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## Breaking Boundaries: Modi's Geostrategic Push Into Southeast Asia

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### Abstract: -

The special issue on Narendra Modi and India's foreign policy is introduced in this article. It draws attention to the fact that opinions on how well the Modi administration has managed foreign affairs vary. Some claim that since taking office in May 2014, it has changed India's foreign policy and outperformed its predecessors in managing the nation's most important partnerships and issues. Others argue that New Delhi's stance is weaker now than it was under previous administrations, particularly with regard to China and Pakistan, and that India's fundamental strategy remains unchanged.

The importance of ideas and ideology, the degree of the prime minister's autonomy in formulating foreign policy, and the degree to which institutional barriers both domestically and internationally limit India's agency are all covered in this article. In addition, his government launched new initiatives including "Neighbourhood First," a new effort to improve relations with India's neighbors, and revamped key initiatives like "Look East," which was renamed "Act East." It promised to play a major role in maintaining security

and improving infrastructure in the Indian Ocean region, in addition to fortifying its defense and diplomatic ties with countries from the Middle East through Central and South Asia to Southeast Asia.

**Keywords-** Policy, China, Ideology, Neighbors, Government.

### **Introduction:**

The set of tactics and measures a state uses in its dealings with other states, unions, and international organizations is referred to as its foreign policy, or external policy. It covers a broad variety of goals, such as economic gains, humanitarian aid, and defense and security. Numerous elements, including geopolitical strategies, other states' actions, and internal considerations, influence how foreign policy is formulated. Diplomatic corps have been essential to the evolution of foreign policy, which has historically moved from handling immediate crises to dealing with long-term international ties.

Foreign policy objectives are numerous and interdependent, resulting in a complete approach for any state. Defense and security are frequently top priorities, with states forging military alliances and using soft power to confront threats. Economic interests, such as trade agreements and foreign aid, are critical to a country's position in the global economy. Furthermore, several states have formed humanitarian programs based on the responsibility to protect, which provide various sorts of help to less powerful countries. Foreign policy studies look into the reasons and procedures behind state interactions, with think tanks and academic institutions doing research and analysis to help policymakers make decisions. (Devare, 2006)

The Modi government's foreign policy, often known as the Modi doctrine, refers to policy measures implemented by the current Indian government after Narendra Modi took office as Prime Minister on May 26, 2014.

In the international arena, every country has always been interdependent. Even after achieving the highest level of development, every nation must rely on other nations to meet its own needs. No nation can be isolated. Thus, developing foreign policy was a crucial task for the contemporary state. It sprang from the conditions; as Lenin once said, a state is not an isolated island, but rather a member of a society of states, in which participation is unavoidable. Thus, in today's world, every state establishes diplomatic, economic, trade, educational, cultural, and political relations with other countries, which obligates them to maintain these relationships with one another, as well as with international organizations and non-governmental actors in international relations.

International Relations helps us understand how countries and various institutions—like governments, NGOs, and international organizations—interact and behave across borders. It looks at the reasons behind these actions and how they shape relationships on a global scale.

The Ministry of External Affairs, led by External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, is responsible for carrying out India's foreign policy. Modi's foreign policy focuses on mending relations with South Asian neighbors, as well as engaging Southeast Asia's broader neighbourhood and major global powers. In pursuit

of this goal, he paid formal visits to Bhutan, Nepal, and Japan within the first 100 days of his administration, followed by trips to the United States, Myanmar, Australia, and Fiji. (Pant, 2014)

Several goals may drive a government's foreign policy. Foreign policy might be oriented for military and security, economic benefit, or assistance to states in need. All foreign policy objectives are interrelated and contribute to each state's overall foreign policy. Unlike domestic policy, foreign policy challenges frequently emerge unexpectedly in response to developments and important events in other countries.

During this period, the Modi Doctrine was characterized by a proactive and assertive foreign policy, focusing on regional stability, economic growth, and a strong security framework, all while maintaining India's strategic autonomy in a multipolar world. It also emphasized several key ideologies that reshaped India's international relations:

### **1. Neighborhood First Policy**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Neighborhood First" strategy emphasizes the importance of developing India's connections with its South Asian neighbors. This method focuses on diplomatic engagement and development projects. Key factors include encouraging connection initiatives, strengthening trade ties, and enabling cultural exchanges.

