

Indira Doctrine

According to Chris Ogden in his book, "Dictionary of Politics and International Relations in India", Indira Doctrine is proctored and emancipated by the former Prime Minister of India, Indira Gandhi, which centres around dissuading the influence of external countries within South Asia that have either implicit or explicit anti-Indian agendas, primarily via the deployment of India's military forces as both a deterrent and an interventionist foreign-policy tool.

C Raja Mohan in his article, "Beyond India's Monroe Doctrine", During the Indira Gandhi years, India's Monroe Doctrine was buttressed by the principle of bilateralism. Under the so-called Indira Doctrine, India insisted that the problems in the region must be resolved bilaterally and that external powers should have no role in the region. Since then, the principle has been a matter of faith for Indian foreign policy makers. Recall the 1987 agreement Rajiv Gandhi signed with Sri Lanka which insisted that Colombo not offer bases to any other country. But that happy world in which South Asia was an exclusive geopolitical space for India is dead. It cannot be reconstructed in its old form.

Why is there a need for Indira Doctrine?

By the time Indira Gandhi came to the realm of affairs, the dynamics of the world had changed so completely that even though she swore by the Panchsheel principles with China in public, India practically started finding allegiance in the Soviet Union during her stewardship. Under Richard Nixon and Henry Kissinger, China-US rapprochement flourished. Due to this, there was no option left with New Delhi but to cement and consolidate its ties with Moscow. By the early 1970s, Mrs Gandhi found belligerence in the attitude of the Sikkim Court, when its US-born queen began to create a faux-Tibetan identity for itself. Thus New Delhi accelerated its policy of patronising what had become by then the Nepali-speaking majority in the kingdom. From there to the ultimate 'integration' of the Sikkim protectorate into the Union of India is the story of a ham-handed manner of dispensing with an institution that could have been useful in projecting a positive image of India to rest of the world. Sikkim's integration into the union – legitimised through the ballot box – was projected as a 'gobbling up' by its critics. 'Sikkimisation' entered the lexicon of nationalist and leftwing politicians of Nepal to depict India as an expansionist power.

Indira Doctrine & its Applications

Indira Doctrine's biggest success was the establishment of SAARC, a regional body for consolidating and strengthening cooperation. SAARC can be considered as that element that helped USA's scope of influence outside this region.

Sri Lanka

- Gandhi's approach to dealing with Sri Lanka's ethnic problems was initially accommodating. She enjoyed cordial relations with Prime Minister Sirimavo Bandaranaike.
- In 1974, India ceded the tiny islet of Katchatheevu to Sri Lanka to save Bandaranaike's socialist government from a political disaster.
- However, relations soured over Sri Lanka's movement away from socialism under J. R. Jayewardene, whom Gandhi despised as a "western puppet". India under Gandhi was alleged to have supported the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE) militants in the 1980s to put pressure on Jayewardene to abide by Indian interests.
- Nevertheless, Gandhi rejected demands to invade Sri Lanka in the aftermath of Black July 1983, an anti-Tamil pogrom carried out by Sinhalese mobs. Gandhi made a statement emphasising that she stood for the territorial integrity of Sri Lanka, although she also stated that India cannot "remain a silent spectator to any injustice done to the Tamil community."

Pakistan

- India's relationship with Pakistan remained strained following the Shimla Accord in 1972.
- Gandhi's authorisation of the detonation of a nuclear device at Pokhran in 1974 was viewed by Pakistani leader Zulfikar Ali Bhutto as an attempt to intimidate Pakistan into accepting India's hegemony in the subcontinent.
- However, in May 1976, Gandhi and Bhutto both agreed to reopen diplomatic establishments and normalise relations.
- Following the rise to power of General Muhammad Zia-ul-Haq in Pakistan in 1978, India's relations with its neighbour reached a nadir. Gandhi accused General Zia of supporting Khalistani militants in Punjab. Military hostilities recommenced in 1984 following Gandhi's authorisation of Operation Meghdoot. India was victorious in the resulting Siachen conflict against Pakistan.

