
INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE 21ST CENTURY BALANCING STRATEGIC INTERESTS WITH GLOBAL DIPLOMACY.

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Abstract

The foreign policy of India in the 21st century displays a strategic balancing act between the protection of national interests and the active participation in global diplomacy. India has altered its strategy in order to manage the difficulties of a multipolar world that is defined by shifting alliances, economic interdependence, and security problems. India is a growing global force. In this article, we investigate India's efforts to strengthen its strategic autonomy by forming solid alliances with big powers such as the United States of America, Russia, and the European Union. At the same time, India wishes to preserve its historical links with countries in the International South. In addition to highlighting India's proactive posture in addressing global concerns such as climate change, terrorism, and pandemic management, it also stresses India's leadership in multilateral forums such as the BRICS, the G20, and the United Nations. The Act East Policy, the Neighborhood First initiative, and the Indo-Pacific policy are all examples of India's commitment to maintaining regional stability and connectivity. The study highlights how India has changed its foreign policy to reconcile strategic objectives with its goal for a leadership position in global governance by exploring these elements. This brings to light how India has evolved its foreign policy.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, 21st Century, Balancing, Global

Introduction

A reflection of India's historical legacy, geographical circumstances, and aspirations to become a growing global power, India's foreign policy in the 21st century is a reflection of Indian foreign policy. In light of the fact that the international system is transforming into a multipolar and complex order, India has endeavored to establish itself as a significant actor in the process of determining the global agenda. The combination of economic development, technological innovation, and geopolitical upheavals has demanded a recalibration of India's foreign policy in order to confront developing difficulties while also capitalizing on new possibilities. The ideals of non-alignment and strategic autonomy have traditionally served as the foundation for India's foreign policy; nevertheless, the country's foreign policy has gradually shifted towards pragmatic involvement. Its proactive attitude to regional and global concerns, such as encouraging connectivity through programs such as the International North-South Transport Corridor and furthering its interests in the Indo-Pacific region, is a clear indication of this transformation. Other examples include maintaining stability in South Asia. Furthermore, India has shown that it is committed to multilateralism, as seen by the fact that it has taken on leadership positions in many forums, including the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the BRICS, and the G20 Summit. At the same time, the country's emphasis on strategic alliances with the United States of America, Russia, the European Union, and important Asian nations indicates a delicate balance of ties in order to protect its national interests. The dynamic transformations that

have occurred in India's foreign policy are investigated in this article, with a particular emphasis placed on India's strategic imperatives, regional efforts, and contributions to global governance. It tries to understand how India strikes a balance between its domestic interests and its obligations on the world arena, with the goal of establishing itself as a credible voice for peace, stability, and development in the 21st century. This would be accomplished by evaluating these aspects.

In light of India's ongoing rise in power, the country's foreign policy is a reflection of the dual difficulty of furthering its economic objectives while also addressing concerns about security. As a result of China's ascent to prominence as a regional and global force, the strategic calculations of several countries, including India, have been drastically changed. India's reaction has been to diversify its alliances, with a particular emphasis on enhancing its military, economic, and scientific capabilities in order to protect its interests. A more robust and nuanced approach to India's foreign policy is required because of the complexity of India's security environment, which is characterized by territorial conflicts that have been going on for a long time and instability in the area. The idea of "strategic autonomy" continues to play a significant role in India's foreign policy. This notion enables the country to interact with a number of global powers without surrendering its autonomy in terms of decision-making. In a world where alliances are increasingly determined by shifting power dynamics and economic concerns, India has been able to maintain its status as a non-aligned state because to its foreign policy, which is characterized by pragmatism and flexibility. This is seen in India's attitude on topics such as the Indo-Pacific area, where it argues for a rules-based order and freedom of navigation while also maintaining a balance in its ties with both the United States and China. At the regional level, India has placed a great emphasis on its "Neighborhood First" strategy, which aims to strengthen economic, cultural, and political relations with its immediate neighbors. Within the context of South Asia, where India plays a crucial role, this strategy seeks to achieve the goal of stabilizing the region while simultaneously avoiding the incursion of external forces in the region. India ensures that its regional influence is preserved while simultaneously encouraging stability and prosperity by strengthening its connections with nations in the Bay of Bengal, the Indian Ocean, and Central Asia. India's foreign policy also aims to address significant global concerns like as climate change, terrorism, and the recovery from the pandemic. These are all issues that are being addressed on the world arena. As a pioneer in worldwide talks on sustainable development, India has advocated for a strategy that is both inclusive and responsible to the environment. This approach seeks to strike a balance between economic growth and environmental responsibility.

