

**Key Note Address at Harvard India Conference by Ambassador Asoke Kumar Mukerji on "India's Foreign Policy and Multilateralism: Scope and Challenges " at Harvard University on February 16, 2014**

The scope for India's foreign policy offered by multilateralism, which refers primarily to the present-day United Nations system, has two important parameters. One is the predictability and security provided by the multilateral world order. This is essential for a consistent implementation of India's foreign policy. The other is the relevance of the multilateral agenda for a re-emerging economy like India, so that this agenda is supportive of India's priorities. In this context, India's foreign policy faces two major challenges. First, ensuring substantive and equitable participation in the multilateral institutions responsible for "global governance" issues, including the maintenance of international peace and security. Second, using the agenda of multilateralism as a mutually supportive framework for India's national policies. As this presentation will attempt to show, India's foreign policy has adapted itself to maximize the opportunities offered by multilateralism to meet its objectives, despite the inherent imperfections of the modern multilateral order.

2. Predictability and security in international relations in the modern era depend primarily on the agreements between nations codified into treaties. Multilateralism received a boost when, to end the First World War, the victorious Allied powers negotiated the Treaty of Versailles, signed in June 1919. India, with its huge contribution of more than 1.3 million soldiers, and a large sum of financial grants and loans to the Allied War effort, was among the 26 original signatories of the Treaty.

3. Article 1 of the Treaty created the first modern multilateral institution, the League of Nations, and India became a founding member of this organization. The scope of the League of Nations to influence multilateral policies was ambitious, and its legacy in the areas of labour, human rights, health, justice and disarmament are evident even today. India benefitted by participating in these activities of the League. This contributed to building up a significant national capacity in India even before independence, which proved beneficial for the task of nation-building.

4. The League of Nations, however, failed to maintain international peace and security. The outbreak of a series of conflicts, leading to the Second World War, renewed the determination of the Allied nations to create a successor organization that would sustain international peace and security, and assist in the reconstruction of the devastation caused by the War. On 1 January 1942, India, which provided more than 2.5 million volunteer soldiers to the Allied war effort, joined 26 fellow Allied nations, to issue a Declaration by United Nations at a meeting in Washington DC. This was followed by the drafting and signature of the United Nations Charter at San Francisco on 26 June, 1945. By signing the UN Charter, India became one of the founders of the United Nations.

5. These two treaties, which were entered into before India became fully independent in August 1947, imparted a strong multilateral dimension to India's foreign policy. Based on its experience of the human and material destruction caused by the two world wars, and aware of the need for a peaceful and secure external environment for meeting its security and socio-economic needs as an independent nation, India became one of the strongest supporters of the United Nations-driven multilateral agenda.
6. Against this background of the evolution of the modern multilateral system, it may be useful to address the scope and challenges for India's foreign policy with reference to what are considered some of the topical issues of the day.
7. The scope of multilateralism for India's foreign policy objective of contributing to international peace and security, became evident soon after the establishment of the United Nations.
8. India advocated the goal of general and complete disarmament based on the principles of universality, non-discrimination and verification at the United Nations. As early as 1948, India called for limiting the use of atomic energy only for peaceful purposes and the elimination of atomic weapons from national armaments. India was the first country to call for a ban on nuclear testing in 1954. The challenge remains to achieve this objective in the face of ground realities today.
9. Subsequent to the deployment of UN peacekeepers in the Middle East in 1948, peacekeeping became a tool of multilateralism to maintain ceasefires and stabilize situations on the ground, providing crucial support for political efforts to resolve conflict by peaceful means. The three principles of peacekeeping – consent of the parties to the operations, impartiality, and non-use of force except in self-defence and defence of the mandate – have been fully endorsed by India, as more than 170,000 Indian UN peacekeepers, drawn from among the most professional units of the Indian Armed Forces, have served with distinction and valour in 43 of the 64 UN peacekeeping operations mandated till today.
10. The experience of Indian UN peacekeepers on the ground has revealed that the greatest challenge facing multilateral efforts to maintain international peace and security, especially in the past two decades, comes from a proliferation of international conflicts, especially in Africa. The number of UN peacekeeping operations have risen sharply.
11. The effectiveness of existing multilateral structures to resolve international disputes has been brought into question, mainly on account of the inability of the United Nations Security Council to act in a credible, effective and representative manner. Instead of pursuing the path of political dialogue for resolution of disputes, as mandated by the Charter, the Council has taken recourse to mandating "robust" peacekeeping operations in unsettled political conditions, ostensibly under the cloak of protecting civilians. This has been compounded in recent times with an intrusive role being mandated by the Security Council for UN peacekeeping operations within member

states, which appears unlikely to sustain lasting peace and security, and has the potential to violate international humanitarian law.

