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# Environmental Security: An Agenda for India's Foreign Policy

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SUMIT GUPTA<sup>1</sup>

## ABSTRACT

*International security scenario is changing rapidly with changes in agendas of common interest. The themes for international collaborations are becoming more and more on cooperation for those common interests. The past decade has seen augmented acknowledgement of the relationship between environment and foreign policy within academic literature and among strategic groups. Increasing verification by various communities for the linkage between environment and security has been discussed in detail in the most recent conferences of UNEP and COP. This study explores India's foreign policy and its role in the environmental security agenda. This study also identifies the relationship between foreign policy and environmental security, which a descriptive survey of the history of the environment has done. New emerging security concerns have been elaborated. In the changing strategic environment, India's initiatives in articulating international security strategies for environmental security have been evaluated in this work. Various efforts of all levels of foreign policy efforts have been traced. Some suggestions have been presented based on this analysis that can help to decision-makers in framing relevant strategy to achieve the agenda of a sustainable world.*

**Keywords:** Foreign Policy, Environmental Security, Climate Change, Environmental Hazards, Solar Alliance.

## I. INTRODUCTION

From the beginning of human life, there has been an unseen relationship between the environment and human beings. The Vedic and ancient literature, the gems of Indian Knowledge System, have too many references to environmental security and the preservation and promotion of the domain. Indian saints are also contributing to the securitisation of environment. In middle age, too many conflicts take place. The essential planning of development revolved around the preparation and victory in a war, which was the superior agenda of that time. Kings and kingdoms ruled for glory and fame. This glory and fame also came from physical grandness for the fulfillment of these objectives. The environment started

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in many ways with the Industrial Revolution and the practice of War between 1400 and 1945 that gave a sense of pace to the extortion of the environment in many ways in which minerals like oil and coal except for learning in steam engines and energy and metals like Iron branch form metal and machines what the mean component the struggle of power in securing amongst nature is struggling for natural resources.

A nation's security and strategic environment change with the change in international scenario. It reflects a view to policy and decision makers for how they continue their current policies and strategies and what to do for the addicted feature, which is stick scenario about India, it has diversity in many dimensions. Internationalization exists more for economic and cultural aspects, not for basic human needs which are related to survival and sustainability. It is not fair for human existence.

The Indian decision makers always in favour of human well-being. It reflects in their work-culture through various policies including Foreign Policy. Since freedom, Indian leader has presented the example of these decision through representation in various Conferences called by international organizations like U. N. O. and other multilateral and bilateral forums. In these platforms, India always tried to show its free-will and well researched point of view on the matter of environment. It was possible through the strong national leadership and foreign policy.

### **Methodology:**

This study aims to investigate the relationship between environmental elements and national security through a multidisciplinary approach. It examined case studies, policy frameworks, and geopolitical ramifications to clarify the growing significance of environmental security in influencing foreign policy. This research employed a qualitative approach, analysing academic literature, official records, and empirical data. Various sources provided a variety of viewpoints to complement the study. The paper attempts to provide a thorough knowledge of how environmental concerns increasingly influence foreign policy agendas and shape the global geopolitical landscape by combining various techniques.

### **Conceptual framework:**

Securitization is an age-old practice in India. At the beginning of the 21st century, it was realized by developing nations that environmental degradation was a threat to security for survival, and developing countries like India pay attention to the environment as a security issue. The Controversy over the term environmental security still exists. Following it, few criticisms came into existence because it is unfit for the agenda of security and does not directly relate to the paraphernalia of national security, or it fails to seek its thematic system. Justice P.N

Bhagawati, in his work “The Crucial Condition in Survey of Environment (1991), has made the term environment clear and simpler to understand. He opines that ‘the term refers to the conditions with and around an organism, which affect the behavior, growth, and development, or life processes, directly or indirectly. It includes the conditions with which the organism interacts. Environmental security is not a soft policy dimension. Environmental insecurity may lead to a survival dilemma. These issues affect the whole of humankind, not specific. So, identification of the effector and affected is also about impossible. Environmental security then spotlights issues such as ecological interdependence, the impact of internationalisation and consumption patterns on the international community and human rights. Barry Buzan defines environmental security as “*maintenance of local and planetary biosphere as an essential support system on the beach all over human enterprises depend.*”<sup>2</sup> The Millennium Report defines *environmental security as the relative public safety from environmental dangers caused by natural or human processes due to ignorance, accident, mismanagement, or design and originating within or across national borders.*<sup>3</sup> And John Barnett defines *Environmental security is the proactive minimization of anthropogenic threats to the functional integrity of the biosphere and thus to its interdependent human component.*<sup>4</sup> These definitions have been framed in reference of the given scope of their research and more hopefully would be true. But as environment and scopechange, the national interest also got change. In reference of India, a broad definition of environment may be as environmental security is an approach *to mitigating threats that can harm security and promote peace, harmony, and prosperity of humans and nature at any level or dimension.*