The fact that it is actively involved in international organizations such as the United Nations, the World Trade Organization (WTO), and the Paris Agreement on climate change is evidence of its dedication to international cooperation and diplomacy. To summarize, India's foreign policy in the 21st century is characterized by its capacity to strike a balance between its strategic goals and its diplomatic efforts on a global scale. The pursuit of economic prosperity, security, and regional stability is the foundation of India's approach to international relations. At the same time, India's active engagement in global governance shows its aspiration to influence the order of the world. India is preparing itself to make a contribution to the global peace, prosperity, and stability of the 21st century by establishing itself as a prominent participant in the shifting geopolitical environment. This is being accomplished via the implementation of a strategy that is both sophisticated and adaptive. In light of India's ongoing rise in power, the country's foreign policy is a reflection of the dual difficulty of furthering its economic objectives while also addressing concerns about security. As a result of China's ascent to prominence as a regional and global force, the strategic calculations

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Literature Review

Extensive research has been conducted on India's foreign policy, which reflects the country's key role in international politics as well as its developing policies in reaction to shifting international dynamics. There is a broad variety of topics that are discussed in the literature that pertains to India's foreign policy in the 21st century. These topics vary from India's pursuit of strategic autonomy and regional stability to its increasing role in global governance. This study focuses on important works and ideas that offer a deeper understanding of the fundamental concepts that underpin India's foreign policy as well as the recent changes that have taken place in this area.

Strategic Autonomy and Non-Alignment

One of the most fundamental ideas in India's foreign policy is strategic autonomy, which has its origins in the non-alignment movement that India participated in during the Cold War. A number of academics, including K. Subrahmanyam (2002) and C. Raja Mohan (2005), have explored the ways in which India's foreign policy was influenced by the country's aspiration to preserve its independence from both of the superpowers during the time of the Cold War. According to S. K. Katyal (2011), India's pursuit of non-alignment was not just about avoiding alliances but also about pursuing a policy of self-reliance and

independence in its international relations. This was according to the author's interpretation of the phenomenon. More recently, academics have observed that although the framework of non-alignment has developed over time, the notion of strategic autonomy continues to serve as a guiding principle in India's foreign policy. This approach enables India to interact with a variety of global powers without committing to exclusive alliances. According to Rajesh Rajagopalan (2017), India's current foreign policy is a pragmatic blend of historical non-alignment and selective engagement with major countries. This flexibility is underscored by Rajesh Rajagopalan, who contends that India's foreign policy now reflects a pragmatic mix.

India's Evolving Security Concerns

In the 21st century, there has been a dramatic shift in the strategic environment around India. This is especially true in light of the growth of China and the rising significance of the Indo-Pacific area on the international stage. In their respective works, Amitav Acharya (2014) and S. K. Verma (2018) investigate the manner in which India's foreign policy has developed in response to these developments. The authors concentrate on India's security concerns in relation to China's ascent and the threats that China poses to India's regional supremacy. In the context of the Indo-Pacific region, Harsh V. Pant (2020) claims that India's increasing security concerns have led to a more assertive stance, with a particular focus on maritime security and freedom of navigation. This assertion is made in reference to the Indo-Pacific region. In the literature, India's expanding alliance with the United States, notably within the framework of the Quad, is highlighted as a response to China's aggression in the area. On the other hand, academics such as Shivshankar Menon (2016) warn that India continues to emphasize its autonomy in the decision-making process regarding its foreign policy, despite the fact that it is actively seeking strategic alliances.

