



# From Strategic Realism to Nation Integration: Sardar Patel's Strategic Vision and the Making of Modern India

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**Abstract-** Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel, who was India's inaugural Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Home Affairs, provides a perfect source of inspiration through his legacy as the first Deputy Prime Minister and Minister of Home Affairs. His exceptional leadership in the integration of princely states into independent India stands as a remarkable example for leaders across various fields. His relentless dedication and strategic diplomacy resulted in the unification of 562 princely states into a cohesive India. Sardar Patel embodied a strong character and dedication across various fields of national importance. His perspectives and ideas regarding India's long-term security and the evolving geopolitical landscape were both realistic and foresighted. Patel's views on India's international challenges were largely influenced by the historical context of his time and his role as a builder of the nation. He recognized the implications of the 'cold-war' phenomenon and its impact on the geopolitical tensions among major powers. A staunch advocate of democracy, Patel opposed Communism. Patel's inclusive strategy made certain that the varied perspectives and desires of the princely states were acknowledged and valued, creating a feeling of unity and belonging among the populace. His legacy as the "Iron Man of India" still serves as an inspiration for leaders globally, highlighting the significance of unity in constructing a robust and thriving nation. As a pragmatist and realist, Patel was an astute analyst of global affairs and promoted a practical approach to foreign policy over mere symbolic idealism. He consistently insisted that no action should be taken that might jeopardize India's territorial integrity, particularly warning against the internationalization of the Kashmir conflict. "Let me be clear, we will not yield an inch of Kashmir territory to anyone," Patel is famously quoted as saying. His inclusive vision was highlighted by his emphasis on secularism, protection of minority rights, and promotion of Hindi as the national language. Patel's legacy, characterized by his dedication to national unity, administrative efficiency, and strategic foresight, continues to serve as an inspiration and roadmap for India's progress toward a bright, united, and prosperous future. This paper seeks to analyse Sardar Patel's perspective during a period in history when the geopolitical landscape, both domestically and internationally, had a significant impact on India's overall foreign policy. Indeed, his role in the development of India's foreign policy was crucial to the survival and consolidation of India as a country.

**Keyword:** Sardar Patel, Foreign Policy, Pragmatist, Communism, Integration.

## I. Introduction

History is abundant with prominent figures who have significantly contributed to the formation of their respective nation-states. India, during its quest for independence in the 20th century, was also replete with such eminent personalities. Vallabhbhai Patel, more widely recognized as Sardar Patel, emerged as a pivotal figure in 20th century India. He was among the most esteemed individuals who advocated for independence and played a substantial role in shaping Indian politics in the post-independence era as well. With his astute political insight, he assumed a vital role in the amalgamation of approximately 562 princely states into the Indian Union, excluding Jammu and Kashmir, Junagadh, and Hyderabad. He served as the inaugural Home Minister and Deputy Prime Minister of independent India, and his steadfast commitment to the unification of the nation earned him the moniker 'Iron Man of India.'

Upon his passing, Girija Shankar Bajpai, the Secretary-General of the Ministry of External Affairs, remarked, "We convene today to lament the loss and to honour the legacy of an exceptional patriot, an exemplary administrator, and a remarkable individual. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel embodied all three attributes, a rare amalgamation in any historical period and within any nation" (Press Information Bureau, 1950). For the majority of historians, Patel is recognized as one of the preeminent freedom fighters in the Indian national movement, whose pivotal role in fostering the unity of India remains unequivocal.



Nonetheless, anyone who reads his works and agrees with his opinions on international relations would undoubtedly concur that he had a realistic outlook on world events. In contrast to Prime Minister Nehru's idealistic ideals, his thoughts on the geopolitical climate of the moment were not only relevant but also grounded in reality. Although Nehru was constantly in the spotlight, Sardar Patel occasionally gained greater notoriety and support than Nehru. Patel had greater popularity within the Congress Party than Nehru did, even during the freedom movement (Godbole, 2014, p. 1). Gandhi, Patel, and Nehru were elected by the provincial Congress committees to lead the Lahore Congress in 1929, according to D.V. Tahmankar's book. Again, in 1946, twelve provincial Congress committees had nominated Patel for the presidency; and only three [had nominated] Nehru. But on both the occasions, Gandhi intervened and made his loyal follower Patel retire" (Tahmankar, as cited in Godbole, 2014, p. 2). Sardar Patel was not interested in mere visions and ideals. To him, the first pre-requisite was a strong, united, and prosperous India. It was only after this was achieved that India could afford to have visions or ideals. This thinking was clearly visible in his ideas and views on the contemporary times, on India's foreign policy and the emerging geopolitical situation in the region. V.P. Menon has quoted Vallabhbhai Patel saying, "It will be folly to ignore realities; facts take their revenge if they are not faced squarely and well" (Patel, as cited in Menon, 1956, p. 494). Very soon Patel was proved right.

