

Navigating Global Shifts: India's Foreign Policy Adjustments

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Abstract

India, due to its distinctive geopolitical location in South Asia and its standing as one of the largest democracies globally, has persistently been a significant actor in international politics. Its foreign policy has experienced substantial transformations, especially following the conclusion of the Cold War, the disintegration of the Soviet Union, and the emergence of China as a global force. India's foreign policy, historically defined by non-alignment, has progressively been modified to address emerging global issues. The emergence of global multipolarity, evolving security challenges, and the nation's increasing economic influence have all played a role in the evolution of India's foreign policies. In recent decades, India has adjusted its foreign policy to reflect changing power dynamics, increasing regional tensions, and developing global economic trends. The article examines India's strategic modifications especially policies like, strategic autonomy, multi-alignment, de-hyphenation and so on aimed at improving its international stature, especially its relations with significant nations such as the United States, Russia, and China, along with its participation in multilateral organisations. This paper analyses India's evolving diplomatic strategy, emphasising the equilibrium between continuity and transformation in its foreign policy, and providing insights into the nation's prospective direction in global politics. Along with it, this article also examines India's foreign policy in light of global transformations, emphasising its adaptations to evolving international dynamics.

Key words: Strategic autonomy, Multi-alignment, De-hyphenation

Introduction

The foreign policy of India has seen drastically evolved over the past 30 years, reflecting the changing global politics and the country's relationship with the USA, Western European countries, and China. The first prime minister, Jawaharlal Nehru, was considered a chief architect of Indian foreign policy, and his policies have endured. Subsequent prime ministers, including the present Prime Minister Narendra Modi, have played significant role in shaping

India's foreign policy (Barik, 2021; Pande, 2017). The global political order is dynamic and each nation is adapting its foreign policy according to their global and regional interests. After the decline Soviet Union, India has concentrated on enhancing its relations with the West, especially the United States, while simultaneously maintaining its historical connections with Russia. Moreover, India's reaction to China's growing influence, particularly in the Indo-Pacific area, has emerged as a vital aspect of its foreign policy (Bhattacharya, 2018). This article seeks to examine the characteristics of these adjustments, the persistent elements in India's foreign policy, and how these transformations mirror wider global developments. However, India's foreign policy has remained consistent, focusing on sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-interference in other nations' domestic affairs, and respect for international law (Ganapathi, 2017). Despite increasing engagement with global powers, India has remained cautious in its approach to military alliances and multinational alliances (Sujith. 2023). It has also maintained its focus on regional stability, particularly in South Asia, and has advocated for dialogue with Pakistan. India's commitment to multilateralism and engagement with global institutions remains strong, with a focus on equitable development and a fair international order (Dubey, 2016).

The 1947 partition of the subcontinent led to a majoritarian conception of nation-building, which devalued shared socio-cultural commonality and hindered cooperation. India's foreign policy actions over the years, arguing that an analysis of changing global structures and their impact on domestic imperatives is necessary (Barik, 2021). However, in the 21st century, global order has evolved into a multi polar and India has holding a unique position. For attaining its global interests and regional aspirations, needs to take more pragmatic and strategic moves (Ganapathi, 2017). The strategic realignment is influenced by its growing relationships with global powers like the United States, China, and Russia. In the Post-Cold War, India transitioned from a non-alignment strategy to a more pragmatic approach, notably through the ratification of the India-U.S. Civil Nuclear Agreement in 2008 (Bhattacharya, 2018). India's relationship with China has been both collaborative and rivalry, with border issues and tensions in the Himalayas hindering the relationship. India has also strengthened its relationship with Russia, a crucial defence ally, and has prioritized enhancing its presence in multilateral organizations to ensure its perspective is acknowledged on global issues (Jaishankar, 2020). One major challenge for India is dealing with China, a country with growing assertiveness in South Asia. Despite several rounds of talks, tensions at the border