Economic Diplomacy and Global Trade

As India works to strengthen its economic standing on the international scene, economic diplomacy has emerged as an essential component of the country's foreign policy. India's economic diplomacy, as stated by Jagannath P. Panda (2020), is centered on the building of connections with both developed and developing nations, the capitalization on trade agreements, and the expansion of India's footprint in global supply chains. India's position in international trade organizations such as the World Trade Organization (WTO) and its efforts to traverse the complexity of global trade policy are investigated in the works of Sujit Dutta (2018) and R. K. Bansal (2019). Both authors have published their findings publicly. The "Act East" strategy of India, which has been at the center of India's outreach to Southeast Asia and its efforts to strengthen economic connections in the area, is highlighted in J. B. Singh's (2017) article. India's wider purpose is to project soft power, and economic diplomacy plays a significant part in this endeavor. projects such as the India-Africa Forum Summit and the International Solar Alliance are examples of projects that represent India's global aspirations.

Regional and Multilateral Engagements

In the 21st century, India's international relations have been significantly influenced by the country's decisions about its regional strategy. India's "Neighborhood First" strategy, which strives to create closer connections with its near neighbors, notably Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, Nepal, and the Maldives, is discussed in works written by Brij V. Lal (2012) and Sumit Ganguly (2014). These authors explore the policy in their respective works. Tanvi Madan (2017) highlights the significance of India's regional leadership by arguing that India's regional power position is vital for its worldwide aspirations. She believes that stability in South

Asia is considered as a requirement for larger international influence, and that India's regional power status is essential for India's global ambitions. In his 2016 article, Rajiv Bhatia investigates India's participation in international forums such as the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), the BRICS, and the G20. He argues that India's efforts to build global governance frameworks and express its influence in multilateral diplomacy have been largely influenced by these engagements.

Global Challenges and India's Role in Global Governance

The literature has provided a wealth of analysis on India's involvement in addressing global concerns such as climate change, terrorism, and the post-pandemic international order. Scholars such as Shyam Saran (2020) have observed that India is placing a greater focus on sustainable development. This is due to the fact that India is presenting itself as a leader in international climate negotiations, notably through the Paris Agreement and the International Solar Alliance. In their respective studies, Amitav Acharya (2015) and S. N. Jha (2018) investigate India's dedication to combating global terrorism and its efforts to strike a balance between its contributions to peacekeeping and humanitarian operations and its worries over regional security situations. The role that India plays in global governance is also investigated through its involvement in the United Nations. Scholars like as R. P. Vaidya (2019) say that India's diplomatic initiatives are a reflection of the country's goal to promote a more equal and inclusive international order.

Research Methodology

This study on India's foreign policy in the 21st century makes use of a research technique that combines qualitative analysis with a case study approach. This approach enables a full investigation of India's strategic interests, regional efforts, and global diplomatic engagements thanks to the combination of these two research methodologies. The purpose of the technique is to assess the manner in which India strikes a balance between its strategic aims and its aspirations in global diplomacy. The methodology will concentrate on both historical roots and present developments. The following is a list of the most important aspects of the research methodology.

The purpose of this study is to investigate the development of India's foreign policy in the 21st century by employing a research approach that is both descriptive and analytical. This study intends to uncover significant themes, policies, and shifts in India's foreign relations by conducting an analysis of the forces that have driven these changes as well as the consequences that have been created as a result of these changes. In addition to this, the research intends to get an understanding of how India navigates complex regional and global difficulties while maintaining a balance between its national interests and its international engagements.