## **II. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's Contribution to National Security**

According to Harold Laswell, 1950 "The distinctive meaning of national security means freedom from foreign dictation." Lasswell's assertion that national security is about freedom from foreign dictate underscores the supreme importance of sovereignty and independence. This principle, fundamental to a nation's ability to exercise self-determination, safeguard its interests, and pursue its foreign policy objectives, was championed by men like Sardar Patel in India's struggle for freedom from British colonial rule. Patel's tireless efforts to strengthen India's sovereignty and territorial integrity exemplify the practical application of Lasswell's theoretical framework.

Sardar Patel's contribution to national security is most prominently reflected in his efforts to integrate the princely states into the Indian Union. At the time of independence, India was a conglomeration of British-administered provinces and over 500 princely states, each of which had the option of joining India, Pakistan or remaining independent. Patel's diplomatic acumen and strategic foresight were crucial in persuading most of these states to join India. His approach involved negotiation, political pressure and, when necessary, the use of force, as seen in the integration of Hyderabad and Junagadh. Patel's successful integration of these states laid the foundation for a unified and secure India.

Patel also focused on strengthening the internal security apparatus. He played a key role in the establishment and organisation of the Indian Administrative Service (IAS) and the Indian Police Service (IPS), ensuring a strong administrative structure for maintaining law and order in the newly independent nation. His emphasis on a disciplined and efficient bureaucracy was crucial in addressing the challenges of a diverse and newly formed country. "National security then is the ability to preserve the nation's physical integrity and territory; to maintain its economic relations with the rest of the world on reasonable terms; to preserve its nature, institution, and governance from disruption from outside; and to control its borders." (Harold Brown, U.S. Secretary of Defense, 1977-1981) Harold Brown's definition of national security aligns seamlessly with Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's contributions to India's security, encompassing multiple dimensions.

## **III. Physical Integrity and Territorial Security**

Harold Brown has placed a strong emphasis on protecting the country's territorial integrity and physical borders. The integration of several princely states into the Indian Union was greatly aided by Sardar Patel. In order to protect India's physical integrity and draw distinct borders, this territorial integration was a crucial step.

### **Economic Security**

Brown highlighted the significance of financial steadiness and worldwide financial relations. Patel perceived the significance of a solid economy for the nation's security. Sardar Patel imagined a quickly industrialized India to diminish outside reliance and modernize the outfitted strengths. Be that as it may, he perceived the significance of rural restoration to address unemployment and destitution. He pushed a adjusted financial approach, accentuating investment-led development, reserve funds, and expanded generation. Patel rejected short-term arrangements and favoured a long-term methodology based on sound financial standards and down to business



arrangements.

### **Political and Social Security**

Brown focused the got to protect the nation's political framework and social texture. Patel played a key part in forming India's majority rule educate and advancing national solidarity. He worked energetically to smother communal pressures and guarantee a smooth exchange of control from British colonial run the show to Indian self-government.

### **Border Security**

Brown emphasizes the importance of border control. Patel's efforts in securing India's borders, particularly in the disputed areas of Kashmir and Hyderabad, were crucial in maintaining the country's territorial integrity. He also played a key role in establishing a strong Border Security Force to protect India's borders.