Broadly, foreign policy is a set of plans of action by which the government of a country conducts its relationship with the international community. The main objective of a foreign policy is always to achieve its interest without hurting the security and development of the nation. Its interest may be the protection of territory accounting and challenges to security as it is related to human development. Foreign policy is about promoting the security and prosperity of people, and the quality of the environment is directly related to a single institution or personality that can be attributed to having exclusive rights or influence in making a Foreign Policy in India. Among many actors, influencers, and makers of India’s foreign policy, the National Security Council, the Ministry of Defence, the MEA-supported Indian Council of World Affairs

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<sup>2</sup>Buzan, Barry (1991) *People, states, and fear: an agenda for international security studies in the post-Cold War era* (New York: Harvester Wheatsheaf)

<sup>3</sup> The Millennium Project, (1997) *State of the Future*. Washington, D.C.: American Council for the United Nations University, Retrieved on 12 June 2023 from <http://107.22.164.43/millennium/es-2def.html>

<sup>4</sup> Barnett, Jon(2001) *The meaning of Environmental Security: Ecological Politics and Policy in New Security Era*, London: Zed Books Ltd.

(ICWA), and the Defence Ministry-supported Institute of Defence Studies and Analysis (IDSA) have emerged as a vital stakeholder in the shaping of India's foreign and security policies. It also has to deal with the negative aspects of internationalization, such as nuclear proliferation, terrorism, pandemics, human and drug trafficking, environmental degradation, and cybercrime, challenges that do not respect national boundaries.

## **II. ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY AS AN INTERNATIONAL AGENDA FOR FOREIGN POLICY**

Human beings are part of the environment and have depended on it for ages. Security is not limited to armed forces. Now, it is a subject of interest to every nation's citizens. The concept of cosmopolitanism explains that even a nation cannot securitize itself in isolation. Regarding environmental security, the goals of a foreign policy may be to reduce the impact of environmental stress, decrease vulnerability, and strengthen the capabilities of restoration, development, and Improvement in preparedness and planning for hazards and disasters. The trail-blazing study of the Brundtland Commission (1987) showed the world the actual means of development. Rio Summit was a landmark in the field of environmental security because it presented the structural system of the agenda at an international level, though it came into existence. The Conference of Parties is also a milestone in environmental security.

As the situation has changed, India is evolving as one of the many poles in the international political, security, and economic architecture, and our non-alignment policy has lost its pride of place. International and regional challenges are another aspect of shaping foreign policy—an enormous list of scholars and academicians who have explored this field earlier. Nowadays, security threats arise less from traditional international politics and more from nontraditional threats. Traditionally, the term 'Security' has been woven with the threat of violence and coercive strength, and the security-related community seldom accepts an institutional culture and experiences from environmentalists. Environmental change is continuously negatively affecting a nation's security, leading to land degradation, climate change, and weather-related natural disasters. Our preconceived notions about security have become tattered. Today, environmental degradation, terrorism, organised crime, resource wars, and epidemic diseases like Corona pose more significant threats to our security than hostile neighbors' armed forces. A single nation-state cannot achieve security alone; an individual can also reach it. Additionally, security has evolved to include new social, economic, political, and environmental facets. A growing public concern over pollution and environmental degradation in the 1960s and 1970s gave rise to the term. All the above are the result of negligence and lack of awareness.

### III. ROLE OF INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE INTERNATIONAL AGENDA OF ENVIRONMENTAL SECURITY:

It is venerable ideas to live in synchronize with environment. In the initial years after independence, India appreciated a defensive approach. It has been keen to contribute to vital action within its boundaries and for collective efforts at the international platform. Population growth, increasing consumption, and decreased production are happening due to climate change. Resource degradation, desertification, water scarcity, rising sea levels, and a boom in natural disasters are already having an enormous effect on international economic and political stability. The role of Indian foreign policy can be evaluated in two shifts, first before the Rio Summit and second after the Rio Summit. In the pre-British period, environmental security was not a new concept for India. It had been imbibed with Indian culture and philosophy for a long time. From Vedas and cultural traditions, the prehistoric period to the medieval period Showed the magnitude of India's awareness of the importance of environmental protection. Various hymns of Vedas were instructed directly about it and also concerned and suggested a variety of situations of environment. The LokKathas and Jataks of the medieval period, like Panchtantra, etc., have also been taught about the importance of the security of the environment. Many Medieval kings established gardens and massive plantations to stabilize the environment and restore the average living standard.

