



Gujral Doctrine of Foreign Policy

For Prelims: [Gujral Doctrine](#), [Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty \(CTBT\)](#), [South Asian Countries](#), [Bilateral Negotiations](#), [South East Asia](#), [Water-Sharing Treaty, 1977](#), [Mahakali River](#).

For Mains: Impact of Gujral Doctrine on India's Foreign Policy.

Source: IE

Why in the News?

Recently, the **11th death anniversary** of the precursor of **Gujral doctrine**, **IK Gujral**, the **12th Prime Minister of India** has been marked on **November 30**.

- He is the only **Prime Minister** with a **foreign policy approach** identified with his name the [Gujral Doctrine](#).

Who is Inder Kumar Gujral?

- **Inder Kumar Gujral** was sworn in as the **12th Prime Minister of India** from **April 1997 to May 1998**.
- **IK Gujral** can be remembered for **two significant contributions to Indian foreign policy**:
 - He propounded the '**Gujral doctrine**' when he was the **Union minister of External Affairs from 1996 to 1997**.
 - Despite **international pressure**, **Gujral** firmly refused to sign the [Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty \(CTBT\)](#) in **October 1996**.

What is the Gujral Doctrine?

- The **Gujral doctrine** delineated its approach towards **India's neighbors**, which later came to be known as the **Gujral Doctrine**. This consisted of **five basic principles**. It was outlined at a speech in **Chatham House in London** in **September 1996**.
- The five basic principles of **Gujral Doctrine**:
 - **India**, surrounded by neighbors such as **Nepal, Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, and Sri Lanka**, doesn't seek reciprocity but instead offers assistance wholeheartedly, guided by **goodwill and trust**.
 - **South Asian** nations **won't tolerate** the use of their territory to harm the interests of another country in the region.
 - None will interfere in the **internal affairs** of another.
 - All [South Asian Countries](#) must respect each other's **territorial integrity** and sovereignty.
 - Nations will settle all their disputes through **peaceful bilateral negotiations**."
- The **Gujral Doctrine** believed that **India's significant size** and population naturally positioned it as a key player in [South East Asia](#).
- To enhance its standing and reputation, the doctrine advocated adopting a non-dominant

approach towards smaller neighboring countries. It, thus, recognises the supreme importance of friendly, cordial relations with neighbors.

- It also stressed the significance of maintaining ongoing dialogue and refraining from unnecessary provocations, such as commenting on the internal affairs of other nations.

How Successful was the Gujral Doctrine?

- Gujral's approach to foreign policy helped strengthen trust and **cooperation in India's neighborhood**.
- The [Water-Sharing Treaty, 1977](#) between **India** and **Bangladesh** expired in **1988**, and negotiations failed due to inflexibility on both sides. The resolution of the [water-sharing dispute](#) with Bangladesh came in just **three months** in **1996-97**.
- India obtained **Bhutanese approval for a canal project to increase water flow** to the Ganga.
- This almost coincided with the treaty with **Nepal** for taming the [Mahakali river](#) for the **generation of hydel power**.
- It was followed by agreements with **Sri Lanka** for expanding development cooperation.
- Also, it led to the starting of composite dialogue with Pakistan.
 - The composite dialogue was based on the principle that entire spectrums of relationships came under sincere problem-solving dialogues.
 - Cooperation must begin on agreed terms in agreed areas (trade, travel, culture etc.) even as certain disputes remain unresolved.

What are the Criticism of Gujral Doctrine?

- **Lenient approach toward Pakistan:** Gujral doctrine was criticized for going too soft on Pakistan, and leaving India vulnerable to the threats of the future, including the many terror attacks.
- **Security Concerns:** It was perceived by some as being too idealistic and neglecting India's security concerns. Critics argued that the doctrine did not adequately address the security challenges posed by some of India's neighbors, especially in the context of historical conflicts and ongoing geopolitical issues.
- **Failure to Address Bilateral Issues:** The Gujral Doctrine did not effectively address long standing bilateral issues between India and its neighbors. **For example**, issues like **territorial disputes**, and **cross-border terrorism** were not given sufficient attention according to some critics.
- **Domestic Opposition:** Some argued that the emphasis on goodwill and non-reciprocity might be perceived as weakness and could be exploited by adversaries.

Way Forward

- **Balancing Idealism and Realism:** Future foreign policies should strike a balance between **idealistic principles and realistic assessments** of security challenges. Ensuring national security should be a paramount consideration.
- **Comprehensive Conflict Resolution:** Addressing unresolved bilateral issues with neighbors requires a comprehensive and proactive approach. Dialogue must encompass **territorial disputes** and **security concerns**.
- **Adapting to Evolving Threats:** Recognizing the evolving nature of security threats, future doctrines should incorporate strategies to counter terrorism and ensure the safety of the nation.
- **Strengthening Regional Alliances:** Building on the positive aspects of the **Gujral Doctrine**, India should continue strengthening **regional alliances** and cooperation for mutual benefit.
- **Public Diplomacy and Domestic Consensus:** In crafting **foreign policies**, **fostering domestic consensus** is crucial. Public diplomacy efforts can help in conveying the rationale behind diplomatic decisions, mitigating potential domestic opposition.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Mains

Q. At the international level, bilateral relations between most nations are governed on the policy of promoting one's own national interest without any regard for the interest of other nations. This leads to conflicts and tension between nations. How can ethical consideration help resolve such tensions? Discuss with specific examples. **(2015)**

Q. In respect of India-Sri Lanka relations, discuss how domestic factors influence foreign policy. **(2013)**

Q. 'The long-sustained image of India as a leader of the oppressed and marginalised nations has disappeared on account of its new found role in the emerging global order.' Elaborate. **(2019)**

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