## **IV. Sardar Patel's Views on India's National Security and Geopolitical Challenges: Insights on Kashmir, Pakistan, Tibet, and China**

Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's key vision expected India's future security dangers. He supported unequivocal military activity in Kashmir amid the 1947 tribal attack, perceiving Pakistan's persevering antagonistic vibe. In expansion, he moreover saw the perils of China's expansionist desire, particularly after its occupation of Tibet. Patel accentuated the basic of military readiness and a cautious outside approach to protect India's sway and territorial steadiness.

## **V. Sardar Patel's stance on Kashmir and Pakistan**

The contrasts between Nehru and Patel developed during the case of Pakistan. In this case Gandhi himself was the most prominent against Patel. He went on an uncertain quick fast to challenge against Patel's halting the instalment of Rs 55 crore to Pakistan. (Basu, 2014). Patel had shrewdly conceded the instalment until the issue of Kashmir and the predicament of the Hindu minority there was settled to the fulfilment of all stakeholders. India was beneath no commitment to pay the whole sum at once. In any case, Gandhi's quiet and his declining wellbeing constrained Patel to allow in to his requests. Whereas Patel regarded Nehru's wishes with respect to Kashmir, their contradictions on the issue have frequently been ignored (Basu, 2014).

Nehru's approach, which permitted Kashmir to hold an Islamic personality, has been lauded by his supporters. Be that as it may, faultfinders contend that Nehru's activities, at the side discolouring the notoriety of the Hindu Maharaja Hari Singh; have contributed to the continuous Kashmir strife (Basu, 2014). In any case, this explanation is off base. Nehru's precondition for increase was that the Maharaja hands over control to Sheik Abdullah, who did not speak to either the Hindu or Sikh populaces or whose notoriety among Muslims, indeed within the exceedingly enraptured environment he had made a difference make, was flawed (Singh, 2011, p. 242). Nehru saw Sheik Abdullah as vital to both destroying the two-nation hypothesis and building up India's common qualifications (Singh, 2011, p. 242). In any case, his choice to internationalize the Kashmir issue at the UN, fundamentally for individual pick up, and his baseless guarantee of a plebiscite, advance complicated the circumstance. It was Patel who eventually spared the day, as prove by Common Sam Manekshaw's account of Patel's conclusive mediation in requesting the airdrop of Indian troops to avoid the drop of Srinagar amid the 1948 Indo-Pak war (Jha, 1996). Patel afterward conceded to Baxi Ghulam Mohammad his failure to resolve the Kashmir issue due to a need of Nehru's believe (Chopra, 2002, p. 274).

## **VI. Sardar Patel's stance on Tibet and China**

Sardar Patel and Jawaharlal Nehru had different views about China and Tibet. While Nehru, driven by his vision of Asian unity, favoured appeasement of China, Patel was more cautious. Nehru's recognition of Chinese sovereignty over Tibet in 1954, despite the unresolved border issue, was a strategic blunder. Patel, on the other hand, had already foreseen the potential threat posed by China's control over Tibet. He advocated a proactive approach without resorting to imperialism, a distinct characteristic of Indian civilisation. Patel warned Nehru about China's expansionist ambitions, but his concerns were dismissed. Nehru's faith in China's peaceful intentions, rooted in shared experiences of colonial oppression, blinded him to the reality of China's growing assertiveness. Patel and Nehru's divergent views on Sino-Indian relations highlight the far-reaching consequences



of contrasting approaches to foreign policy and strategic miscalculations.

On November 7, 1950, Sardar Patel wrote a letter to Prime Minister Nehru, highlighting the grave implications of China's military incursion into Tibet earlier that year. Patel warned that this development forced India to adopt a two-front defence strategy, a necessity unprecedented in centuries. He underlined Tibet's strategic importance, emphasising the radical change in India's security landscape. Patel urged a comprehensive reassessment of India's defence posture in light of China's territorial expansion. His visionary comments continue to resonate today, serving as a stark reminder of the enduring geopolitical challenges facing India.