### **2. Act East Policy**

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's "Act East" program seeks to strengthen India's ties with Southeast Asian countries and the larger Indo-Pacific region. This plan aims to improve economic connections, security cooperation, and cultural exchanges with countries including Japan, Vietnam, and Australia. The program focuses on establishing strategic ties through trade agreements, joint military exercises, and infrastructure development.

### **3. Economic Diplomacy**

Narendra Modi's economic diplomacy is focused on using foreign connections to boost India's economic growth and development. This policy seeks to attract foreign investment, strengthen trade partnerships, and promote technology transfer. Key programs include "Make in India," which promotes manufacturing and investment, and efforts to build links with major economies like as the United States, Japan, and Europe. (J, 2020)

### **4. Security and Counter-Terrorism**

The policy focuses on modernizing the armed forces and improving border security to deter infiltration and ensure territorial integrity. Furthermore, India has maintained a diplomatic policy of isolating countries that support terrorism while lobbying for stricter international standards against such actions. Modi's government

has also prioritized internal security measures, with investments in technology and infrastructure to strengthen domestic law enforcement agencies.

5. Cultural Diplomacy

Narendra Modi's cultural diplomacy agenda aims to promote India's rich heritage and values on a global scale. This strategy seeks to strengthen India's soft power by encouraging cultural exchanges and engagement with other countries. Yoga, traditional arts, and Indian festivals are among the key projects aimed at highlighting India's unique cultural landscape.

Modi's government has actively fostered international engagement through projects such as the International Day of Yoga, which has received great recognition and participation around the world.

Comparative Analysis of Indian Foreign Policy: A Study of Pre- and Post-2014 Approaches:

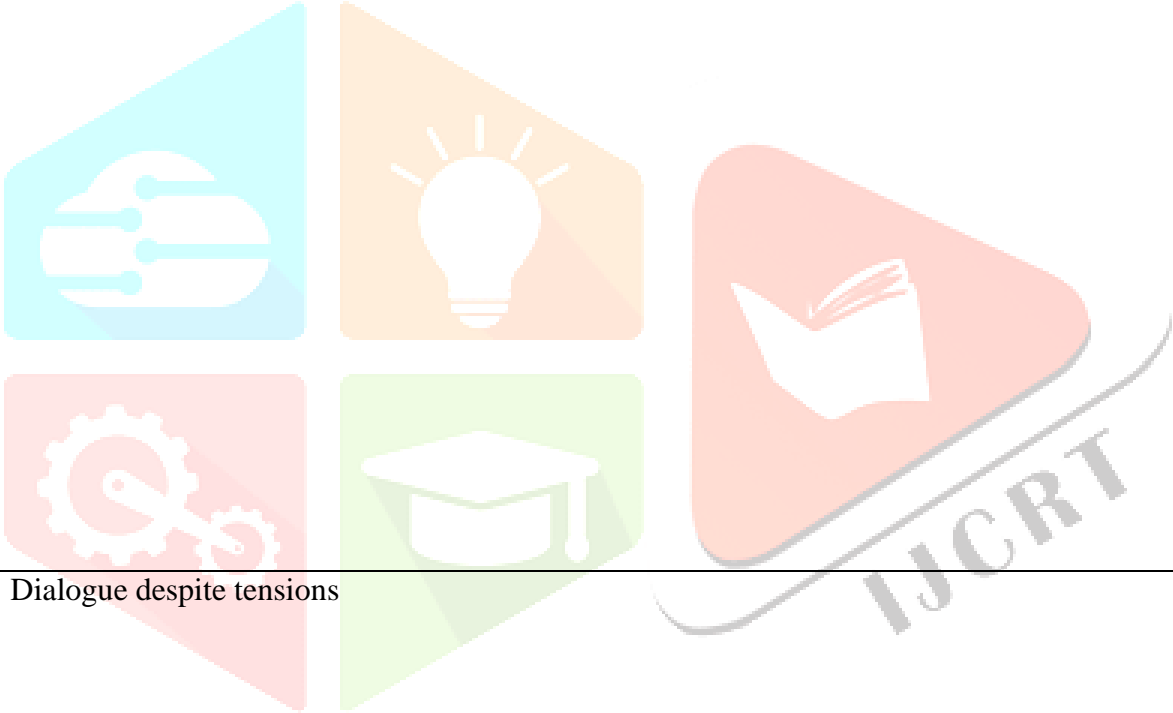
This is a succinct and straightforward analysis of India's foreign policy prior to and following 2014, emphasizing the significant shifts implemented by Prime Minister Narendra Modi in contrast to the previous Congress-led (mostly UPA) administrations:

