



India's Evolving Foreign Policy: A Historical Analysis Of The Non-Aligned Movement And The Modi Doctrine

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Abstract: India's foreign policy has evolved significantly since its independence in 1947. Initially, India, along with other newly independent colonies, established the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1961 as a voice for developing countries at multilateral forums. After the end of the Cold War in 1991, India took political steps to improve its relationships with the USA, Western European countries, and China, and adopted a new economic policy centered around liberalization, privatization, and globalization. In recent years, several experts have attributed changes in India's foreign policy to the leadership of Narendra Modi, who was elected in 2014. They have referred to this new approach as the "Modi Doctrine" and argue that it differs significantly from previous policies. However, while Modi's objectives are more energetic, some experts suggest that his foreign policy is similar to that of his predecessors Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh. India has faced numerous challenges in its 75 years of independence, including the confrontation with China in 1962 and the IPKF's misadventure in Sri Lanka. To navigate the challenging road ahead in this era of geopolitical transformation, India can draw lessons from its foreign policy since independence, which has been divided into six broad phases.

Keywords: India, Foreign Policy, Indo-Pacific, NAM, China

After India gained independence in 1947, it faced a world that was divided ideologically. The Western (liberal-capitalist) and Eastern (communist) blocs were led by the United States of America (USA) and the former Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR), respectively. Instead of aligning with either of these two blocs, India, along with many other newly independent colonies, established the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) in 1961. This movement became a voice for developing countries at multilateral forums. The end of the Cold War (1947-1991) caused the disintegration of the former USSR in 1991, leading many countries, including India, to re-evaluate their foreign policies and adjust their economic structures. In the years following the end of the Cold War, India took political steps to improve its relationships with the USA, Western European countries, and China. Additionally, in 1991, India adopted a new economic policy centered around liberalization, privatization, and globalization.

In the three decades since India significantly altered its foreign and economic policies, numerous changes have occurred in global politics. To safeguard its interests in this new world, India has made deliberate or compulsory adjustments to its foreign policy. Although some fundamental principles of India's foreign policy have been modified over time to serve the nation's interests, certain core tenets remain unchanged. Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first prime minister, was widely recognized as the primary architect of Indian foreign policy during the country's early years of independence, and his policies continue to endure. However, other prime ministers, including those who led coalition governments, have also played a role in shaping India's foreign policy. Several experts have attributed changes in India's foreign policy to the leadership of Narendra Modi, who was elected in 2014. They have referred to this new approach as the "Modi Doctrine" and argue that it differs significantly from previous policies (Chaulia, 2016; Ganguly et al., 2016). According to Mohan (2015), Modi has revitalized India's foreign policy, while Pant (2016, pp. 13-14) sees evidence of greater dynamism and pragmatism in the country's international relations. However, Hall (2015) suggests that Modi's objectives, while more energetic, are similar to those pursued by his predecessors Atal Bihari Vajpayee and Manmohan Singh. Ganguly (2017) contends that Modi's foreign policy has made some departures from the past, but has not fundamentally altered India's overall orientation.

India is commemorating 75 years of independence this year. During this time, the country has experienced both domestic and international mini transformations. When India gained independence, it faced immense challenges. Recently, the external affairs minister of India, S. Jaishankar, delivered the 4th Ramnath Goenka memorial lecture on Indian foreign policy. The international order is undergoing a significant transformation, which can be attributed to various geopolitical events such as America's unilateralism under its first policy, the rebalancing of the global economy, the rise of China and India, the return of old empires, the resurgence of Russia, Iran, and Turkey, geopolitical flux in the Middle East, the crisis in Syria and Afghanistan, and the reign of terrorism by the Islamic State of Iraq and Syria. Africa, formerly known as the lost continent, is now being referred to as the continent of hope. Technology, connectivity, and trade have emerged as the new sources of power, and climate change is playing a significant role in geopolitics, among other factors, due to the opening of the Arctic passage, a sea route that connects the Pacific and Atlantic Oceans. To navigate the challenging road ahead in this era of geopolitical transformation, India can draw lessons from its foreign policy since independence. By dividing Indian foreign policy into six broad phases, one can gain a better understanding of its evolution.

First Phase (1946-62): An Era of Optimistic Non-Alignment

In the aftermath of the Cold War and Independence, India worked to rebuild its economy and strengthen its sovereignty while avoiding constraints on its options and diminishing its autonomy. Its secondary goal, as the first decolonized country, was to guide Asia and Africa in their pursuit of a more equitable international system. This was the height of Third World unity, and India was actively engaged in diplomacy across Korea, Vietnam, Hungary, and the Suez. For a time, India's standing on the international stage was stable and secure. However, the confrontation with China in 1962 brought this era to a close and had negative consequences for India's reputation.

