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## ATAL BIHARI VAJPAYEE AS MINISTER OF EXTERNAL AFFAIRS: AN ASSESSMENT

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### ABSTRACT:

Atal Bihari Vajpayee was not only the dynamic prime minister of India but also a man of high integrity. The simplicity of nature was the main attraction of his personality. He was also the most reputed leader of the history of Indian politics. Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee contributed to Indian politics in multiple ways. He made a major contribution to strengthening democracy in true spirit of the ideal enshrined in Constitution. This article aims to explore the role of Vajpayee in External Affairs of the Indian Government and his foreign policies on different issues. The methodology of this research Endeavour's to be analytical and narrative. Required information have been gathered from different secondary sources like Speeches and statements of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, books and poems written by Atal Bihari Vajpayee and statements of other dignitaries. It is concluded in the present study that Vajpayee's way of handling Indian foreign policy not only earned him praises in India but also in the international community. His approach had been quite realistic and genuine.

### Introduction:

The foreign policy of any country is a reflection of domestic correlation of social forces. Every foreign policy has two core goals—national security and economic betterment. The human factor plays an important role in the formulation and implementation of the foreign policy and for decision making from a set of possible ends and means. Thus, indicating that the foreign policy can never be static but always dynamic. James Rosenau<sup>1</sup>, in his decision-making theory has focused on the linkages and interdependence of domestic and international politics. In this book, he observed that, no foreign policy is formulated without considering its domestic consequences and vice versa. The variables, which affect the foreign policy making process, are organized by Rosenau into five major categories and these are-idiosyncratic, role, bureaucratic, national and systemic. The idiosyncratic variables are concerned with the ideas, perceptions and the personal characteristics of the decision makers. The role variables are connected with the expected rules of behaviour for the prime ministers, presidents, legislators, bureaucrats, pressure group leaders and other elites, who influence and implement foreign policy. The bureaucratic variables are concerned with the structure and the processes of the government and their effects on foreign policy making. In fact, foreign policy always involve the conflicting interests of the bureaucrats, military personnel etc., who try to maximize their influence on the foreign policy making process (B.P. Singh, 2015). The national variables include various national attributes like, size, geographical location, resources, climate, etc.

The foremost striking thing about Atal Bihari Vajpayee's foreign and security policy was its clear-headedness. He knew what he wanted to do from the day he first became the prime minister in May 1996 and through his two truncated terms and a full third term, he pursued his goals tenaciously. In retrospect, it is clear that those goals were not only far-sighted but are essential even today for the peace, stability and prosperity of India and its neighbourhood (Bhattacharya, j, 2023).

Vajpayee had honed his ideas and views on India's foreign policy in the long years he was in the opposition, but the key to his foreign policy was his term as external affairs minister from 1977 to 1979. It was during this period that he took two important initiatives – normalizing relations with Pakistan and with China.

As a member of the Jana Sangh, a constituent of the Janata Party that ran the government during the 1977-79 period, Vajpayee should have been the quintessential hawk; that he was not is a tribute to his ability to transcend his background and pursue goals shaped by his own understanding of the situation. But it also reflected the reality that, given his background, no one would question his 'patriotism' if he reached out to the two countries.

### Need for the Study:

India's foreign policy study under the statesmanship of Atal Bihari Vajpayee has not been studied in a comprehensive manner so far. Further, there has been change and continuity in the foreign policy of India with respect to its boundary neighbours, the major powers, the Indian Ocean security problem and certain regional, international organizations. The non-availability of comprehensive work on these subjects inspired me to take up the present study. The existing study aims to highlight the role of Vajpayee in relation to foreign policy formulation of India and its implementation throughout his long political career.

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## Objectives of the Study:

The present study aimed to explore the role of Vajpayee in External Affairs of the Indian Government and his foreign policies on different issues.

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## Method:

The methodology of this research Endeavour's to be analytical and narrative. Required information have been gathered from different secondary sources like Speeches and statements of Atal Bihari Vajpayee, books and poems written by Atal Bihari Vajpayee and statements of other dignitaries.

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## DISCUSSION:

### *Atal Bihari Vajpayee and the different Non-Alignment Movement*

Non-alignment has been the most significant continuing factor in India's foreign policy ever since our independence in 1947. Non-alignment became one of the guiding principles of India's foreign policy crafted by Jawaharlal Nehru after the independence of India. India has all along perceived non-alignment not as a negative philosophy of taking advantage of differences between great powers, but a commitment to positive cooperation. Thus, the principles of nonalignment, which was the brain child of Nehru, was followed by his successors which indicated India's will to retain its independence without aligning to any power bloc-neither the US nor the Soviet Union. Atal Bihari Vajpayee carried forward the legacy of Nehru and adopted the non-alignment policy, and during the first Summit Conference of Non-aligned Countries held in Yugoslavia, where he quoted the words of late Jawaharlal Nehru, who described non-alignment as the emergence of a „moral force“. However, after coming to power, the Janata Party had stated that in the international field, it will pursue a genuinely non-aligned policy and declared in their election manifesto, that it was committed to „genuine non-alignment.“Here, Vajpayee made it clear that-“Non-alignment is not neutrality“ and emphasizing on their commitment of following this policy, promised to make the foreign policy of non-alignment, as a “genuine one”, “free from attachment to any power bloc,” and to reflect the nation's enlightened interest and its aspirations and priorities at home by emphasizing good neighbour-policy with the countries of South and South-east region. Vajpayee out rightly declared adhering to this policy strictly, during a speech after the Janata party came to power and specified:

“If anything we say or do give rise to the feeling that we have leaned towards a particular bloc, and have surrendered our sovereign right of judging issues on their merit, it will be deviation from the straight but difficult path of non-alignment. The Janata government would never allow this to happen.”