have not subsided, and trade between the countries has increased exponentially (Dubey, 2016). India is promoting a Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) to deal with China, but Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi has referred to QUAD as a ‘huge security risk’ that could stir confrontation among different groups to maintain the US’s dominance (Jaishankar, 2020). Since 2014, there has been a paradigm shift in Indian foreign policy has witnessing. India’s Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been a vocal supporter of the doctrine of nonalignment since the end of the Cold War (Pande, 2017). The doctrine, which aimed to promote human rights, self-determination, and universal disarmament, was a significant part of India’s foreign policy (Bhattacharya, 2018). However, since Modi’s inauguration in 2014, no member of his Cabinet has publicly referred to the doctrine, suggesting that the Indian government places little stock in its relevance (Chaulia, 2016). Indian foreign policy has moved from non-alignment to multi- alignment and India has started to adopt very pragmatic approach to deal with both regional global issues. Narendra Modi addressed the issue of enclaves along the border, which have been a long-standing issue in Indo-Bangladesh relations (Pande, 2017). In 2015, Modi concluded a Land Boundary Agreement, resulting in the exchange of 111 Indian enclaves in Bangladesh and 51 Bangladeshi enclaves in India. This settlement represents an important step in improving Indo-Bangladeshi relations (Jaishankar, 2020). However, Modi’s policies towards Bhutan and Nepal have been uneven. He improved relations with Bhutan by visiting the Himalayan kingdom and signing agreements to enhance hydroelectric power station development. Modi also responded to a massive earthquake in Nepal, coordinating relief efforts and generating goodwill (Pande, 2017). India’s foreign policy has remained consistent, focusing on sovereignty, territorial integrity, non-interference in other nations’ domestic affairs, and respect for international law. Despite increasing engagement with global powers, India has remained cautious in its approach to military alliances and multinational alliances. It has also maintained its focus on regional stability, particularly in South Asia, and has advocated for dialogue with Pakistan. India’s commitment to multilateralism and engagement with global institutions remains strong, with a focus on equitable development and a fair international order (Dubey, 2016).

India’s Foreign Policy: Adjustments in the Dynamic Global Political Order

The foreign policy of India has exhibited both consistency and transformation, mirroring the changing dynamics of the global political landscape. India, being one of the greatest

democracies and an emerging economic power, holds a distinctive status in the global arena (Bhattacharya, 2018). Nonetheless, its foreign policy has necessitated adaptation over time to address the challenges presented by evolving geopolitical realities, especially following the conclusion of the Cold War, the ascendance of China, and the growing influence of global powers such as the United States (Chaulia, 2016). India's foreign policy fundamentally emphasises the preservation of strategic autonomy and the protection of national sovereignty. The ideals of non-alignment, which underpinned India's foreign policy throughout the Cold War, remain influential (Sujith. 2023). Nonetheless, the conclusion of the Cold War and the rise of a more multipolar world necessitated India to adjust its diplomatic strategy (Ganapathi, 2017; Kukreja, 2020). India's current foreign policy exemplifies a pragmatic equilibrium between the preservation of its fundamental values and adaptations to emerging geopolitical dynamics (Dubey, 2016; Jaishankar, 2020).

A notable transformation in India's foreign policy has been its increasing involvement with the United States. Throughout the Cold War, India and the United States were predominantly affiliated with opposing factions; however, the post-Cold War era has witnessed a gradual evolution in their relationship (Bhattacharya, 2018). Subsequent to India's economic liberalisation in the early 1990s, both nations acknowledged the prospects for enhanced collaboration, especially in trade, technology, and defence. The ratification of the India-U.S. Civil Nuclear Agreement in 2008 signified a significant transformation in India's foreign policy, transitioning from its non-aligned position to fostering closer relations with the United States (Pande, 2017). Notwithstanding certain disparities, like India's stance on global non-proliferation initiatives and its dedication to strategic autonomy, the India-U.S. partnership has prospered in the 21st century (Dubey, 2016). This transition was motivated by India's aspiration to elevate its worldwide stature and economic capacity, alongside its objective to mitigate China's expanding influence in the Indo-Pacific area (Jaishankar, 2020). The return of Trump administration, and the changing global political equations will determine India's approach towards the United States.

