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CHAPTER

Indian Foreign Policy, Aerospace and Outer Space Diplomacy

After reading the chapter, the reader will be able to develop an analytical understanding on the following:

- Role of air power in foreign policy
- Air power as coercive instruments
- Air power to achieve national interest
- India's space programme and INCOSPAR – 1962
- Aryabhatta and Bhaskara

In the modern times, as diplomacy has evolved, the concepts of national interest and state sovereignty have become important. For a state to defend national interest, military power is the key. Twenty first century diplomacy includes facets of military power, which is used as a primary tool of foreign policy. For most of the states, the two key national interests are security and economic interest. The economic interests are pursued through diplomacy. In recent times, geo-economics is the ongoing theme in international affairs due to the advent of globalisation. The strength of geo-economic influence, which today, is exerted through diplomacy, was, in the 20th century, exerted through the practices of colonialism and imperialism, achieved by military force. India, however, has always treated economic and military diplomacy separately. We have never perceived military diplomacy as a tool of foreign policy despite it having helped us at various times to achieve foreign policy goals. India has already used its military forces in the UN peace keeping missions for promoting peace and international security as envisaged by the Indian Constitution under Article 51, and has even, at times, used air power and naval power when needed. Several powerful states actually actively use military power as foreign policy intervention—for instance, the US has used air power in combat and non-combat roles to supplement US foreign policy goals. For that matter, there is a growing realisation of use of air power in foreign policy.

Airlift 1991 – Kuwait

A huge number of Indians have been living and working in Iraq and Kuwait. In 1990s, the number was close to three lakh Indians. In 1991, as the Kuwait war broke out, India's top priority, that aligned with its national interest, was to bring its people out of the war zone. India transported its citizens to Jordan and organised an airlift of more than a lakh people. This airlift signified the role of airpower and its importance vis-à-vis the foreign policy goal of protecting the Indian diaspora.

Apart from using air power to secure national interest, at times it can be used to achieve military victories. In this sense, air power is envisaged as an instrument of coercion. It may be also used to ensure that conflict does not escalate or even be used to defeat the enemy at a strategic level.

Airpower in 1971 War

In the 1971 war, as the Indian forces entered East Pakistan, the US carrier Enterprise was found sailing towards the Bay of Bengal. India understood that if the US carrier reaches East Pakistan, it may use airfields of East Pakistan to further complicate Indian policy choices. The Indian Air Force resorted to heavy attacks on East Pakistani airfields, rendering them unfit for the US to use the airfields. This gave India an edge over Pakistan.

The two cases above prove that airpower is an important instrument of foreign policy. It can be used to advance the national interest of the nation. India has also taken the issue of air power seriously and the recent Rafale deal (as discussed in detail in the Chapter on India and France) signifies the growing importance in diplomacy.

The space race between the US and the USSR began in 1957. During the Cold War, for many countries, initiating a space programme was difficult due to financial reasons. India's drive to establish a space programme goes back to 1958–59. India understood that space research can be of great use in agriculture, education and industry. India also felt that space is an area that offers international cooperation. The government of India, in 1961, decided that the Department of Atomic Energy would conduct space research for peaceful use. An Indian National Commission for Space Research (INCOSPAR) was established in 1962 for outer space research. The basic goal of India was to become a self-reliant player by developing indigenous space technology and participate in International Cooperation by contributing to areas of serious research and technology.

Metrological Rocket Sounding[1] and India

INCOSPAR planned the establishment of a meteorological rocket sounding initiative, with the cooperation of the National Aeronautics and Space Administration (NASA), the independent US federal agency responsible for space research as well as aerospace and aeronautics research. As the cooperation was about to commence, the UN Commission on Peaceful Use of Outer Space decided to extend UN support for International Sounding Rockets in critical locations. India's location was close to the geomagnetic equator and it began to ask for UN support. Due to positive assistance received from the UN and other states, a Thumb a Equatorial Rocket Launching Station (TERLS) was established in 1962.

After the death of Homi Jehangir Bhabha, the leadership came to Vikram Sarabhai and he successfully enunciated the Indian Space Programme and outlined the socio-economic goals to be achieved through special satellites. As India embarked upon self-

reliance in space during the Cold War period, countries like the US denied rocket technology to India as it was widely apprehended that any rocket technology transfer to India could bolster its ballistic missile capabilities. India did still manage to succeed in other areas. The thrust was mainly on domestic research and development. India achieved success in small rockets and satellite communication as well as in two-stage sounding rockets. As the space sector began to grow in India, in 1972, a new space commission was established which handed over the entire gamut of space research to the Department of Space (DOS). The DOS was placed under the Indian PM and had to report to the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), which was established in 1969. The new duo of DOS and ISRO created a specific satellite Aryabhatta (launched in 1975) and Bhaskara – I (the first experimental remote sensing satellite built in India, launched in 1979) and Bhaskara – II. The satellites collected data on telemetry, oceanography and hydrology. Russian support in both projects was pivotal. The period from 1980s onwards saw India begin to achieve a status of respect in space activities.

1. A sounding rocket, sometimes called a research rocket, is an instrument-carrying rocket designed to take measurements and perform scientific experiments during its sub-orbital flight. The rockets are used to carry instruments from 50 to 1,500 kilometres (31 to 932 mi) above the surface of the Earth.