

Transforming Dynamics of India's Foreign Policy

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Abstract

Foreign policy is a term that is often heard in the context of international relations, but foreign policy is the set of goals, strategies, and actions that a state or a non-state actor pursues in its relations with other actors in the international system.

Background: Post-independence, India's foreign policy was shaped in the context of an ideologically divided world. Over time, India has adjusted its foreign policy and economic structures to respond to global changes, including the end of the Cold War and the onset of globalization.

Objective: This paper aims to explore the meaning and objectives of foreign policy, the evolution of Indian foreign policy, its defining features, key issues, and strategic priorities. It also provides recommendations for improving India's foreign policy strategy.

Methods: The study employs a qualitative analysis of primary and secondary sources, including policy documents, historical records, and academic literature, to trace the development and dynamics of Indian foreign policy.

Findings: Foreign policy is the framework guiding a nation's international relations, aimed at ensuring sovereignty, security, and development. Under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, India adopted non-alignment during the Cold War to avoid alignment with the US or Soviet blocs. Core principles include sovereignty, non-alignment, strategic autonomy, and regional cooperation. Challenges include balancing great power relations, border disputes, regional instability, and adapting to shifts in global governance structures.

Conclusion: India's foreign policy reflects its commitment to strategic autonomy while addressing global and regional challenges. The integration of economic reforms and diplomatic pragmatism highlights India's adaptive approach in an evolving international system.

Implications: By understanding the historical and strategic dimensions of India's foreign policy, this paper provides valuable insights into its future trajectory and offers actionable recommendations for enhancing strategic priorities.

Keywords: Foreign Policy; India's Foreign Policy; Foreign Policy Evolutionary Journey; Indian foreign policy; Strategic autonomy; Global governance.

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INTRODUCTION

Foreign policy is a critical area of study in international relations that seeks to explore how a state interacts with other states and non state actors in the global arena (Ganguly, 2016). It involves the formulation, implementation, and evaluation of strategy towards achieving its national interests and objectives. Foreign policy reflects the interests, values, and preferences of the actor; it guides its decisions and behaviors in the global stage (Mohan, 2003). India's foreign policy, since its independence in has been shaped by its unique historical context, cultural diversity, and geopolitical circumstances. India's foreign policy has always been influenced by its need to balance relationships with major powers while promoting its own national interests. In the early years, India's focus was on decolonization, regional stability, and fostering South-South cooperation. The country played a significant role in the Bandung Conference of 1955, which laid the foundation for NAM (Mohan & Mazumdar, 2019) and emphasized the importance of Afro-Asian solidarity.

Objectives of foreign policy

Foreign Policies are the goals and priorities that a state seeks to achieve through its interactions with other states and international actors. The objectives of foreign policy can vary depending on the particular interests and aspirations. Objectives of foreign trade policy on the other hand are the specific goals and targets that a state sets for its foreign trade activities, such as exports, imports, and investments.

Indian Foreign Policy:

India has made a major shift in its foreign and economic policy much has changed in global politics. The first prime minister of India, Jawaharlal Nehru, was considered a chief architect of Indian foreign policy in early years of India's independence, and Nehruvian policies endure. Modi has 'reinvigorated' India's foreign policy. Highlighting the role of a leader and political leadership, and changes in the Indian foreign policy after Narendra Modi was elected into power in 2014. The end of the Cold War and the liberalization of India's economy in the early 1990s marked a shift towards a more pragmatic and multi-aligned approach. India's relations with the United States improved significantly during this period, driven by economic reforms and the strategic need to counterbalance China's growing influence (Kapur,

2017). India's relations with its neighbors have also been a key focus. While maintaining a strong relationship with traditionally Russia, India has sought to improve ties with countries like Japan and Australia, furthering the concept of the Quad, a strategic dialogue involving the United States, Japan, Australia, and India. Relations with Pakistan have remained tense, primarily due to the ongoing conflict over Kashmir and concerns about cross-border terrorism. Similarly, India's relationship with China has seen periods of cooperation and confrontation, with border disputes occasionally escalating into military standoffs. India's approach to global governance and multilateralism has also evolved. As a proponent of reform in international institutions, India seeks a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council, reflecting its growing global stature. Additionally, India has taken on leadership roles in various global forums, such as the International Solar Alliance and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, showcasing its commitment to addressing global challenges like climate change and sustainable development.

Characteristics of India's Foreign Policy

India's foreign policy is based on the principle of non-alignment, meaning that India does not align itself with any major power bloc or alliance, and that it maintains its autonomy and independence in its foreign policy decisions and actions. It is based on the principle of peaceful coexistence, meaning that India respects and supports the sovereignty and territorial integrity of other actors, and that it seeks to establish and maintain friendly and cordial relations with them. India's foreign policy is also based on the principle of Panchsheel, meaning that India follows the five principles of mutual respect, mutual non-interference, mutual non-aggression, mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence in its relations with other actors, especially with its neighbors.

Issues in India's Foreign Policy

China-India Relations

The long-standing border disputes with China, particularly along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), remain a significant challenge. China's growing influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) poses a strategic challenge to India. The Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and China's increasing presence in India's neighborhood, such as in Sri Lanka, Pakistan, and Nepal, complicate India's strategic calculus.

