

India's Regional Policy

Indian regional policy has developed from the so-called "Indira Doctrine," by which India claimed the right to intervene in the affairs of neighbouring states if internal disorder threatened Indian security. The following policy principles underlie India's doctrinal approach to its relations with South Asia:

India has no intention of intervening in the internal conflicts of a South Asian country and it strongly opposes intervention by any country in the internal affairs of any others;

India will not tolerate external intervention in a conflict situation in any South Asian country if the intervention has any implicit or explicit anti-Indian implication; and,

no South Asian government must ask for external military assistance with an anti-Indian bias from any country.¹¹

Under what became known as the South Asian Doctrine, the true nature of Indira Gandhi's non-interventionist policy was revealed as her son and successor implemented what has since become known as the Rajiv Doctrine. The interventions in Sri Lanka (July 1987-March 1990) and the Maldives (November 1988) confirmed New Delhi's calculated commitment of its military power to the furtherance of its political objectives. These were relatively minor demonstrations of power-politics in which New Delhi ran no risk of running into superior opposition. Nevertheless, in a sure test of India's military capabilities, some 45,000 Indian troops were unable to defeat an estimated 2,000 Tamil Tiger rebels in Sri Lanka and the Indian forces suffered heavy losses.¹² For all intents and purposes and despite India's military strength, the Sri Lanka operation was costly and largely unsuccessful. Conversely, the Maldives operation was a resounding success and demonstrated, as Rajiv Gandhi said to the Indian Parliament after the intervention, that South Asia, i.e. India, can solve its problems, "among ourselves without

¹¹ *Janes Defence Weekly*, December 3, 1988.

¹² Under an agreement signed between President Premadasa and Prime Minister Gandhi in September 1989, all Indian Peace Keeping troops were withdrawn from Sri Lanka by March 1990.