The government of India always presents its freedom and impartial view at every international crisis. The result of this impartiality led to the Non-Alignment. There were some critical episodes where Indian foreign policy showed its effective presence in various international events. In the Vietnam War, the use of chemical agents to destroy significant vegetation caused remediless environmental implications in Vietnam.<sup>5</sup> The massive civilian population and natural ecosystems were destroyed<sup>6</sup>. At that time, the Prime Minister of India strongly condemned the U.S. action. This showed India's solidarity.

The Kuwaiti oil fires during the Gulf War of 1991 were brought on by the Iraqi forces' "scorched earth" withdrawal strategy. When Iraqi forces unlocked valves at the Sea Island oil facility, oil from multiple tankers was released into the Persian Gulf, and the most significant oil spill of modern history happened. Additionally, oil was thrown into the center of the desert. The Iraq War in 2003 and the Gulf War in 1991 had significant environmental effects. After the wars,

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<sup>5</sup>Westing, Arthur H. (1983)The Environmental Aftermath of Warfare in VietNam,Vol.23,Issue 2, Natural Resources Journal,Retrieved on 18 July 2023 from <https://digitalrepository.unm.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2568&context=nrj>

<sup>6</sup>Orians, G. H., & Pfeiffer, E. W. (1970). Ecological Effects of the War in Vietnam. *Science*, 168(3931), 544–554.

the Persian Gulf countries, particularly Kuwait and Iraq, faced severe environmental catastrophes. The results of the conflict and the use of chemical weapons on nature and public health are among the environmental effects.

During the initial debates, this kind of equity-based discourse was the focal point of India's climate change policy. Given that India's per capita emission was significantly lower than developed countries, developed nations insisted on adopting "per capita equity" to establish who was responsible for reducing GHG emissions. The notion of "per capita equity," India's willingness to consider its contractual responsibilities, and its demand for separate monies under the Climate Convention were all part of its position during INC sessions. The UNFCCC's language does not impose legally binding duties on underdeveloped nations while acknowledging advanced nations as most accountable for causing climate change. The above was the noteworthy consistency of India's foreign policy to prioritize climate change interventions.

The National Centre for Polar and Ocean Research (NCPOR) has been working with the objective of the Antarctic and the Arctic being unique places to research ozone depletion. It also provides a clean and stable environment for scientific observations and monitoring of international environmental changes. The Madrid Protocol was adopted in 1991 and came into force in 1997;<sup>7</sup> it deals with protecting and preventing the Polar environment. India signed it in 1992 with a comprehensive protection of the Antarctic environment. About the Arctic, India established its Research Station Himadri in 2008, intending to understand climate change and its impact at the international level. The prudence of India's foreign policy is to sign an MoU with Ny Ales mud Scientific Manager Committee for Arctic Research and Madrid protocol for Antarctic research.

The United Nations Convention to Combat Desertification (UNCCD) is the only lawfully binding international accord connecting environment and development matters to the agenda of land. In 1994, India signed the UNCCD and ratified it in 1996. India hosted the Fourteenth Session of the Conference of Parties (COP - 14) from 29th August to 14th September 2019 in India. At this conference, India launched a flagship project on enhancing the capacity of forest landscape restoration (FLR) and the Bonn Challenge in India<sup>8</sup>. All these initiatives show the

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<sup>7</sup>Union Minister Dr Jitendra Singh says India is committed to curtailing carbon emissions in the Antarctic atmosphere, Press Information Bureau, 04 OCT 2021, Retrieved on 11 August 2023 from <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleasePage.aspx?PRID=1760870>

<sup>8</sup>Government of India, India will lead by example in combating desertification: Union Environment Minister, Press Information Bureau, 17 June 2019, Retrieved on 8 June 2023 from <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1574780>.



level of commitment to India.

Depletion of the stratospheric ozone layer is of great concern to the world. It plays a protective role in protecting the earth from harmful ultraviolet rays. India's contribution to international efforts to protect the ozone layer will require significantly reorientating ozone-depleting production and consumption patterns, with clear implications for industrial structure. On 17th September 1992, India signed the Montreal Protocol on Substances that Deplete the Ozone Layer<sup>9</sup>. The London meeting also facilitated the transfer of new ozone-depleting technologies to Article 5 countries and those Parties (developing country Parties whose consumption of ozone-depleting substances is less than 0.3 kg per person per year). Agreed to establish an interim multilateral fund to provide funding; India is listed as an Article 5 country because its per capita consumption is well below the target of 0.3kg per capita.<sup>10</sup> India's expression of related concerns has been widely supported by the heads of the Multilateral Fund (MLF) mechanism at various points during the development of the Montreal Protocol. India insisted on establishing an international fund to reward technology transfer on reasonable terms and not to use the assistance received for other purposes. China joined India in calling for establishing a global fund to protect the ozone layer. India is also providing capacity-building training on the implementation requirements of the Montreal Protocol for National Ozone Unit (NOU) officers. By summing up these steps, all efforts are towards an environmentally secure future.