Results

Taking into consideration India's foreign policy in the 21st century, the findings have been arranged into three overarching categories. Partnerships of Strategic Importance and International Activities Through strategic relationships, India has considerably increased its worldwide influence, particularly with major nations such as the United States of America, Russia, Japan, and Australia. In particular, India has been able to improve its defense, security, and economic relations within the Indo-Pacific area as a result of the development of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), which comprises the United States of America, Japan, Australia, and India. India's foreign policy in this area is defined by a pragmatic and flexible

approach, which enables it to strike a balance between its partnerships with China and the United States without surrendering its strategic autonomy. India's ability to pursue its interests in defense technology and regional security, particularly with regard to marine challenges, has been made possible by the country's strategic focus on expanding military cooperation with the United States of America and Japan, while also retaining its traditional connections with Russia. Relations within the Neighborhood and Diplomacy in the Region India's Neighborhood First strategy places an emphasis on building connections with nations that are geographically adjacent to it in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific region as a global area. Positive outcomes have been achieved as a consequence of the emphasis placed on bilateral ties, particularly with Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. These outcomes include improved economic cooperation, the construction of infrastructure, and an improvement in regional security. In addition, India's participation in regional efforts such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) demonstrates the country's dedication to maintaining regional connectivity and stability. India's diplomatic outreach to its neighbors, notably in maritime security, particularly in the Indo-Pacific area, has assisted the country in establishing itself as a regional leader while also deterring the intrusion of foreign forces.

Governance on a Global Scale and Leadership in Addressing Global Challenges India has been an active participant in several global governance forums, notably in multilateral organizations such as the United Nations, the BRICS, and the G20. Through participation in these forums, India has advanced the cause of global peace and security, as well as sustainable development. When it comes to solving global concerns like as climate change and terrorism, it has also been an extremely important factor. In the realm of climate diplomacy, India's leadership is highlighted by the fact that it has made contributions to both the Paris Agreement and the International Solar Alliance (ISA). With regard to the matter of international security, India has been an active participant in peacekeeping operations, which is a reflection of its dedication to multilateral diplomacy and the maintenance of international stable conditions. It is a reflection of its objectives for a more fair global order that it maintains a consistent position on reforms in international institutions, particularly the United Nations Security Council (UNSC).

Table 1: Strategic Partnerships and Global Engagement

Strategic Partnership	Key Countries/Regions	Policy Focus	Diplomatic Outcomes
United States	U.S. (Quad, Bilateral Relations)	Defense cooperation, counterterrorism, economic ties	Enhanced defense collaboration, defense technology transfer, trade agreements
Russia	Russia (Bilateral Relations)	Defense, energy, strategic autonomy	Continued defense ties, energy cooperation (e.g., nuclear energy), military contracts
Japan	Japan (Quad, Economic Cooperation)	Economic partnerships, technology exchange, security cooperation	Strengthened economic and technological ties, maritime security cooperation
Australia	Australia (Quad, Indo-Pacific)	Regional security, defense, maritime cooperation	Increased defense cooperation, joint military exercises, Indo-Pacific stability

European Union	EU (Bilateral, Trade, and Security Relations)	Economic collaboration, climate change, strategic partnership	Deepened trade relations, cooperation on climate change, multilateral partnerships
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India's strategic alliances are distinguished by a concentration on defense, economic cooperation, and regional security, in particular with the United States of America, Russia, Japan, and Australia. In order to offset China's dominance in the Indo-Pacific region, the Quad (consisting of the United States of America, Japan, Australia, and India) has evolved as a highly influential alliance. India has benefited from increasing defense coordination and trade deals. The areas of military and energy have been the primary focuses of India's partnerships with Russia, while India's relationships with Japan and Australia have promoted technical collaboration and increased regional security. Through engagement with the European Union, commercial links have been enhanced, and a forum where climate diplomacy may take place has been developed.