Simultaneously, India has had to meticulously manage its relationship with China. China's swift economic expansion and growing assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific area have offered India both prospects and obstacles. India has endeavoured to engage with China across multiple dimensions, notably in multilateral platforms such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) and BRICS (Jaishankar, 2020). Nonetheless, tensions about border

disputes, especially in the Himalayas, together with China's increasing influence in adjacent nations such as Pakistan and Sri Lanka, have strained the bilateral relationship. India's response has been a meticulous balancing act, aiming to preserve stable relations with China while concurrently increasing its alliances with other nations to counteract China's regional hegemony (Pande, 2017). This entails strengthening its strategic alliances with Japan, Australia, and other countries in the Quad, a coalition of democracies in the Indo-Pacific area. India's foreign policy on China exemplifies its attempts to adjust to evolving security challenges while preserving economic collaboration (Ganapathi, 2017).

Another significant facet of India's foreign policy modification has been its persistent connection with Russia. Notwithstanding the conclusion of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, India has preserved robust defence and diplomatic relations with Russia (Ganapathi, 2017). Russia continues to be a crucial ally for India in defence, energy, and technological sectors. The enduring defence collaboration, especially on military equipment acquisition, remains a fundamental aspect of the India-Russia relationship. While India has fortified its relationships with the United States and other Western nations, it has been prudent in avoiding the alienation of Russia, a steadfast strategic ally. This intricate equilibrium of connections exemplifies India's strategic methodology of sustaining a diverse foreign policy that avoids excessive reliance on any singular power (Jaishankar, 2020).

India's foreign policy modifications extend beyond its interactions with big powers. The nation's regional strategy has adapted in reaction to alterations in the South Asian security landscape (Bhattacharya, 2018). India has historically been the preeminent force in South Asia; however, its influence is being contested by the ascendance of China and its growing presence in the region. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) of China has resulted in increased Chinese investments in nations such as Sri Lanka, Nepal, and Pakistan, all of which carry strategic significance for India (Pande, 2017). India has endeavoured to enhance its regional alliances through efforts like the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). Simultaneously, India has upheld a resolute position on regional security matters, especially concerning Pakistan, with whom it has enduring conflicts about the Kashmir issue and cross-border terrorism (Jaishankar, 2020; Kukreja, 2020).

Multilateralism continues to be a significant element of India's foreign policy modifications. India, as an emerging state, has progressively pursued a more significant position in global governance, particularly within international institutions like the United Nations (UN), the World Trade Organisation (WTO), and the Group of 20 (G20) (Pande, 2017). India's pursuit of a permanent seat on the UN Security Council is a primary goal of its multilateral diplomacy, as the nation aims to influence global choices about security, trade, and climate change. India's involvement with multilateral organisations reflects its acknowledgement that global concerns necessitate collaborative efforts, and it has endeavoured to amplify its voice on matters including climate change, counterterrorism, and sustainable development (Bhattacharya, 2018).

As India navigates the intricacies of a shifting global order, its foreign policy is expected to develop. The nation has the problem of navigating partnerships with several big countries, combining its strategic independence with the necessity for international collaboration. Moreover, India must address the ascendant China, regional security issues, and the growing significance of non-traditional security challenges, like climate change and cyber warfare. Simultaneously, India's expanding economic prowess and its geopolitical position in the Indo-Pacific region would enhance its worldwide impact (Jaishankar, 2020). India's foreign policy must remain adaptable and flexible, combining the fundamental ideals of sovereignty, regional stability, and multilateralism with the requirements of a progressively intricate and linked global landscape (Kukreja, 2020). India's foreign policy modifications amid the evolving global political landscape signify its strategic aims and the overarching transformations in global power dynamics. India has endeavoured to augment its security, economic capacity, and diplomatic clout by recalibrating its connections with significant global countries (Bhattacharya, 2018). Although the fundamental tenets of its foreign policy, including non-alignment and strategic autonomy, persist, India's growing interactions with the U.S., China, Russia, and other nations illustrate its capacity to adjust to the evolving global environment. As India ascends as a global power, its foreign policy will be pivotal in influencing the trajectory of international relations in the 21st century (Ganapathi, 2017).