12. The big challenge for India's foreign policy in this context is to negotiate, with other like-minded countries, effective early reforms of the UN Security Council, in order to make it more representative and equitable, and fulfil its mandate given by the UN Charter to maintain international peace and security. Such reforms would help the Council to draw upon the perspective, experience and resources of new permanent members like India. In turn, a revitalized Security Council would be the most effective platform to implement the UN Charter's emphasis on the use of dialogue and negotiated political solutions to international disputes.

13. Confronting international terrorism is a major preoccupation of India's foreign policy. The League of Nations had identified the threat posed by terrorism, and drafted a Convention on the Prevention and Punishment of Terrorism, which was signed in November 1937 by 24 signatories. Of these signatories, only India ratified the Convention. The outbreak of the Second World War prevented the Convention from entering into force.

14. Following discussions in the General Assembly in the 1990s on the violation of the principles and provisions of the UN Charter by terrorism, India proposed a draft of a Comprehensive Convention on Countering Terrorism (CCIT) in 1996 at the United Nations. The draft sought to incorporate the key guiding principles already present in the universal UN legal instruments and amendments on countering terrorism, so that multilateral cooperation in addressing this global challenge becomes legally sustainable and effective.

15. Of course, the CCIT initiative was taken before the horrific attacks of 9/11 in the United States. The United Nations Security Council responded to 9/11 by swiftly passing its main Resolution (1373) to counter terrorism, requiring all States to criminalize terrorism, deny terrorists safe haven and financial support, and cooperate with other States to bring terrorists to justice. Resolution 1373 established up a Committee for Counter Terrorism under its aegis. In November 2011, at its tenth anniversary commemoration of 9/11, the Security Council endorsed the call by the Committee, under the Chairmanship of India, for "zero tolerance towards terrorism".

16. Today, international terrorism targets the integrity of nation-states as well their socio-economic infrastructure. The terrorist attack of 26 November 2008 on Mumbai is a potent example of this, illustrating that there are no "root causes" for modern international terrorism. India's experience has shown the limitations of relying exclusively on national and bilateral mechanisms. Robust multilateral cooperation is needed to address the challenges posed by international terrorism. However, the fragmented nature of the United Nations structures, both legal and operational - there were more than 30 UN entities dealing with this issue at last count - to deal with this threat is an inherent shortcoming in the present multilateral system.

17. For a re-emerging economy like India, the creation of a socio-economic infrastructure needed for equitable, inclusive and sustainable growth, based on basic human rights and empowerment, has been an overriding priority. India's foreign policy has focused on using the principal levers of the external environment to strengthen its ability to meet this challenge. Eradication of poverty as the cornerstone of development is a priority of India's foreign policy.

18. Access to financial resources, markets and technology are central to meeting this objective. India participated in the process establishing the appropriate multilateral organizations responsible for these issues even before the United Nations was formed. The Bretton Woods meeting which discussed this strategy in 1944 was called the United Nations Monetary and Financial Conference. India's membership of the IMF and the World Bank, and subsequently of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (GATT)/World Trade Organization (WTO), which were conceptualized as the institutions that would help sustain international peace and create socio-economic growth after the Second World War, has played an important role in this context.

19. India became a member of the IMF in 1945. IMF credit has been instrumental in helping India respond to emerging balance of payments problems on two occasions. In 1981-82, India borrowed SDR 3.9 billion under an Extended Fund Facility, the largest arrangement in IMF history at the time. In 1991-93, India borrowed a total of SDR 2.2 billion under two stand-by arrangements, and in 1991 it borrowed SDR 1.4 billion under the Compensatory Financing Facility. It may be noted that the borrowing in 1991-1993 was crucial to provide the platform from which India has ushered in socio-economic reforms and integrated with the world economy.

20. During the past decade, the IMF has provided technical assistance to India to modernize its government securities market, foreign exchange market reform, public expenditure management, tax and customs administration and strengthening statistical systems. These measures have harmonized India's interface with other major world economies, especially as part of the Group of 20 major economies of the world.

21. At the G20 Summit in June 2012, India announced a \$10 billion contribution to the IMF's additional \$430 billion financial firewall to help the debt-wracked 17-nation Eurozone, to protect the global economy against the spread of any financial contagion. The ultimate objective for Indian foreign policy is to ensure that the IMF governance structure will be altered to give greater role to developing economies such as India, making possible greater flexibilities in the strict conditions traditionally imposed by the IMF on its loan programmes. The challenge for India, and other major economies, is similar to that faced in attempts to reform and restructure the United Nations Security Council, where the entrenched interests of some of the major powers of 1945 are loathe to accept the changing realities of the present world.