While Western imperialism and Chinese irredentism and communist imperialism differ in their methods, the latter is arguably more insidious due to its ideological cloak. This disguise masks underlying racial, national, and historical claims, making it a potent and dangerous force. India's security landscape has evolved, with traditional threats from the west and northwest persisting while a new challenge emerges from the north and northeast. This dual-front scenario, unprecedented in centuries, necessitates a fundamental shift in India's defense strategy. Sardar Patel's prescient warning about the threat posed by China's control of Tibet aligns with the Tibetan government's plea to the United Nations on November 7, 1950. The Tibetan appeal, while acknowledging the futility of resisting Chinese aggression, underscores the international community's responsibility to halt such actions. India's 1954 Sino-Indian Agreement on Trade with Tibet, which enshrined the principles of Peaceful Coexistence or Panchsheel, inadvertently legitimized China's military occupation of Tibet.

Dr. Bhimrao Ambedkar, a prominent Indian statesman, expressed deep skepticism about the sincerity of China's commitment to these principles. He pointed out the stark contradiction between China's professed adherence to Panchsheel and its harsh treatment of Buddhists within its own borders. Ambedkar warned the Indian Prime Minister that China's growing influence in Tibet posed a significant threat to India's security. He cautioned that by allowing China to consolidate its control over Tibet, India had inadvertently facilitated the deployment of Chinese forces along its borders, potentially endangering India's territorial integrity. Patel's astute assessment of the Chinese threat was shared by others. He was prepared to challenge Nehru's foreign policy during a crucial cabinet meeting scheduled for 21 November 1950.

With the support of Rajagopalachari and KM Munshi and the anticipated support of Baldev Singh, Jagjivan Ram and Sri Prakash, Patel was prepared to confront Nehru's China policy. However, his untimely absence from the meeting may have changed the course of history. Deeply upset by Nehru's approach to China, Patel was particularly distressed by India's failure to protect the Tibetan people who had placed their trust in India. He accused the Chinese government of deceit and betrayal, exposing their double-dealing and their calculated aggression against Tibet. Patel's prophetic words are a poignant reminder of the costly consequences of underestimating China's intentions. Patel's foresight was evident when he warned Nehru about China's real intentions, saying that India considered China a friend, but the feeling was not reciprocated. However, Nehru dismissed these concerns and denied any immediate threat from China. He also rejected Patel's proposal to modernise the Indian Army, citing economic constraints and possible adverse effects on India's overall defence position. Cabinet colleague V.N. Gadgil shared Patel's concerns about China's ambitions and warned about the possibility of Chinese aggression in Tibet and India's northeastern regions. Patel emphasised the weakness of India's northeastern border, particularly through Nepal, Bhutan, and Sikkim, which China could exploit to infiltrate and destabilize India. He warned against any indecisiveness or lack of decisiveness in formulating and implementing India's foreign policy, as it could weaken India's position and exacerbate existing threats. Patel also highlighted the potential security implications of China's growing influence, particularly with regard to the Communist Party of India. He warned that the party could now have easier access to Chinese communist networks and overseas communist organisations, posing a threat to India's internal security. Had Patel been the decision-maker, he would have taken a more cautious and strategic approach to India's foreign policy, prioritising national security interests.

In contrast to Nehru's unwavering support for China's entry into the United Nations, Patel expressed his objections, citing China's aggressive behaviour towards Tibet and its involvement in the Korean War. He questioned the wisdom of advocating for a nation that had repeatedly turned down India's overtures. The Sino-Indian War of 1962 exposed the flaws of Nehru's idealistic approach to China. His belief in developing friendship through appeasement proved ineffective in curbing Chinese aggression. Patel's foresight, including his suggestion to consider Tibet's independence as a strategic countermeasure, could have significantly altered Asia's geopolitical landscape.



## VII. Sardar Vallabhbhai Patel's Contribution to Nationalism

Patel inherited a strong sense of nationalism from his father, a veteran of the 1857 revolt. As a child he spent countless winter nights in peasant huts, influenced by his father's stories of the uprising. Soon, he left his rural roots to work in the busy textile mills of Ahmedabad, the place where Gandhiji would later establish his first ashram. Driven by ambition, Patel studied diligently at night and saved every single rupee. At the age of 33, he finally fulfilled his dream of studying law in London. Unlike Nehru, who frequented the city's elite, Patel immersed himself in the libraries of the Inns of Court. To save money, he would walk ten miles daily between the courts and his modest accommodation. The day he was called to the bar was a turning point. Without hesitation, he booked a ticket home and vowed never to leave India again. Patel and Nehru were both leaders of independent India, but their visions for the nation were fundamentally different.