Strategic Autonomy of India and the Aspiration to Become a Viksit Bharat

India's post-independence trajectory has been marked by a distinctive foreign policy, grounded in the principle of strategic autonomy. This approach is driven by India's national

interests, strategic goals, and the belief that an independent foreign policy is essential for its security, development, and global prominence (Ganapathi, 2017). The concept of strategic autonomy originated in the post-independence period when India, led by Jawaharlal Nehru, embraced a non-alignment policy to place India outside both the U.S.-led Western bloc and the Soviet-led Eastern bloc during the Cold War (Bhattacharya, 2018). However, the political shift of 2014 further accelerated the principle of strategic autonomy, particularly, the Government of India adapted much more pragmatic policies like, Multi-alignment, De-hyphenation and so on (Jaishankar, 2020; Sujith. 2023).

Despite significant changes in the geopolitical scene during the Cold War, India's dedication to strategic autonomy has largely persisted, albeit adjusted to accommodate evolving global realities. India's strategic autonomy is now influenced by a multifaceted approach that harmonises interactions with major global powers while protecting its national interests. India's connection with the United States has significantly intensified in the past twenty years, especially in the areas of defence, technology, and commerce. However, India has been vigilant in preserving its autonomy in decision-making (Dubey, 2016).

India's strategy against China illustrates its dedication to strategic autonomy. India has endeavoured to interact with China on various fronts, such as the BRICS group, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and bilateral trade, while simultaneously exercising caution on China's expanding influence in the Indo-Pacific area (Ganapathi, 2017). The persistent border conflicts and strategic rivalry in the region have prompted India to strengthen its connections with nations such as Japan, Australia, and Vietnam, while upholding its policy of non-alignment in multilateral forums. India's quest for strategic autonomy is intricately linked to its ambition to achieve 'Viksit Bharat,' or a developed nation. This objective necessitates economic expansion, technical progress, social infrastructure development, and a robust defence strategy. The economic policies of India have evolved throughout time to facilitate this ambition, with the country aiming to enhance its participation in international trade, technology, and innovation (Sujith. 2023). However, the journey towards achieving a Viksit Bharat is fraught with challenges, including poverty, unemployment, infrastructural deficiencies, regional inequalities, and external problems like regional security threats from Pakistan and China. Achieving a balance between economic growth and the necessity for social and environmental sustainability would be essential for India's success (Jaishankar, 2020).

Conclusion

India's foreign policy has been based on strategic autonomy since independence, aiming to maintain decision-making autonomy while managing global ties. This study finds that India's strategic autonomy in relation to its aspirations for global leadership in the 21st century, focusing on the interaction between national development, economic progress, and global relationships in technology, defence, and trade. India's foreign policy has evolved in response to global politics, focusing on its relationships with key powers like the US, China, and Russia, and its role in multilateral organizations. India's strategic autonomy and ambition to achieve a Viksit Bharat are interrelated objectives aiming for independence, sovereignty, and prosperity. Strategic autonomy allows India to manage international relations while protecting national interests. As India progresses, its foreign policy will play a pivotal role in realizing a Viksit Bharat vision and shaping its international destiny. The paper also finds that India's evolving diplomatic priorities, highlighting both continuity in foreign policy principles and necessary adjustments in response to new geopolitical realities. It aims to secure India's national interests while maintaining its position in a multipolar world. This article analyses the significant modifications India has implemented in its foreign policy due to the evolving global landscape, emphasising its strategic realignments and endeavours to reconcile conflicting interests.

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