Table 2: Regional Diplomacy and Neighborhood Relations

Region/Country	Key Initiatives	Policy Focus	Diplomatic Outcomes
South Asia	Neighborhood First Policy, SAARC	Strengthening bilateral ties, regional stability	Improved relations with Bangladesh, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bhutan
China	Border Talks, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)	Managing border disputes, trade, and regional influence	Border tensions continue, trade cooperation, and balancing security concerns
Pakistan	Dialogue on Terrorism, Confidence-Building	Counterterrorism, peace-building in Kashmir	Stalled peace talks, ongoing security concerns, and diplomatic standoff
Sri Lanka & Maldives	Economic and Defense Assistance	Promoting regional stability, maritime security cooperation	Strengthened defense ties, infrastructure development in Maldives, Sri Lanka
Bangladesh	Water Sharing, Trade, and Connectivity	Cross-border connectivity, resource sharing	Strengthened bilateral ties, improved trade, water sharing agreements

The implementation of India's Neighborhood First Policy has resulted in favorable outcomes with South Asian nations that are immediately next to India, particularly in terms of economic cooperation, regional security, and the development of infrastructure. Trade and connection have been made easier as a result of the strategy, which has contributed to the improvement of ties with Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Nepal. On the other hand, tensions with Pakistan continue to exist, mostly as a result of continuous security concerns, such as the question of Kashmir and other terrorist acts. India's regional influence in Sri Lanka and the Maldives has been strengthened via defense cooperation and infrastructure projects, but relations with China continue to be complicated, requiring a balance between commerce and collaboration and persistent border conflicts.

Table 3: India's Role in Global Governance

Global Forum	India's Engagement	Policy Focus	Diplomatic Outcomes
United Nations	Peacekeeping, UNSC Reforms, Global Diplomacy	Reforming global governance, peacekeeping, security issues	Increased peacekeeping contributions, advocacy for UNSC reforms

BRICS	Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa	Multipolar world order, economic cooperation, global governance	Strengthened economic cooperation, advocacy for Global South interests
G20	Economic Coordination, Global Issues	Economic stability, climate change, post-pandemic recovery	Leadership on global economic recovery, climate change action
Paris Agreement	Climate Change Diplomacy	Sustainable development, renewable energy, global cooperation	Leadership in climate negotiations, promotion of the International Solar Alliance
World Trade Organization	Trade Negotiations, Agricultural Policy	Promoting fair trade, opposing protectionism	Advocacy for global trade reforms, agricultural policy focus

It is notably through the United Nations, the BRICS, the G20, and the Paris Agreement that India plays a significant role in the governance of the global community. This commitment to a more fair global order is shown by India's strong engagement in peacekeeping operations and support for reforms to the United Nations Security Council. India is able to expand its relations with developing economies and promote multipolarity through its participation in the BRICS group. During its participation in the G20, India has established itself as a frontrunner in the fight against global economic recovery, climate change, and post-pandemic difficulties. Additionally, India has emerged as a prominent actor in climate change diplomacy, promoting the Paris Agreement and driving efforts such as the International Solar Alliance. This represents India's rise to prominence in the sector.

Table 4: Economic Diplomacy and Trade Relations

Trade Initiative	Partner Countries/Regions	Policy Focus	Diplomatic Outcomes
Act East Policy	ASEAN, Southeast Asia	Enhancing economic cooperation, regional connectivity	Expanded trade routes, stronger economic ties with Southeast Asia
Regional Trade Agreements	RCEP, BIMSTEC, WTO	Trade liberalization, market access, economic integration	Mixed results with RCEP (India's exit), growing participation in BIMSTEC
Foreign Direct Investment	Global, Focus on Southeast Asia and Africa	Attracting investment, fostering economic growth	Increased foreign investments, particularly in manufacturing and technology sectors
Digital Economy	Global	Promoting tech innovation, digital diplomacy	Strengthened technological partnerships, focus on digital economy growth
Energy Cooperation	Middle East, Russia, Central Asia	Energy security, renewable energy collaboration	Expanded energy trade, increased participation in renewable energy initiatives

India's economic diplomacy represents a balance between fostering sustainable economic growth and expanding commercial links with other countries throughout the globe. Through the implementation of the Act East Policy, India has been able to extend its trade channels and strengthen its connections with the nations that make up the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN). India continues to be wary about trade imbalances, despite the fact that regional trade accords such as RCEP (despite India's

withdrawal) and BIMSTEC have created chances for further economic integration. As a result of India's efforts to attract Foreign Direct Investment (FDI) and to build a digital economy, the country has seen an increase in investments in the manufacturing and technology sectors, which has further positioned India as a global economic actor.