1. Ideological Approaches

Aspect	Before 2014	After 2014 (Modi’s era)
Philosophy	Non-alignment and strategic autonomy	Pragmatic, nationalist, interest-driven
Diplomatic Style	Low profile, bureaucratic	High-visibility, leader-centric diplomacy (Modi's personal outreach)

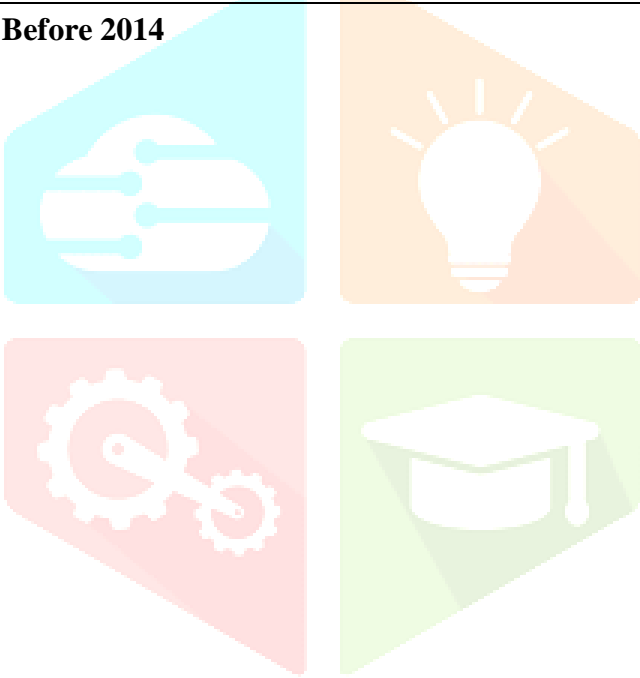

2. Neighbourhood Relations

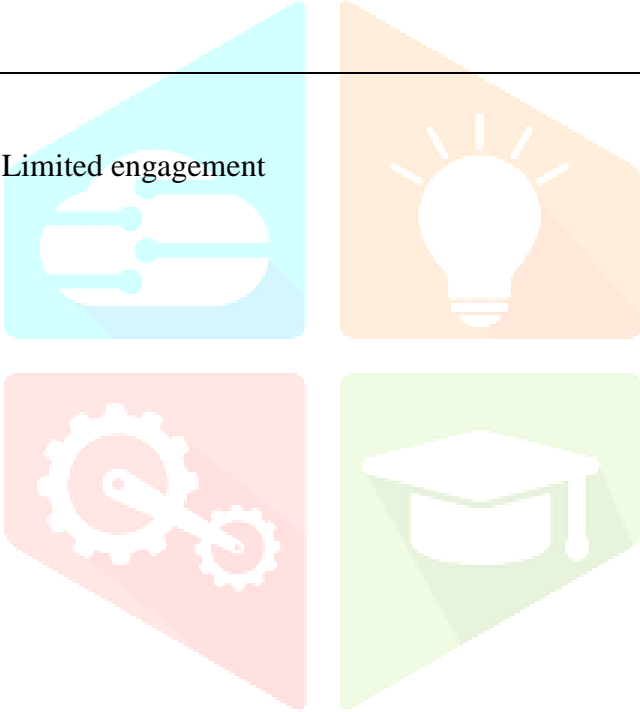

A re a	Before 2014	Aft er 201 4
So ut	SAARC-based multilateralism	"Ne igh

h As ia R eg io n (B hu ta n, Vi et na m, Sr i L an ka , et c.)		bor hoo d Firs t" poli cy wit h bila tera l outr eac h
Pa ki st an	Dialogue despite tensions	Tou gh stan ce on terr oris m; halt ed talk s
C hi na	Economic cooperation despite border tensions	Shif t to strat

		egic com peti tion , post - Gal wan tens ions
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3. Global Engagement and Strategic Partnership

