

VIMARSH- INDIA: FOREIGN POLICY OPTIONS AND CHALLENGES BEFORE THE NEXT GOVERNMENT

A country as large as India should not be dominated by anybody, but should have an independent foreign policy
Vimarsh, the monthly discussion series of Vivekananda Kendra International was held on 27th February 09 at 6.30 pm in the premises of Vivekananda Kendra International, Chanakyapuri. The topic of the Vimarsh was 'India: foreign policy options and challenges before the next government' and the speaker was Shri Rajiv Sikri, the former secretary, ministry of external affairs. The vimarsh started as usual with the invocations. The day being the auspicious occasion of Sri Ramakrishna Jayanti, special prayers were chanted by Sri Pravin Dabholkar. It was initiated by Shri Ajit Doval, the honorary director of VKI. and he gave a brief description of the hostile environment in which our nation was placed. He also gave a brief introduction of the speaker.

Sri Rajiv Sikri started his oration by describing how the present world scenario was in a state of transition. He said the power equations in the 21st century are changing and USA which was once considered to be invincible is on the down. But it is still the most powerful nation though showing signs of decline in various areas like economy, military prowess etc. He emphasized on how India should judiciously combine various strategic techniques, so as to bring about a resilience in our foreign policy. This will enable us to promote our interests in the best possible manner. He explained that if India has to make her presence felt in the international arena, as an important nation, then it should stop playing a subservient role to any powerful nation. Such an attitude will not make us strong. 'Power is not given, you have to take power'.

He reflected that as we are living in an era of globalization, everything ranging from mind to terror to economy is being globalized. We have to formulate a policy which should enable us to maintain an international balance without tilting in favour of any country. We should not allow ourselves to succumb to any pressures exerted by any nation because that will lead to undesirable consequences. For example, after the nuclear deal was struck with USA, our old strategic ally Russia did not feel very pleased with it and it increased the price of the nuclear submarine 'Admiral Groshkov' by 400 %. We have to be very clear regarding what position we wish to seek in the international scenario. Do we wish to be at par with the big players like USA, China etc or we want to be the minnows playing second fiddle to them?

We should emphasize more on relationships with our neighbouring troublesome nations like China, Bangladesh, Pakistan etc and formulate strategic techniques to confront their conspiracies. We should never allow any emotions associated with any cultural factors to undermine our international strategies, such as India and China being neighbours from times immemorial, Bengali fraternal ties between India and Bangladesh etc. We should make it very clear to China that Tibet has always been a region having provincial autonomy and it was China's responsibility to make the atmosphere in Tibet conducive enough for the refugees to return and get rehabilitated. He pointed out as China claims Tawang to be their a part of their nation, on the grounds of the 5th Dalai Lama having been born there, India can also retaliate by claiming Kailash-Mansarovar as they have been associated with our Hindu mythology.

He also mentioned that if the need arises, we should not hesitate in adopting subtle techniques such as an efficient exploitation of Indus water sharing agreement which we had with Pakistan, which would lead to the drying of rivers there and subsequent droughts. The most important points mentioned by Shri Rajiv Sikri was that with the information

explosion and all pervasive media, foreign policy diplomacy is not restricted to the Diplomats in external affairs ministry. It is now a public domain. Effective building of public opinion and mature media management have become need of the hour.

The talk was followed by interaction with the audience which comprised of various outstanding personalities like Admiral KK Nayyar, Commodore H. S. Puniya, Brigadier R K Gupta, Shri Sanjeev Sanyal. The Vimarsh concluded with the chanting of the 'Shanti Mantra'

Mukul Kanitkar

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