### *Belgrade Conference*

The next meeting of the non-aligned nations was held at Belgrade. The Belgrade Conference meeting was attended by Foreign Ministers of non-aligned nations including Vajpayee from India on 25 July, 1978. Djibouti was admitted as a new member and Pakistan as guest. While appreciating this step Vajpayee said: “We are happy to welcome Djibouti as a member of the movement. We are also glad to greet our neighbour Pakistan in our midst as a guest and we hope it will go on to detach itself from military alliance system.” This depicts the open-mindedness of Vajpayee and farsighted diplomatic vision whereby, he tried to re-develop bilateral relations with Pakistan.

### *Nuclear Test:*

During the first Vajpayee rule for 13 months, NDA gave a push to two initiatives – go nuclear and build closer relations with Pakistan. The BJP has been a great exponent of India going for nuclear weapons. On 11 May 1998, India conducted three nuclear tests at Pokhran in Rajasthan. With Pokhran – II, India declared itself a nuclear weapon state. Soon followed India's ‘nuclear doctrine’ which had three important principles: voluntary moratorium on further tests; ‘no first use’; and ‘minimum credible’ deterrence. Analysts have reported that India had first tried to test nuclear weapons in 1982 under Mrs. Indira Gandhi; later Narasimha Rao tried to test nuclear weapons in 1995 but on each occasions, American intelligence found out and put pressure to stop the testing. It goes to the credit of the first NDA government that India did successfully experiment nuclear devices and declared itself a nuclear weapons state; and thereafter has sought to join the nuclear power club as a responsible nuclear state. There was a strong international reaction against nuclear tests but credit to Indian political leadership and the diplomacy that it was able to successfully withstand these criticisms and sanctions which came in the wake of the tests (Dixit J. N., 1998).

### *Indo-US Relations:*

There were many developments during the tenure of Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee. After the Pokhran II, India engaged US in a dialogue for improved relations with that country. There was a better understanding on the part of US leadership towards India's growing strategic importance. US President Bill Clinton came to India in March 2000. India was able to convey to the US and other powers its complex strategic scenario which had prompted it to go nuclear. US also showed better appreciation of India's security situation especially in the context of 23 cross-border terrorism emanating from Pakistan. Besides, a liberalizing Indian economy offered tremendous opportunities to American firms for trade and investment. US also better understood the rising strategic importance of India in the context of the rise of China. India could anchor US in Asia and help in the ‘peaceful rise’ of China. Relations with US gained a new strategic dimension after the terrorist attacks in US on 11 September 2001 (9/11). US became aware of the danger of international terrorism emanating from Pakistan A fghanistan border region. India assured its support to US in the fight against

international terrorism. Then came the terrorist attack on the Indian Parliament on 13 December 2001 which further highlighted before the world the threat of cross border terrorism and use of terrorism as a tool by Pakistan against India. Bush administration began considering India a strategic partner for the peace and security in Asia and the wider Indian Ocean region. The large-sized India with its growing economic and military capabilities could anchor US in Asia and the Indian Ocean region as a partner for regional peace and stability. Under Bush, US began a strategic dialogue with India. (Gaur Mahendra, Senger Shailendra, 2009) . There were three core issues in the dialogue: civilian nuclear technology; space shield; and trade in dual use technology. Bush administration also lifted several of the sanctions that had been imposed in the wake of the Pokhran – II though other restrictions remained in force. In February 2003, India and US signed a framework agreement to boost trade in high technology area. The dialogue also included aspects of nuclear safeguards and other technology-related safety issues. Then came the civil nuclear energy agreement in 2005 under the next UPA government headed by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh.

#### **India-Pakistan Relations:**

Prime Minister Vajpayee said, ‘you can change friends, not neighbours’. Realizing this geographic fatalism, he took unprecedented initiative to improve relations with Pakistan. He went on a bus trip to Lahore to meet his Pakistani counterpart, Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif. After the meeting in Lahore, the Pakistani PM said that it would be the year of decision on the vexed issue of Kashmir. But then came the set-back. In May 1999, Kargil war broke out when Pakistani troops were found occupying heights in Kargil region. Kargil was the first military confrontation between two nuclear-armed countries. There was change of guard in Pakistan. Pakistan Army Chief, General Pervez Musharraf overthrew the elected government of Nawaz Sharif in October 1999. Prime Minister Vajpayee made another attempt at normalization of relations when he invited Pervez Musharraf to Agra in early 2000 (Singh, V. 2018). The effort did not bear fruits as Pakistan continued to insist on first resolving the ‘core’ issue of Jammu & Kashmir. On 13 December 2001, came the attack on the Indian parliament. Thereafter, relations deteriorated for a long period. Meanwhile, India became closer to US and sought a strategic partnership.

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#### **Conclusion:**

Vajpayee’s way of handling Indian foreign policy not only earned him praises in India but also in the international community. His approach had been quite realistic and genuine. He laid stress on economic self-reliance and his new approach was “to move away from the growth man ship and blind imitation of industrialized states, towards integrated planning in which man is in the centre. This shows India’s Endeavour, with respect to global issues, to solve these through collective means and by consensus and co-operation. Thus, abiding by the aims laid down by the Janata Government, Vajpayee tried to foster cooperation and friendly bilateral relations among the neighbours and in this respect he continued where it was necessary with the policy laid by previous government and made ramifications when it seemed desirable.

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