Patel, a pragmatist, was skeptical of Nehru's idealistic dreams of a socialist utopia, dismissing them as mere rhetoric. He believed in the efficacy of capitalism, and advocated adapting it to Indian realities rather than rejecting it outright. Coming from an industrial city, Patel's outlook was influenced by the tangible world of machines, factories and textiles. In contrast, Nehru's upbringing in Kashmir, a land of natural beauty, influenced his romantic and idealistic outlook. Patel's focus was entirely on domestic affairs. As home minister, he reformed India's civil services, ensuring their loyalty to the nation rather than the British colonial legacy. While Nehru attracted international attention and assumed the role of Gandhi's successor, it was Patel who commanded the real power and loyalty of the people. Yet, history often overlooks Patel's crucial role. As one of his colleagues rightly put it, Patel was "the last Mughal of India," a leader of immense power and influence whose legacy is often suppressed by the more glamorous Nehru-Gandhi dynasty. Sardar Patel's vision of nationalism was deeply rooted in the principles of unity and integrity.

He believed that a strong and united India was essential for the country's progress and stability. Patel's efforts to integrate the princely states were driven by his commitment to building a coherent national identity. He envisioned an India where regional, linguistic, and cultural differences were respected but did not dominate the collective national identity. Patel's promotion of Hindi as the national language, though controversial, was aimed at developing a common medium of communication that could unite the diverse population. His belief in secularism and his efforts to protect the rights of minorities further underscored his inclusive vision of nationalism. In addition to his political endeavours, Patel's speeches and writings inspired a sense of pride and patriotism among Indians. He emphasized the importance of self-reliance, hard work, and devotion to the nation, ideals that still resonate among the Indian public today.

## VIII. Conclusion

Sardar Patel, a pioneer in Indian history, "Iron Man of India" played a very significant role during British colonial rule and especially between the critical periods of transition from 1947 to 1950. R.K. Murthi rightly states that Nehru could have not been able to redefine India's future without the support of Sardar Patel (Murthi, 1976, p. 136). Patel's speeches and his work during the freedom movement and after the Independence as the Deputy Prime Minister and Home Minister reflect the coordination between speech and action.

Patel provided critical suggestions to Nehru in the making of the foreign policy. Sardar Patel, a better judge of geopolitics; was strongly against communist China. He knew that in the long run it would be the Chinese who would present the major threat to India and not Pakistan. Hence, he never approved of Nehru's legitimization of China's sovereignty over Tibet. Patel also did not favour Nehru's endorsement of the 'One China policy' and over a Permanent Seat at the UNSC to China. Influenced by the Chanakya school of thought, he was against internationalising Kashmir by taking it to the UN.

His unwavering commitment to national unity and integrity, coupled with his strategic brilliance and diplomatic acumen, played a key role in shaping the destiny of independent India. One of Patel's most significant contributions was the integration of over 560 princely states into the Indian Union. Through a combination of persuasion, diplomacy and decisive action, he skillfully handled complex political scenarios and created a unified nation. His strong will and determination played a key role in overcoming many challenges, including the integration of Hyderabad, Junagadh, and Kashmir. Beyond his political achievements, Patel's legacy extends to



the field of national security. He recognised the importance of a strong and efficient administrative system and played a key role in establishing the All-India Services. These services have been the backbone of India's civil administration, contributing to its stability and progress. Patel's unwavering patriotism and his vision for a strong and prosperous India will continue to inspire generations.

In the current scenario, when India and China face each other over Doklam and other issues, Patel's ideas and his views on foreign policy becomes all the more relevant. The centrality of national interest in making relations with other countries, i.e. the making of foreign policy is, thus, one of the parts of his legacy. India faces numerous contemporary security challenges today of which few can certainly be attributed to the historical mistakes committed soon after the independence. Patel's writings and correspondence are living proof to those mistakes which could have been averted had his suggestions been given serious consideration. His life and achievements are a testimony to the power of leadership, courage, and unwavering dedication to the nation. As we commemorate his legacy, let us take inspiration from his example and strive to build a strong, united, and prosperous India.

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