakistan has become a key country providing logistic support to the US and NATO forces on the one hand and seen to be giving shelter and support to Taliban and Al Qaida elements on the other. This was evident in the US forces action of killing Osama bin Laden at Abbottabad well inside Pakistani territory. US President Obama has recently announced the beginning of withdrawal of US forces by 2012. The US decision will have a substantive impact on the Afghan security situation. However, looking for 'good' Taliban and handing over power to them hardly seems to be a desirable option. For India stability and peace in Afghanistan is crucial, without which the whole region would remain insecure. India therefore, continues to extend political and economic support to the government and people of Afghanistan and has committed more than \$ 1.2 bn. in developmental assistance to the country.

As mentioned earlier, today India-US relations today have after a long time substantially improved and there is a growing understanding and dialogue between the two on a wide range of issues, global, regional bilateral. A strategic dialogue was held between Secretary of State Hillary Clinton and Indian Foreign Minister earlier this week in which mutual concerns over the situation in Afghanistan and Pakistan, international terrorism, 26/11, 2008 and 13th July, 2011 incidents in Mumbai etc. were discussed. The improved Indo-US relations is a positive development in India's foreign policy and could be a useful factor for peace and security in the Asia-Pacific as the two have common values and interests. India and the US could work together to support the ASEAN driven mechanism such as ARF and EAS.

As the centre of economic gravity is seen to be increasingly shifting to Asia, there are hopes and expectations that the 21st century will be Asia's century.

Already economic integration is beginning to take place across the Asia-Pacific. India and ASEAN entered into a landmark Free Trade Agreement last year. India also has bilateral FTAs or CECAs with Thailand, Singapore, South Korea, Malaysia, Japan and is now negotiating with Indonesia and Australia. Along with similar agreements that ASEAN has entered into with China, Korea, and others a web of interlocking cooperation is developing. India's own relations with Japan, a great industrial nation have been reinvigorated. Thus, along with China, Japan, Korea and ASEAN, India looks forward to an Asian Economic Community in not too distant a future. This is an important component of India's vision of its Look East Policy of India's deep engagement with the East.

This also brings me to the subject of a security architecture in the Asia-Pacific which is under discussion for some time. We must remember that perhaps for the first time in history, several powers have emerged in Asia at the same time. We all have great stakes in the stability and security of this region. We must build the architecture on all these pillars. Among the pillars from Asia are China, Japan, ASEAN and India. These are extra-regional powers also such as the US and Russia. We all have a unique opportunity to build on the complementarities that exist and the institutions that we are developing. ASEAN has played a stellar or pivotal role in establishing and promoting ARF, EAS, ADMM+. India has always supported ASEAN's centrality in the Asia-Pacific regionalism. By firmly remaining in the 'driver's seat' ASEAN can and should steer the course of Asian regionalism which would be in the interest of all. Of course, ASEAN faces numerous challenges, internal and external. But I have no doubt that through peaceful dialogue and partnership, it can succeed in its efforts.

In conclusion, India stands today at a critical juncture in time and its place in the world. Rise of India has created new expectations within India and abroad. Engaged in a gigantic experiment, a democracy committed to raising the economic well-being of more than billion people through peace and non-violence and rule of law is a huge challenge. Externally, India seeks peaceful and stable environment especially in its neighbourhood and wants to live in harmony with countries of the world. India's fundamental policy requisite namely peace and inclusive growth at home should remove any apprehension of India's exercise of power for expansion or aggression. In any case, India is among very few ancient countries which has no history of ruling outside countries. Rising India, can thus be a responsible player and a major factor for security and stability in the region and beyond.

What does India foreign policy regard as its strategic vision for the future? India as a pluralistic society and a developing country foremost seeks continued peace and stability in and around it but for which it cannot address the serious issues of poverty and under-development. India's foreign policy objectives would, therefore, have to be very closely linked to the issues of inclusive growth and better improvement of basic goods – all within democratic governance. India by virtue of its size and level of development has a degree of responsibility towards stability and improvement of the living standards of the people of South Asia. A host of challenges emerge in this regard such as connectivity, migration, drug trafficking, women and children trafficking, border trade and so on. Several micro-issues have a bearing on the larger foreign policy canvass.

Equally important for India is the extended neighbourhood which include the friendly country, Thailand. Our relations have always been marked by close understanding and friendship. India has major opportunities in developing

linkages with Thailand with regard to connectivity through railways and roads, trade, culture and tourism especially with respect to Buddhist pilgrimage. India and Thailand signed a FTA several years ago. BIMSTEC is a sub-regional mechanism which was started in 1996 under Thailand's initiative as also the Mekong Ganga Cooperation. Thailand has thus helped to create bridges between Southeast and South Asia. Both are very promising mechanisms through which cooperation can be built across a wide range of areas. India looks forward to working with Thailand both bilaterally and multilaterally. Synergising Thailand and India will be an important undertaking in our foreign policy.

Rabindranath Tagore, India's well-known, philosopher and poet whose 150th birth centenary is being celebrated around the world this year had visited Thailand in 1927. I believe he addressed this august institution, the Chulalongkorn University. He said during his visit "While I stood before thee, Siam, I felt that love's signet ring had pressed thy name on my mind in life's unconscious dawn, and that my traveller's hasty moments were big with the remembrance of an ancient meeting."

We are thus friends from ancient times. May our bonds of kinship continue to develop and flourish further.

Thank you very much.