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## India's Foreign Policy- Post May 23 2019- Three Scenarios:

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India's geopolitical significance rose to unprecedented heights in global strategic calculus under the assertive foreign policy initiatives and formulations of Prime Minister Modi during period 2014-19 coupled with international recognition of India's pragmatic economic foreign investor-friendly policies.

India's foreign policy bars therefore stand set high not only for possible and favoured return of PM Modi as Prime Minister yet again but far higher and challenging to the unlikely emergence of an alternative Prime Minister in the event of a badly fractured electoral mandate on May 23 2019.

India's foreign policy well calibrated thrusts during Prime Minister Modi's tenure 2014-19 stood characterised by a singular emphasis on securing India's national security imperatives as the central focus of India's foreign policy formulations while at the same time ensuring a semblance of balance in approaches to India's reinforced strategic partnerships with the United States, Western Europe and Japan.

In India's quest for securing India's national security interests under PM Modi therefore was a marked stress also in terms of cultivating and strengthening personal relationships and personal chemistry with leaders of Major Global Powers. This paved the way for adding more impetus and assertion to PM Modi's foreign policy initiatives.

The above postures paid high security dividends in relation to India's contentious and conflict prone relations with China and Pakistan which figure at the top of India's military threat perceptions.

In China's context there was growing recognition that India now without policy paralysis of appeasement timidity of the period 2004-14 stood strong and firm and qualified as an active existential counterweight to China, short of open containment. PM Modi's firm stand against China in the months long Doklam Military Standoff and refusal to attend OBOR Summits in Beijing are indicative of same.

PM Modi therefore left political space for China to re-modulate its Pakistan-tilted South Asia policies by balancing this with India's participation in China's pet project of SCO Meets.

In the Pakistan context, PM Modi stood firm that no peace dialogues were possible till Pakistan renounces Pakistan Army support for Jihadi terrorism groups operating against India, especially those active in Kashmir Valley. PM Modi's Pakistan policy has paid good dividends visible in 2019 is Pakistan's loss of United States political support and permissiveness and cut-off of US military aid to Pakistan as a consequence. China too stands cornered and having second thoughts as evident in lifting its veto on declaration of Masood Azhar as 'Global Terrorist' under severe global pressures of Major Powers in support of India.

In mid-May 2019, India's foreign policy successes can be briefly encapsulated as (1) Reinforcing and intensification of US-India Strategic Partnership (2) Transforming India's 'Look East policy initiated by late PM Narasimha Rao into an assertive and assertive 'Act East' Policy (3) Notable successes in India's standing in the Middle East policy where in 2019 India enjoys confidence of all regional powers of Middle East divide from Saudi Arabia to Iran and Turkey while at same time according Israel the valued status of reliable defence cooperation.

India's gains in its foreign policy conduct under PM Modi were made possible by unprecedented support of Major Powers at the global level and its highly personalised moves at the regional level in East Asia with Japan and South Korea and in ASEAN and the Middle East. Vietnam stands out as India's valued anchor in South East Asia.

With such formidable foreign policy successes that India has achieved under PM Modi paving the way for global perceptions of India as an 'Emerging Power' no major change of directions can be seen on the horizon, even in the remote possibility of a Coalition Indian Prime Minister arriving in New Delhi after May 23 2019 as a result of a fractured mandate.

The three scenarios that could unfold at the end of this month can be set out as (1) PM Modi returns as Prime Minister with resounding mandate (2) PM Modi returns to power with reduced majority (3) India gives a fractured mandate bringing a fractitious political coalition to power in New Delhi.

In the First Scenario, PM Modi's return to power with a resounding political mandate would add greater impetus to PM Modi's foreign policy directions and initiatives under way since mid-2014. PM Modi's aspirational goals of seeing India's emergence as a Major Global Power would see India's intensification of its vital Strategic Partnerships with United States, Japan, Australia, Vietnam and Western Europe and

with its new Middle East oil-rich partners.

In Scenario I, PM Modi would stand further reinforced in his boldness and assertive approaches to China and Pakistan, both of these nations presently not in favour with Indian public opinion. Indian public opinion in terms of strong postures towards China and Pakistan would leave PM Modi unfettered by differing Indian public perceptions.

Between China and Pakistan, PM Modi under Scenario I would continue to leave political space for China to honourably modulate its heavily tilted Pakistan-friendly postures. But in case of Pakistan, PM Modi or for that matter of fact any Indian Prime Minister can go against Indian public opinion of 'soft policies' towards Pakistan as long as Pakistan's destiny is firmly in hands of Pakistan Army.

In Scenario II, one does not foresee much changes in PM Modi's foreign policy directions and thrusts even if he returns to power with a reduced mandate and therefore with a requirement of greater number of smaller coalition partners. Coalition partners in such an eventuality would be more clamouring for political space for themselves rather than demanding drastic changes in India's foreign policies towards China and Pakistan, especially.

Scenario III entails the remote likelihood of India delivering a fractured electoral mandate in which the sum total of disparate Indian political parties with just about double digit seats each cobble together an unwieldy coalition whose sole aim would be to prevent return to power of PM Modi. It could also envisage a Congress Party with no clear majority of its own but again cobbling together some loose sort of opportunistic coalition. Such coalitions would be absorbed with contending PM aspirants with king-sized egos threatening such coalitions to be short lived and forcing another General Election in 2020.

In Scenario III India's foreign policy gains made during 2014-2019 under PM Modi stands the risk of being retarded and distracted by intra-party squabbles of the coalition partners. None of the probable Prime Ministers in the race have neither the global standing nor adequate experience and exposure to conduct of credible Indian foreign policies.

Scenario III would therefore see the eclipse of India's assertive move towards the earlier aspirational goals of emerging as a Major Power.

Major Powers of the world in Scenario III would be prone to adopt a 'Wait and Watch' posture unsure of India's foreign policy directions, unsure of longevity of a Scenario III government and its stability in resisting existing foreign policy thrust left behind PM Modi.

Concluding, while India waists with abated breath the electoral verdict of May 23 2019 and so would be Major Powers friendly to India, the suspense would be nerve-racking for China and Pakistan as they would like to see the back of PM Modi. In terms of India's national security and its aspirational goals materialising India should really be looking forward to Scenario I materialising.

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