Bangladesh

- India maintained close ties with neighbouring Bangladesh (formerly East Pakistan) following the Liberation War. Prime Minister Sheikh Mujibur Rahman recognised Gandhi's contributions to the independence of Bangladesh.
- However, Mujibur Rahman's pro-India policies antagonised many in Bangladeshi politics and the military, which feared that Bangladesh had become a client state of India.
- The Assassination of Mujibur Rahman in 1975 led to the establishment of Islamist military regimes that sought to distance the country from India. Gandhi's relationship with the military regimes was strained because of her alleged support of anti-Islamist leftist guerrilla forces in Bangladesh.
- Generally, however, there was a rapprochement between Gandhi and the Bangladeshi regimes, although issues such as border disputes and the Farakka Dam remained an irritant to bilateral ties.

West Asia

- Gandhi remained a staunch supporter of the Palestinians in the Arab–Israeli conflict and was critical of the Middle East diplomacy sponsored by the United States.^[14] Israel was viewed as a religious state, and thus an analogue to India's archrival Pakistan. Indian diplomats hoped to win Arab support in countering Pakistan in Kashmir. Nevertheless, Gandhi authorised the development of a secret channel of contact and security assistance with Israel in the late 1960s. Her lieutenant, P. V. Narasimha Rao, later became prime minister and approved full diplomatic ties with Israel in 1992.
- India's pro-Arab policy had mixed success. Establishment of close ties with the socialist and secular Baathist regimes to some extent neutralised Pakistani propaganda against India.
- However, the Indo-Pakistani War of 1971 presented a dilemma for the Arab and Muslim states of the Middle East as the war was fought by two states both friendly to the Arabs.
- The progressive Arab regimes in Egypt, Syria, and Algeria chose to remain neutral, while the conservative pro-American Arab monarchies in Jordan, Saudi Arabia, Kuwait, and the United Arab Emirates openly supported Pakistan.
- Egypt's stance was met with dismay by the Indians, who had come to expect close co-operation with the Baathist regimes. But, the death of Nasser in 1970 and Sadat's growing friendship with Riyadh, and his mounting differences with Moscow, constrained Egypt to a policy of neutrality.

- Gandhi's overtures to Muammar Gaddafi were rebuffed. Libya agreed with the Arab monarchies in believing that Gandhi's intervention in East Pakistan was an attack against Islam.
- The 1971 war became a temporary stumbling block or a bit of clash in growing Indo-Iranian ties. Although Iran had earlier characterized the Indo-Pakistani war in 1965 as Indian aggression, the Shah had launched an effort at rapprochement with India in 1969 as part of his effort to secure support for a larger Iranian role in the Persian Gulf.
- Gandhi's drift towards Moscow and her dismemberment of Pakistan was perceived by the Shah as part of a larger anti-Iran conspiracy involving India, Iraq, and the Soviet Union.

Africa

- Indira focussed more on Indian Diaspora present in the African continent by trying to involve them in diplomacy by calling them as "Ambassadors of India".
- Gandhi began negotiations with the Kenyan government, among the four like Ethiopia, Libya, and Nigeria that supported India in the Sino-Indian War of 1962, to establish the Africa-India Development Cooperation. The Indian government also started considering the possibility of bringing Indians settled in Africa within the framework of its policy goals to help recover its declining geo-strategic influence.
- Efforts to rope in the Asian community to join Indian diplomacy, however, came to naught, in part because of the unwillingness of Indians to remain in politically insecure surroundings, and because of the exodus of African Indians to Britain with the passing of the Commonwealth Immigrants Act in 1968. In Uganda, the African Indian community suffered persecution and eventually expulsion under the government of Idi Amin.
- Foreign and domestic policy successes in the 1970s enabled Gandhi to rebuild India's image in the eyes of African states. Victory over Pakistan and India's possession of nuclear weapons showed the degree of India's progress.
- Furthermore, the conclusion of the Indo-Soviet treaty in 1971, and threatening gestures by the United States, to send its nuclear armed Task Force 74 into the Bay of Bengal at the height of the East Pakistan crisis had enabled India to regain its anti-imperialist image. Gandhi firmly tied Indian anti-imperialist interests in Africa to those of the Soviet Union.
- Unlike Nehru, she openly and enthusiastically supported liberation struggles in Africa. At the same time, Chinese influence in Africa had declined owing to its incessant quarrels with the Soviet Union.