Marine pollution is defined as introducing elements into the marine environment by humans, resulting in adverse effects such as damage to biological resources, threats to human health, and disturbance of marine activities, including fisheries, which are essential qualities for using seawater will be Reduced equipment. Marine pollution includes different types of pollution affecting marine ecosystems, such as chemical and plastic pollution. A vast amount of litter and a high quantity of sediments spread in marine water through various ways, but at the National level, the Ministry of Environment constituted an authority named the National Centre for Coastal Research and two significant programmes called SwachchhSagar and SurakshitSagar Campaigns in 2022. all of the above shows the sensitivity of the Government of India for a better-shared future on mutual commitments.

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<sup>9</sup>United Nations Environment Program, About Montreal Protocol, Retrieved on 1 September 2023 from <https://www.unep.org/ozonaction/who-we-are/about-montreal-protocol> (ODS)

<sup>10</sup>Measure for measure, Down To Earth, New Delhi, 31 October 1997, Retrieved on 1 July 2023 from <https://www.downtoearth.org.in/coverage/measure-for-measure-24713>



#### IV. MODERN SCENARIO

India is continuously leading international platforms in a modern scenario. The platforms in which India tried to convince the international community with its agendas of global benefit became successful at some levels. On the behalf of nation, the present national leadership is trying hard take various stakeholders on a same platform and make them agree for the common interest of human survival – environmental security. Three profound achievements of Indian foreign policy in contemporary scenario have been presented.

The world's largest seed storage facility, **Svalbard Global Seed Vault or Doomsday Vault**, is situated in Norway<sup>11</sup>. Influenced by it, India has established its seed bank at Chang La in Laddakh (Now a Union Territory). In 2010, under the aegis of the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO), it was the result of a joint effort of the Defence Institute of High-Altitude Research (DIHAR) and the National Bureau of Plant Genetic Resources (NBPGR). Over 5,000 seed accessions have been preserved in it.<sup>12</sup> The Government of India has also taken the initiative by passing the following proposals at the cabinet meeting in November 2011, moved by the Department of Agriculture and Cooperation. India showed its consent for signing the Agreement on Establishing a SAARC Regional Seed Bank on shared bases of common bill.<sup>13</sup> With the consent of the Prime Minister of India, the Minister of Foreign Affairs signed the above agreement on behalf of India at its 17th session of SAARC summit meeting in Maldives. All these goals are dedicated to the future generation along with us.

Solar power is the most readily available to the human population in renewable sources except polls for a specific time. In this way, Prime Minister Narendra Modi and then French President Francois Hollande launched The International Solar Alliance (ISA) at the United Nations Climate Change Conference in Paris on November 30, 2015.<sup>14</sup> India is not only a founding member, but also plays an essential role in the alliance as a host country, making a significant contribution to achieving its goals. ISA is the first international organization to have its secretariat in India. India is targeting 100GW of solar power by 2022, which will account for a

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<sup>11</sup> Jennifer Duggan, Inside The 'Doomsday' Vault, Times, London, Retrieved on 21 October 2023 from <https://time.com/doomsday-vault/>

<sup>12</sup> Pacha, Aswath, What's inside the Svalbard Global Seed Vault ?, The Hindu, New Delhi. 26 February 2018, Retrieved on 13 July 2023 from <https://www.thehindu.com/sci-tech/science/whats-inside-the-svalbard-global-seed-vault/article22858978.ece>

<sup>13</sup> Government of India, Establishing of the SAARc Regional Seed Bank, Retrieved on 17 July 2023 from <https://agricoop.nic.in/sites/default/files/SAARK%20Seed%20Bank.PDF>

<sup>14</sup> International Solar Alliance, The ISA Framework Agreement receives 15 ratifications, Retrieved on 4 August 2023 from <https://isolaralliance.org/uploads/docs/3ea82509578af6cf14d32f6fab2152.pdf>

tenth of the ISA's target.<sup>15</sup> "India will produce 175 GW electricity from renewable sources by 2022, and 100 GW will be from solar energy," Mr Modi said, addressing the ISA<sup>16</sup>. People hope to be part of this initiative for a better and sustainable world.