Second Phase (1962-71): Decade of Realism and Recovery

India, despite limited resources, responded in a practical manner to security and political issues. To safeguard national security, India went beyond its non-alignment stance and signed a defense pact with the United States in 1964, which is now largely overlooked. During this period, external pressures on Kashmir escalated. While the global environment remained fragmented, there were instances of sporadic cooperation between the US and USSR. Due to the geographic convergence of South Asia, India's diplomacy had to engage with both superpowers simultaneously, as demonstrated at Tashkent in 1965. Furthermore, this was a time when domestic challenges, such as political unrest and economic hardship, were particularly severe.

Third Phase (1971-91): Period of Greater Indian Regional Assertion

This phase began when Bangladesh was formed, which effectively ended India-Pakistan equivalence, but it concluded with the IPKF's misadventure in Sri Lanka. The Sino-US rapprochement of 1971 drastically altered the geopolitical landscape, and by that time, the broader environment had undergone a significant transformation. To address this challenge, India signed the Indo-Soviet Treaty and adopted increasingly pro-Soviet positions on global issues. The situation was particularly complex because the US-China-Pakistan axis that was emerging at the time posed a severe threat to India's future. Although this axis had several long-term effects, India's change in stance was more influenced by other factors. After the collapse of the USSR, a close ally, and the related economic crisis in 1991, India was compelled to reassess the fundamentals of both its internal and foreign policies.

Fourth Phase (1991-99): Quest for Strategic Autonomy

The fourth phase of India's development was marked by significant events, particularly the fall of the USSR and the emergence of a "unipolar" world. This period of change prompted India to reevaluate numerous topics and focus on maintaining its strategic autonomy. India's increased openness to the global economy was reflected in its new diplomatic goals and strategies, including a revised approach to international affairs and a shift in its posture toward Israel, which was encapsulated in the Look East policy. During this time, India sought to strengthen its relationship with the US while also defending its interests in key areas. However, its primary focus was on preserving its nuclear weapon option and maintaining strategic autonomy. By the turn of the century, India had achieved sufficient progress in its development to elevate its status to a higher level. After 1998, India successfully acquired nuclear weapons, thwarted Pakistan's military aggression in Kargil in 1999, experienced substantial economic growth that attracted international attention, and effectively managed its relationship with the US, which was more concerned with events in Asia and the impact of Islamic fundamentalism.

Fifth Phase (2000-13): India as a Balancing Power

India gained new opportunities as a result of the competitive environment created by liberalization, particularly as the US struggled to maintain the same level of uni-polarity. During this fifth phase, India learned the benefits of collaborating with various powers to address various challenges. India increasingly developed the qualities of a balancing power, as evidenced by the nuclear agreement with the US and improved relations with the West. Additionally, India strengthened its ties with Russia and found common ground with China on trade and climate change, while also helping to shape the BRICS into a significant forum. India adopted new positions during this time, as it viewed this period as one of opportunity.

Sixth Phase (2014- Present): Phase of Energetic Diplomacy

By 2014, a series of events converged to initiate the sixth phase, marked by altered calculations. China's increasing speed and rigidity in its interactions with the rest of the world led to a decrease in balancing functions during times of change. Conversely, the American trumpet grew more uncertain, exacerbated by the resource shortage caused by the Iraq war and the rising apathy in the Asia-Pacific region. Europe, too, became more inward-looking, failing to recognize the costs associated with political agnosticism. Japan's efforts to assert a stronger voice progressed slowly, while the full effects of the 2008 financial crisis and the subsequent global economic rebalancing were influenced by numerous factors. The world witnessed a shift towards multi-polarity, characterized by a larger distribution of power and more localized equations. The necessity for a fresh approach was apparent in light of the evolving political landscape and the increasing importance of international coalitions and regimes. In response, India adopted a more proactive diplomatic stance and embraced the emerging trend of convergence and issue-based agreements. This decision was driven by several key factors, including India's growing prominence as a major global economy and its significant expertise in emerging technologies. Additionally, India is poised to take on greater responsibilities as the world becomes more cautious, and it has an interest in influencing important international negotiations, such as the climate

change talks in Paris. It was noteworthy to observe a greater emphasis on developing partnerships with South American nations. In addition, our approach to both our local area and the larger neighborhood has had an impact on other regions. India's diplomatic objectives have expanded significantly, as have those of its collaborators. The concept of a multi-polar world that is centered on a multi-polar Asia is a shared objective with the rest of the world. To achieve this, India must adopt a strategy of collaborating with numerous partners on various agendas. The states that can aspire to occupy the various poles of the new international order are those that possess the best combination of capabilities, relationships, and positioning. It is the assurance that we can progress in this more flexible architecture that motivates us to become a major force in the future.