Non-Aligned Movement

- In the early 1980s under Gandhi, India attempted to reassert its prominent role in the Non-Aligned Movement by focusing on the relationship between disarmament and economic development.
- By appealing to the economic grievances of developing countries, Gandhi and her successors exercised a moderating influence on the Non-aligned movement, diverting it from some of the Cold War issues that marred the controversial 1979 Havana meeting where Cuban leader Fidel Castro attempted to steer the movement towards the Soviet Union.
- Although hosting the 1983 summit at Delhi boosted Indian prestige within the movement, its close relations with the Soviet Union and its pro-Soviet positions on Afghanistan and Cambodia limited its influence.

Why has Indira Doctrine lost its shine in the current scenario?

Primarily some of the reasons given by the scholar and IR specialist, C Raja Mohan are:

1. The first and foremost is the reality that the Subcontinent today is more integrated with the world. In the past the U.S. and the Soviet Union were not too concerned about the smaller nations of the subcontinent and were quite content to leave it for management by India.
2. The long-standing ethnic conflict in Sri Lanka, Maoist insurgency in Nepal, the antics of the Taliban in Afghanistan, the contest between Aung San Suu Kyi and the military regime in Myanmar, the question of the Nepalese refugees in Bhutan can no longer be swept under the regional carpet. The globalisation of South Asian security politics is complete.
3. China has always questioned India's claims for an exclusive sphere of influence in South Asia. As India's ties to the smaller neighbours became complicated, China has steadily expanded its influence in South Asia. Not that Beijing had to do much. India's smaller neighbours were behaving in copybook style — mobilising other powers to expand their leverage vis-a-vis India. All that China had to do was pat them on the back, say the right things, throw in a few arms and a bit of economic aid.
4. As identity politics began to dominate the internal politics of India's neighbours, the symbols of the special relationship with India became easy targets for political vilification. Huge anti-India constituencies have formed in all of India's neighbouring countries, and the leaders of these nations have not found it easy to resist the temptation of playing to the galleries by "standing up" against India. Enlightened self-interest has often become the casualty in

the charged anti-India politics of our neighbourhood. Pakistan has become adept at manipulating these constituencies.

How to reformulate the Indira Doctrine 2.0 for a vested national interest?

C Raja Mohan has laid down some of the factors that are necessary to rebuild the modified version of Indira Doctrine due to India's primacy in the region cannot be ensured by fiat or trying to keep the world out. It must be based on a conscious strategy of leadership that adapts to the changed political environment, modernises the bilateral relations with neighbours and takes advantage of new international trends.

- India must move quickly to rework the special treaty relationships with Nepal and Bhutan. The old agreements based on the notion of "protectorates" cannot be sustained in the present day world. The inevitable review and revision of these treaties will be painful and messy, but India has no alternative.
- India must shed its obsession with Pakistan and devote more political and diplomatic energies towards tending its relationships with its other neighbours. In the absence of a consistent political tending of the neighbourhood, India will find itself repeatedly confronting poisonous weeds.
- New Delhi needs a massive revamping of its economic strategy towards the neighbours. India needs to take full advantage of natural geographic conditions and the pressures of economic globalisation to quicken the pace of the inevitable reintegration of the South Asian market. India cannot allow political pinpricks from its neighbours to come in the way of pursuing freer regional trade through unilateral action where necessary.
- Despite the bitterness from some of India's past involvement in the civil wars in its neighbourhood, New Delhi must take active interest in resolving the regional conflicts. Avoiding them, for the fear of domestic political consequences or other considerations, will not provide an escape for India from the spillover of these conflicts.
- India's activism in the conflicts next door need not necessarily mean excluding others from the region. India's objective should be to work with friendly great powers to promote principled and reasonable solutions to the conflicts in the region. Working with outsiders on regional conflicts will not be easy. India must find ways to shape and manage the international interest in its neighbourhood, rather than oppose it. The mobilisation of external interest could, however, provide expanded space for New Delhi to douse the anti-India sentiment in the region and nudge it in the right direction.