India's focus on biofuels aimed to reduce carbon emissions, increase energy security, and provide an additional income source for farmers through initiatives like promoting ethanol production from various feedstocks such as sugarcane, biomass, and other agricultural residues. Following it, To strengthen global cooperation for rapid adoption and deployment of biofuels, the Global Biofuels Alliance (GBA) was launched on 9<sup>th</sup> September 2023, on the sidelines of the G20 Summit in New Delhi with the support of 19 countries and 12 international organizations.<sup>17</sup> The GBA represents a collaborative effort involving governments, international organizations, and industries. It unites major consumers and producers of biofuels alongside interested nations from the Global South to collectively advance the development and widespread use of biofuels. It was also a landmark of Indian leadership and foreign policy.

## V. CONCLUSION

Environmental threats have no territorial boundaries, and a nation can achieve overall security if environmental security moves out of the state-centric phenomena. The environment has emerged as a conjunction for defence, foreign, and security policies because it is the source of cooperation and conflict between and among two or more nations. There is a need for a sustainable environment for every nation to survive for the long term. So, the only way is to talk, treaty, or cooperation. The core of all policy is the well-being of humankind. All human, wherever they live, they want their essential environment to live. The idea of a common enemy should be redefined with new environmental threats and challenges. The environment equally behaves for all. So, there should be unity in all nations' policy-making or international relations. International Security mechanisms can provide desirable results for peace and development in the modern era. Outstanding inventions, like the internet, can provide a platform for people to engage with each other quickly to get resolution or protection from any emerging threat and challenge to environmental security. However, environmental threats and challenges

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<sup>15</sup>Jayakumar, PB, ISA wants to solarise all un-electrified Primary Health Centers in member countries, *Business Standard*, New Delhi, 12 June 2020, Retrieved on 22 June 2023 from <https://www.businesstoday.in/opinion/interviews/story/isa-wants-to-solarise-all-un-electrified-primary-health-centers-in-member-countries-260984-2020-06-12>

<sup>16</sup>Raghavan, T.C.A. Sharad, What is the International Solar Alliance? *The Hindu*, New Delhi, March 11, 2018, Retrieved on 11 October 2023 from <https://www.thehindu.com/business/what-is-international-solar-alliance/article23041912.ece>

<sup>17</sup>Government of India, Global Biofuel Alliance: One of the priorities under India's G20 Presidency, Press Information Bureau, 18 December 2023, Retrieved on 20 December 2023 from <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1987807>

significantly threaten international security agendas like regional stability, economic enlargement, and democratization. Environmental security is not a single state-centric approach because the term environment has many folds, and no nation can mitigate these threats and challenges alone.

Transnational and multinational companies are working as dominant factors in pushing their interest into various national policies, including environmental policies. India's foreign policy is shifting towards emerging national security interests, and formal military threats are replaced by a common security agenda in which environmental security is at the topmost priority. The national interest moves from defence buildup to environmental securitization. It is because of the time-consuming process of restoring as in stabilizing. Now, military interests seem short today. In this way, recent governments have performed a leading role in approaching this emerging dimension of environmental security.

## **VI. RECOMMENDATIONS**

Now, the time has come to establish a multidimensional platform comprised of all possible assets critical to the environment to cope with the threats and challenges. The current administration is doing visionary work on the international environmental security agenda. Such efforts would be proactive because the recognition of environmental issues as a common problem in which most nation-states have a vested interest, and the process of coping with these problems in various ways suggests establishing cooperation and understanding among nations.

- There is a need for a universal system for environmental security issues that all can accept and respect.
- More active diplomatic activities are needed to approach this vulnerable dimension of security.
- A minimum standard should be declared to be achieved by nations States by and by
- Adoption and redefining the nation of laws and rules of the various organisations related to the environment should be promoted to advance emerging environmental threats and challenges.
- Competition is a natural human nature that ultimately leads to development, and new inventions and achievements can fulfill successive ways to the international agenda of environmental security.
- India will need access to modern technologies to cope with these non-traditional security threats and adopt new media platforms for a root level of awareness in its diasporas.

- Foreign policy must focus on emerging global security needs to be a role player in international politics, particularly to ramp up its preparedness.
- Environmental security will be the joint agenda as a shared responsibility for SAARC, BIMSTEC, IOR RAC, and other co-operations.

It is more difficult to outline an International Security interest to form an International Security strategy that can be supported internationally. However, the environment will play a vital role in the positive framework for the futuristic environmental scenario. It can be possible under the leadership of the UN. Still, these are hard to follow properly as developing and underdeveloped countries feel insecure and not much affected by international politics and culture.

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