22. The focus on eradication of poverty in India has been supported by India's interaction with the World Bank, which India joined in 1945. The latest partnership strategy between the World Bank and India for the period 2013-2017, developed with inputs from civil society organizations and the private sector, endorses the 12<sup>th</sup> Five Year

Plan's focus on "faster, sustainable and more inclusive growth". The commitment negotiated with the World Bank is for three key areas of engagement, for which financial flows of between \$3 billion to \$5 billion per year have been agreed to. These areas are improving infrastructure, managing the process of urbanization, and focusing on human development to ensure inclusive growth.

23. India was one of the 23 countries that created the post-Second World War multilateral system in 1947 for regulating trade, the GATT, which became the WTO in 1995. Perhaps the only multilateral organization that does allow a single or a group of countries to wield a veto over decision making, the WTO has enabled India to project its perspective as a large developing country on the international agenda, especially in implementing the special and differential treatment provisions in favour of developing countries negotiated into the provisions of the WTO. The WTO's active dispute settlement mechanism has functioned in an equitable and transparent manner, without acrimony, to uphold the balance of rights and obligations of member states, including India.

24. India's focus on using multilateral trade liberalization to foster development led it to support the Doha Development Round of trade negotiations in 2001. The first signs of success in these negotiations was recorded at the WTO Ministerial Conference held in Bali in November 2013. One of the key outcomes of the Bali Conference was an acknowledgement of the necessity of national poverty-eradication programmes in developing countries like India, which are aimed at providing food security for its poor.

25. A key lever available to developing countries today to leapfrog the long-drawn evolutionary cycle of industrial growth of the developed world is technology. India's experience in this area has been well documented, especially in agriculture, health and energy.

26. The most visible current example of the force-multiplier effect that technology can have on socio-economic development is mobile telephony. Out of the reported 6.8 billion mobile phone subscribers in the world, India accounts for more than 900 million subscribers in a population of 1.2 billion. India has ambitious plans for using this technology for electronic governance programmes, which are aimed at improving lives for the poor, improving government services, enhancing internal economic activity and strengthening civil society. The role of this technology especially in empowering women in traditional societies cannot be understated. The nature of this technology, which relies on global investments and infrastructure, requires a supportive external multilateral framework.

27. India's experience of developing as a pluralistic, democratic modern nation state since 1947 makes it acutely aware of the need to pursue policies aimed at socio-economic development in a holistic manner. India is therefore participating actively in the current exercise at the United Nations on identifying and negotiating a post-2015 Development Agenda. This is an exercise that will build on the global experience in implementing the 8 Millennium Development Goals (MDGs) conceptualized in 2000.

28. The MDGs have served the important purpose of prioritizing sectors as part of national development policies of member-states. On the other hand, the lack of resources, both financial and technological, as well as the absence of supportive coherent multilateral policies, have militated against the best efforts of many countries to achieve these goals.

29. India is inclined to build on the MDGs, first to create Sustainable Development Goals (SDGs) agreed to at the Rio+20 Summit in June 2012 , and then to integrate the SDGs into the post-2015 Development Agenda. India has also joined other developing countries in identifying the two areas of financial and technological support mechanisms as essential components of the SDGs package.

30. The pursuit of socio-economic development policies while safeguarding the environment is a priority for India. India was the only country represented at the Head of Government level when the first United Nations Conference on the Human Environment was held in Stockholm in 1972. At this Conference, India placed emphasis on poverty being the biggest polluter, a perception which has been validated as an increasingly globalized world pursues socio-economic development.

31. As the current political discourse substantiates, rising inequalities due to existing policies of socio-economic growth in many countries, are an important factor in international efforts to safeguard the environment. Along with the traditional focus on emissions of greenhouse gases and depletion of the ozone layer, the consumption patterns of high-income populations has become a relevant factor in these efforts. Inequalities occur both within countries, as well as between countries. In ongoing negotiations under the United Nations Framework Convention on Climate Change (UNFCCC), a treaty negotiated in 1992 India has taken the view that addressing the objective of safeguarding the global environment must take into account this inequality, and multilateral solutions should be anchored in the concept of common but differentiated responsibility.

32. To conclude, as an eminent philosopher-statesman from India is fond of saying, the most beautiful picture in the world is that of Planet Earth taken from space. The process of globalization has indeed demonstrated the essential unity of mankind. India's foreign policy objectives in the multilateral sphere seek to emphasize this unity, so that the objectives of the United Nations Charter devoted to peace and prosperity for all mankind can be achieved. This is the wisdom we have inherited from our ancient Vedic tradition, "*Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam*", or the whole world is one family.

Thank you.

[BACK TO HOME PAGE](#)