Pakistan and Cross-Border Terrorism

The unresolved conflict over Kashmir continues to be a major source of tension between India and Pakistan. The abrogation of Article 370 in 2019 further strained relations, with Pakistan intensifying its diplomatic efforts to internationalize the issue. Persistent concerns about terrorism originating from Pakistan, particularly in Jammu and Kashmir, remain a significant security challenge.

Managing Relations

India's close ties with both the United States and Russia present a balancing challenge, especially in light of deteriorating US-Russia relations. The intensifying US-China rivalry puts India in a delicate position.

Economic and Trade Challenges

India faces significant trade deficits with major trading partners like China. Efforts to reduce these deficits through trade negotiations and domestic manufacturing initiatives (such as "Make in India") have had limited success.

Regional Instability

The instability in Afghanistan, particularly after the Taliban's return to power in 2021, presents a security challenge for India. India has invested significantly in Afghanistan's development, but the new regime's ties with Pakistan and extremist groups pose risks to India's interests. India's relations with its smaller neighbors, such as Nepal and Sri Lanka, have been strained at times due to perceptions of Indian interference and their growing ties with China. Managing these relationships requires a careful balance between influence and respect for sovereignty.

Global Governance and Multilateralism

India's aspiration for a permanent seat on the UN Security Council has seen limited progress due to the lack of consensus among the current P5 members and broader UN membership. While India has taken steps to lead in global climate initiatives, balancing economic growth with environmental sustainability remains challenging. India's dependence on coal and its energy needs often clash with its commitments to reducing carbon emissions.

Internal Security and Political Challenges

Internal issues, such as communal tensions, insurgencies in the Northeast, and unrest in Jammu and Kashmir, can weaken India's external posture.

Political polarization and the handling of issues like the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) have also drawn international criticism. Economic challenges could limit resources for defense and foreign aid, weakening India's strategic influence.

Soft Power and Global Perception

India's handling of certain domestic issues, such as the revocation of Kashmir's special status and the response to protests against the CAA, has attracted negative attention internationally. This has impacted India's soft power and its image as the world's largest democracy. India's soft power efforts must also navigate challenges like the global rise of Hindu nationalism and its impact on India's secular image.

Technological and Cyber security Issues

As India advances in the digital economy, issues of data sovereignty, cyber security, and technological dependence on foreign companies have become more pressing. Managing these challenges requires balancing openness with security.

Climate Change and Environmental Concerns

India is highly vulnerable to climate change impacts, such as rising sea levels, extreme weather events, and water scarcity. Balancing economic growth with environmental sustainability is a major challenge, particularly in terms of energy policy and resource management.

FINDINGS

- Evolution from non-alignment to pragmatic, multi-aligned foreign policy.
- Focus on safeguarding national security and promoting regional stability.
- Strengthened partnerships with the US, Japan, and Australia.
- Balancing relations with Russia while countering China's influence.
- Advocacy for UN Security Council reforms and multilateral leadership.
- Persistent border disputes and tensions with Pakistan over terrorism.
- Significant trade deficits with major economies, especially China.
- Domestic challenges impacting global image, such as communal tensions and CAA.
- Vulnerability to climate change and energy challenges.

- Need for stronger economic diplomacy and regional cooperation.
- Leveraging the Indian diaspora for cultural and strategic influence.
- Leadership in global governance and climate negotiations.

SUGGESTIONS

- India should continue to deepen its strategic partnerships with countries like the United States, Japan, and Australia through mechanisms. This enhances India's position in the Indo-Pacific region, contributing to regional stability and security.
- India should take a proactive role in revitalizing regional organizations like SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) and BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation).
- Leveraging its economic potential, India should pursue trade agreements and investment partnerships, particularly with Southeast Asian, African, and Latin American countries.
- India should continue to advocate for reforms in global institutions like the United Nations Security Council, aiming for a permanent seat.
- India's approach to China should be a combination of engagement and deterrence. While economic cooperation is essential, India must also enhance its military preparedness and alliances to counter any potential aggression.
- India should lead by example in international climate negotiations, aligning its domestic policies with global commitments.
- India's large diaspora can be a significant asset in foreign policy. Strengthening connections with the Indian diaspora can enhance cultural diplomacy and influence in countries with significant Indian communities.

CONCLUSION

In conclusion, Understanding foreign policy is essential to comprehending relationships and to addressing the challenges and opportunities that arise in the globalized world. India's foreign policy

has been characterized by a blend of idealism and pragmatism, shaped by its historical experiences and contemporary realities. It is a complex and dynamic field that involves various actors, issues, and factors that interact and influence each other. The objectives of India's foreign policy are safeguarding national Security, maintaining regional Stability, economic development, promoting global peace, promoting India's rich heritage and protection of the huge Indian diaspora (Pant & Joshi, 2020). As India continues to rise as a global power, its foreign policy will likely evolve further, balancing its traditional principles with the demands of an increasingly multipolar world. India decided to respect the sovereignty of all the Nations to achieve security by maintaining peace in its conduct of foreign relations. The key challenges for India's external relations include balancing national interests, promoting peace, and navigating regional conflicts. India should prioritize economic diplomacy by engaging in trade talks and increasing foreign investment. India should enhance its engagement in regional diplomacy by building strong partnerships with its neighboring countries.

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