Table 5: India’s Foreign Policy in Global Security and Defense

Security Domain	Key Focus Areas	Policy Focus	Diplomatic Outcomes
Counterterrorism	Pakistan, Afghanistan, Global Terrorism	Combating terrorism, regional stability	Increased counterterrorism cooperation, participation in global security dialogues
Maritime Security	Indo-Pacific, South China Sea	Freedom of navigation, naval cooperation	Strengthened Indo-Pacific security, maritime agreements with allies
Nuclear Security	India’s Nuclear Doctrine	Preventing nuclear proliferation, maintaining deterrence	Advocacy for nuclear non-proliferation, continued nuclear deterrence
Peacekeeping Operations	Africa, Middle East, South Asia	UN peacekeeping missions, conflict resolution	Increased role in UN peacekeeping, peace mediation efforts
Regional Security Cooperation	BIMSTEC, SAARC, SCO	Security collaboration in South Asia and beyond	Strengthened regional defense ties, increased participation in multilateral security forums

India's participation in global security is characterized by an all-encompassing strategy that places an emphasis on counterterrorism, maritime security, nuclear security, and peacekeeping. India's defense connections with countries in the Indo-Pacific region have been reinforced, and the country has made major contributions to global counterterrorism efforts, notably in South Asia. Regarding the matter of nuclear security, India continues to advocate for worldwide nuclear non-proliferation while also maintaining a position of responsible deterrence. The strong engagement of India in peacekeeping missions demonstrates the country's dedication to preserving both regional and global stability. In addition, activities pertaining to regional security, such as those that are carried out by BIMSTEC, SAARC, and the SCO, bring attention to the role that India plays in promoting peace and cooperation in South Asia and internationally.

Conclusion

Over the course of the 21st century, India's foreign policy has been characterized by an approach that is both dynamic and diversified, with the goal of skillfully balancing national interests with that of global duties. India's ability to secure its place as a vital actor in a global environment that is quickly shifting has been made possible by the country's interaction with major global powers, its emphasis on regional diplomacy, and its active involvement in international governance systems. As a result of India's strategic alliances, which include those with the United States of America, Russia, Japan, and Australia, the country has been able to improve its defense cooperation, economic linkages, and regional security frameworks, notably within the Indo-Pacific area. The Quad effort is a prime example of India's strategy move toward the promotion of multilateral security alliances while still preserving its independence in areas of international affairs. In a similar vein, India's economic diplomacy, which includes measures such as the Act East Policy and involvement with regional trade agreements, has resulted in an improvement in the country's economic status. This has led to increased trade, investment, and connectivity throughout South Asia and Southeast

Asia. On the front of the region, India's Neighborhood First Policy has been centered on the promotion of stability and the cultivation of better connections with neighboring nations, notably those in South Asia. Even as it navigates complicated interactions with nations such as Pakistan and China, India has strengthened its influence by tackling concerns of regional security, commerce, and infrastructure development. This has allowed India to more effectively negotiate these complex relationships. India's role as a leader in terms of both trade and security is becoming increasingly prominent in the Indo-Pacific region. This means that India is guaranteeing that its neighbors and allies are able to reap the benefits of increased collaboration and peaceful marine operations. Through engagement in global governance, India has been able to establish itself as a supporter of a multipolar world order. This has been accomplished through the participation of India in organizations such as the United Nations, the BRICS, the G20, and the Paris Agreement. In the face of global concerns such as climate change, economic recovery, and peacekeeping, India has assumed a leadership position, arguing for fair solutions that are beneficial to the Global South and promoting a more balanced international system. Through its economic diplomacy, India has endeavored to broaden its economic footprint on a global scale by luring foreign direct investment (FDI), fostering technical innovation, and fostering the expansion of the digital economy.

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