India's foreign policy underwent a significant change as it navigated its relationships with great powers, including historic ties with Russia and a strong partnership with the United States. Despite the invasion of Ukraine, India maintained its position of strategic autonomy while deftly balancing its relations with both Russia and the United States. However, tensions with China heightened when Chinese forces crossed the Line of Actual Control. As India assumes the leadership of the G20 this year, it remains committed to promoting multilateralism, regional stability, and forging a path forward.

A challenging foreign policy

India's foreign policy has remained committed to strategic autonomy, but it has undergone gradual shifts as it navigates its relations with great powers, including the United States and the European Union. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine has tested the strength of India's great power relations, particularly with the US and the EU, as they sought to impose economic sanctions and politically isolate Russia. Despite facing increased international pressure to halt Russian oil imports, India carefully balanced its energy needs with its desire to maintain good relations with the West. India showed little intention of cutting ties with Russia or compromising its energy dependence. The US demonstrated maturity in its decision to accommodate India's position, reflecting the strength and flexibility of the US-India bilateral ties and India's commitment to forging its own path forward.

During Prime Minister Modi's visit to Germany and Denmark in early May 2022, the United States' position created new opportunities for India to strengthen its relationship with the European Union. This visit highlighted India's commitment to deepening its connections with European countries, despite previous obstacles that had hindered closer ties. China emerged as the biggest challenge to India's foreign policy in 2022, as tensions along their shared border increased the threat of conflict and escalation in the South Asia and Indo-Pacific regions. In response to these concerns, India pursued a multilateral approach in the Indo-Pacific, primarily through its partnership with the United States. However, China voiced its opposition to the joint military exercises between India and the US under the framework of the Youth Observer program. In December, the Chinese military entered Wang, a region along the Sino-Indian border, marking the latest in a series of incursions across the Line of Actual Control (LLC). The recent incursion may have been a response to the EU-India joint military exercises. With tensions heightened, this incident raises concerns about the potential re-emergence of the "fateful triangle" in the region's geopolitics.

One of the main issues and challenges faced by Indian foreign policy in the present time is how to handle China. The political tensions between the United States and China, along with China's growing assertiveness in South Asia, have a significant impact on India. During the Modi administration, there have been serious political and military tensions between India and China. For instance, in 2017, Indian and Chinese soldiers were locked in a military standoff for 73 days at Doklam in Bhutan. Additionally, in 2020, Indian and Chinese soldiers clashed in the Galwan valley in Ladakh, resulting in the deaths of 20 Indian and four Chinese personnel, as acknowledged by China in 2021 (BBC, 2021).

In recent times, there have been multiple rounds of discussions between the Indian and Chinese military and civilian officials, but the tension along the border remains unabated. Despite this, the trade between the two nations has witnessed a significant upsurge. In the first nine months of 2021, India's trade with China amounted

to US \$90 billion, reflecting a substantial increase of 49% compared to the previous year. It is worth noting that the trade balance is heavily tilted in favor of China (The Times of India, 2021).

To effectively address the Chinese challenge, India is actively promoting the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), which involves Japan, the USA, and Australia. This initiative has been labeled as a "huge security risk" by the Chinese foreign minister Wang Yi, who warned that it could lead to "confrontation among different groups" and serve to maintain the "dominance and hegemonic system of the US" (Jiangtao, 2020).

India's struggle with China led to New Delhi's decision to increase its multilateral cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. Over the course of the first year, the group consisting of India, Australia, Japan, and the US made significant strides towards aligning their internal differences in order to better collaborate in areas of strategic overlap, such as regional prosperity, health, and education. For instance, India's aim of achieving sustainable economic growth in the Indo-Pacific region has led to ongoing discussions within the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative, providing two distinct opportunities for India to achieve its objectives. Although India did not sign on to all pillars of the IPEF, it is expected to return to the negotiating table with the EU in February 2023.

