

A Civilisational Diplomacy

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Chinese public opinion about India has been changed by the demonstration of an independent foreign policy by PM Modi.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping are meeting for the first time in the post-Covid world, at the 22nd Council of Heads of State of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation at Samarkand, Uzbekistan. Given the military standoff between the two along the line of actual control in the Himalaya, their meeting would attract global attention.

At least one reason why this meeting could be happening is the visible change in Chinese public opinion about India, and especially Prime Minister Modi, in the wake of India's principled stand on the Ukraine crisis. India's assertion of an independent foreign policy has generated much discussion online in China.

The Chinese strategic community and political leadership view Modi as being politically astute in pursuing India's national interests by balancing relations with major powers. Many in China also believe that Beijing should have pursued a similar balanced approach to the Ukraine conflict. Chinese public opinion seems to be of the view that the Indian government has been more successful than China in convincing its public to support its position.

It was a revelation to the Chinese public that India could pull-off such an intricate diplomatic manoeuvre in a heightened international crisis situation. One consequence of this seems to be that many in China are beginning to challenge the strongly-held official view that India has already aligned with the US to contain China. They notice India's assertion of its strategic autonomy.

Chinese social media voices draw attention to India using electronic media, social media, alongside official diplomacy to convey Indian viewpoints, and expose the fallacy in the Western arguments. External affairs minister S Jaishankar's robust interventions at various international forums defending India's position has made him a star in China.

Chinese public opinion is increasingly impressed by PM Modi's astuteness in comprehending the complex geopolitical games being played in the international system. This view is also underlined by the realisation that India, unlike many other countries in the Global South, was able to leverage

its neutrality to augment its position as a great power in the international system while minimising the economic fallout due to the Covid crisis.

India's stance on Ukraine has generated a positive mood in China that in turn may help resolve the on-going diplomatic impasse between the two Asian neighbours. In addition to the favourable climate for increased diplomatic engagement within China, New Delhi seems to be pursuing an independent foreign policy emanating from his clear understanding of the international arrangement of power and the emergence of a New India.

This independent foreign policy, which keeps diplomacy open to both Russia and China without compromising on national interests or territorial sovereignty, is key to understanding his foreign policy choices. In PM Modi's view, Russia and China are civilisational states and a complete weakening of either of them may complicate India's ability to resist external threats. India too is a civilisational state. Such choices are compelling to Modi's foreign policy, which springs from a position of Asian **"civilisational dread"** against continued western dominance.

Modi's strategy in foreign policy prioritises both competition and hedging and even encourages ensuring India's national interests. It perceives that the weakening of non-western civilisations that are not hostile to India may bring implications that are unforeseen for India as a civilisational state.

Under these circumstances, India could do business with President Xi given his centrist outlook and soft corner for Buddhism. Indeed, even Russia's Putin, with his non-proselytising worldview and his Russian Orthodox preferences could be someone to do business with.

This outlook has enabled Modi to adopt a prudent approach to diplomacy, much to the chagrin of observers who continue to view India as bandwagoning with the West. Such analyses dismiss the deeper motivations of Modi's foreign policy, where there is an attempt to arrive at a civilisational understanding of the red lines in the international system.

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Expected Question (Prelims Exam)

Q. Consider the following statements-

1. Chinese travelers I-tsing, Fahien and Hiuen Tsang also visited India.
2. The water dispute between India and China is related to the Brahmaputra river and it flows through both the countries.

Which of the above statements is/are correct?

- (a) 1 only
- (b) 2 only
- (c) Both 1 and 2
- (d) Neither 1, nor 2

Ans. (c)

Expected Question (Mains Exam)

Q. Despite the differences at various levels, China-India relations are of considerable global and strategic importance to bilateral relations. While throwing light on the civilizational relations of India-China, discuss what required measures should be taken to bridge the gap in the relations between the two countries. (250 Words)

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Note: - The question of the main examination given for practice is designed keeping in mind the upcoming UPSC main examination. Therefore, to get an answer to this question, you can take the help of this source as well as other sources related to this topic.