In 2022, India displayed a more prominent acceptance of its responsibilities as a security provider in the Indo-Pacific region. However, there are still two significant barriers that hinder India's ability to fully embrace this position. Firstly, India has yet to establish the extent of its security role within the Indo-Pacific. Although India has enhanced its involvement in the Indian Ocean, it has not yet established a compelling reason for a costly security commitment in the bordering Indo-Pacific region. New Delhi is not keen on stretching its Navy too thin to cover the entire area. Secondly, India lacks the capacity to assume such a substantial role in the near future. While India has made rapid strides in bolstering its naval capabilities and reorienting its maritime strategy, differences in regional outlook between India and EU S and its non-NATO allies pose challenges in aligning the Quad's views from time to time. The key to maintaining momentum for the quad lies in carefully navigating various differences. Last year, India's neighborhood policy served as a cautionary tale. The Taliban's leadership in Afghanistan, political stability in Nepal, economic collapse in Sri Lanka, and brewing unrest in Bangladesh all posed challenges to regional relationships. Additionally, India persisted in its policy of neglect towards Pakistan. With terror incidents increasing in Afghanistan and Pakistan, New Delhi feared spillover effects from both countries. However, India's accidental launch of a missile into Pakistan's territory in March 2022 serves as a stark reminder that New Delhi cannot ignore its western neighbor. Following the launch, Pakistan placed its frontline bases and strike aircraft on high alert as it gathered information. The absence of de-escalation mechanisms makes the unprecedented event a serious threat to crisis stability on the subcontinent. Had the launch occurred during a period of heightened tensions, the incident could have escalated to a dangerous level. As India assumes a leadership role at the G20 this year, many of the dynamics that shaped 2022 will persist. India will continue to face pressure in navigating greater power relations while terrorist groups threaten instability. Competition in the international system will continue to strain diplomatic ties. In this uncertain environment, India will take its place on the world stage, and as New Delhi solidifies its strategy, the world will be watching.

Role of Domestic Political Leadership in Changing Contours of Foreign Policy

According to M. Ganapathy, the former Secretary of MEA, a nation's foreign policy is closely tied to its internal politics and governance, as both factors can influence each other. India's foreign policy, as an independent nation, was greatly impacted by the Freedom Movement and the principles of its founding fathers. India's foreign policy was guided by the principles of non-alignment, support for anti-colonial, anti-racist, and anti-apartheid movements, and the philosophies of Mahatma Gandhi's Ahimsa and Satyagraha. India also rose to prominence as a proponent of non-discriminatory non-proliferation and decided to forge its own path, outside of any post-War alliances. It was unexpected that India, known for its civilization, would follow in someone else's footsteps.

According to C. Raja Mohan's paper, 'The Making of Indian Foreign Policy: The Role of Scholarship and Public Opinion,' many of India's diplomatic actions and concepts from the post-independence era were not rooted in a pre-existing national consensus, but rather, they were the by-product of having a strong leader like Nehru and his clear-cut worldview. As a result, deep national divisions on foreign policy emerged due to Nehru's decisions, including bringing the Kashmir issue before the UN Security Council, joining the British Commonwealth, refraining from supporting the Soviet invasion of Hungary, and prioritizing nuclear arms control over decolonization at the first nonaligned movement summit, among other issues. During this phase, Nehru's opinions on India's two main territorial disputes with Pakistan and China, namely the Kashmir and boundary disputes, were fiercely contested on a national level. Subsequently, Indian leaders faced opposition for their foreign policies, including Ashok Mehta, a cabinet minister, who resigned due to Indira Gandhi's reluctance to denounce Moscow for suppressing the Prague Spring in 1968. Many Indian academics criticized her decision to negotiate a security agreement with the Soviet Union in 1971, arguing that it deviated from a "strict" interpretation of non-alignment. Examples of foreign policy decisions that have sparked significant debate within the Indian political class include Atal Bihari Vajpayee's outreach to Israel in 1977, his visit to China in 1978, Mrs. Gandhi's decision to conduct a nuclear test in 1974, Inder Kumar Gujral's good neighbor policy (1996-1998), Prime Minister Vajpayee's nuclear tests in 1998, and Prime Minister Manmohan Singh's civil nuclear initiative with the United States in 2005.

K. Subramanyam's view from 2007 was that leadership played a crucial role in shaping India's foreign policy, which rarely garnered widespread agreement. Notable initiatives led by leaders, including Nehru, Indira, Rajiv, Narasimha Rao, Vajpayee, and Dr. Singh, such as the development of close ties with the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics, nuclear tests, the strategic weapons program, economic liberalization and globalization, the balance of power strategy, and non-alignment as a policy, became firmly established national policies when they proved effective.^{4]}

Indian Foreign Policy Post-2014

In 2014, India experienced a change in leadership that also led to a shift in foreign policy. This shift was in line with India's growing influence on the world order, and Prime Minister Narendra Modi and his Bharatiya Janata Party supporters credit India's rising reputation to a more assertive foreign policy that rejects the deference and hesitation that characterized past governments. This transformation is embodied by Mr. Modi, a charismatic Hindu nationalist who aspires to be the 'Vishwaguru.' According to EAM Dr. Jaishankar, nationalism in India has led to greater internationalism, and the country's current foreign policy is based on Enlightened National Interest, a concept that combines national interest with the interests of others. This approach is influenced by Aristotle's idea of Enlightened Self-Interest and Kautilya's Arthashastra, which states that individuals who act in ways that benefit others also benefit themselves in the long run. Enlightened national interest emphasizes the importance of a collective future vision for all people, rather than focusing on narrow self-interest. The new policy, which was introduced, incorporates the Gujral Doctrine of the 1990s, with its emphasis on neighborhood first and soft power, and replaces the cautious approach of the Non-Aligned Movement with a bold "multi-alignment" with important countries, while still preserving India's strategic autonomy. Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam and "Sabka Sath, Sabka Vikas, Sabka Vishwas, Sabka Prayas" serve as guiding principles for Indian foreign policy, which is being led by these concepts. The foundational principles of Indian foreign policy are the "Panchamrit" and "Panchsheel" concepts. Despite changes to the policy, India's fundamental values and civilizational ethos have remained steadfast in the face of the country's most recent crises.

Each nation, such as India, desires to be powerful in various aspects, namely politically, economically, militarily, and culturally. India's foreign policy is formulated to address its economic, social, political, and ecological needs while maintaining security in all areas. The modern strategy of India extends beyond economic factors and encompasses structural considerations. India aims to be a great power and collaborate with other countries in areas such as energy, the environment, trade, human rights, good governance, and international security.

Harsh V. Pant has explored the rapidly evolving Indian diplomatic style, including substantive shifts under Modi's premiership, and how these developments are likely to have significant implications for the conduct of Indian diplomacy and India's broader role in global politics in the years to come. According to Pant, India is now seen as a credible balancer in its neighborhood in the Indo-Pacific, as China's maritime assertiveness has increased, creating space for Indian diplomacy. Additionally, Modi has successfully provided a new style for the conduct of Indian diplomacy and a new sense of purpose for Indian foreign policy.

In commemoration of 75 years of independence, India is exuding more confidence and optimism in promoting its national interests on the world stage. As a sovereign nation, India has the autonomy to make its own decisions and pursue its own foreign policy, which cannot be undermined. With a population of one-fifth of the global total, India is entitled to assert its standpoint and protect its interests. It is essential for countries to prioritize their national interests in international relations, and India has consistently adhered to this principle in its foreign and national security policies, just like other countries. The present-day India, rooted in its homeland realities, cultural heritage, and steadfast in pursuing its core interests, has a fresh and strong voice in the global arena. From being the only superpower to resist China's Belt and Road Initiative in 2014 to responding forcefully to Chinese military aggression, India has shown its mettle. Additionally, by cooperating with the US without entering into a formal alliance and involving the West to bolster its domestic capabilities, India has expanded its market for goods, identified raw material suppliers, and recognized potential beneficiaries of its growing foreign aid, as its economic reliance on the rest of the world grows. India firmly opposes interfering in the domestic affairs of other nations.

The global diplomatic interactions involving India showcase the various factors at play. India's foreign policy has shifted to reflect the change from a bipolar to a multipolar international order, leading to new diplomatic repercussions. For instance, India's relations with its neighboring countries, as well as its extended neighborhood, including the Gulf States, Central Asian Countries, and ASEAN, have undergone new alignments based on the 3C (Connectivity, Commerce, and Culture) and 3D (Demography, Demand, and Democracy) approaches. In 2021-2022, India was elected as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council, receiving 184 of the 192 valid votes. The G7 summit also welcomed India, even though it is not a G7 member. India's evolving foreign policy has created opportunities for it to rise higher in the global power structure and become a global leader instead of just a middle power. This has led to a revised foreign policy approach. As a result, India can use its expanding diplomatic influence to take a leading role in addressing "issues without passports," such as terrorism and climate change, political instability, etc. India has demonstrated its ability to carry out complex operations, such as "Operation Ganga," which successfully rescued Indian citizens from conflict zones in Russia and Ukraine. Additionally, India has been more vocal about its stance on various international issues, including the reform of the UN Security Council, opposition to the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons, and refraining from voting on matters that may harm its interests. Furthermore, India's membership in three major export control organizations—the Wassenaar Arrangement, the Australia Group, and the Missile Technology Control Regime—enables it to access critical technologies that can enhance its defense and space industries.

Jon Finer, the United States' deputy national security adviser, has stated that India is ranked "extremely high" among its allies, as they possess the potential to support a global agenda. India's G20 Presidency presents a significant opportunity for the country to solidify its position as a global leader or "Vishwaguru."

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