P o l i c y D i m e n s i o n	<div>Before 2014</div> <div></div>	<div>After 2014</div> <div></div>
U S R e l a t i o n s	Improving ties post-2005 nuclear deal	Deepening strategic partnership; Quad revival
I s	Balanced ties; pro-Arab tilt	Stronger relations with Israel, UAE, Saudi Arabia

r a e l a n d W e s t A s i a		
A f r i c a a n d I n d o - P a c i f i c	<div>Limited engagement</div> 	<div>Enhanced focus on Africa, Indo-Pacific strategy initiated</div> 

4. Multilateralism and Soft Power

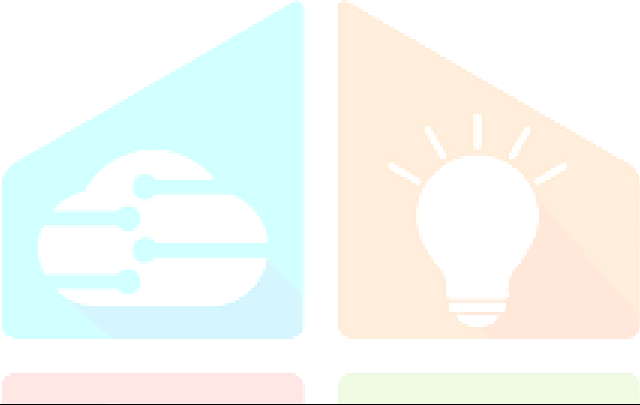
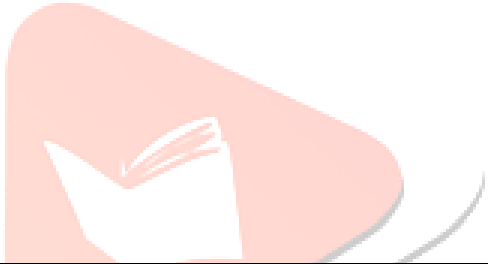
A r		After 2014
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e a	Before 2014	
U N & G  l o b a l  F o r u m s	Support for reforms; limited lobbying	Aggressive push for UNSC seat; active in G20, BRICS
S o f t  P o w e r	Limited global outreach	Promotion of Yoga Day, Indian culture, diaspora events

5. Economic Diplomacy

S e c t o r	Before 2014	After 2014
F D I P	Modest external promotion	"Make in India", "Digital India" pitched globally



r o m o t i o n		
E n e r g y S e c u r i t y	Oil imports, few strategic reserves 	Diversification, green energy diplomacy (ISA) 

Indian foreign policy has changed from a cautious, regionally oriented approach to a more dynamic, globally ambitious agenda since 2014. While there is continuity in retaining strategic autonomy and multipolar engagement, the Modi era prioritizes visibility, personal diplomacy, and strategic relationships. The shift underscores India's desire to play a larger role in global governance and regional stability. (Firdous, 2020)

**The foreign policy of Narendra Modi is successful in the following aspects:**

- Narendra Modi has successfully improved India's image globally. During his tours to several countries, he highlighted India's democracy, cultural heritage, progress, government programs, and the country's progress toward becoming a superpower. 'India is not a beggar, but an able country,' was an attempt to generate such an impression. As a result, India's global image has improved. India's image is changing from bad to positive.
- India's foreign policy was mostly focused on China and Pakistan. As a result, its growth was limited to the Asiatic continent. Initially, Narendra Modi attempted to take over all surrounding countries. However, China and Pakistan did not support such an attempt, so he avoided them and attempted to

accompany Nepal, Bhutan, Bangladesh, and Afghanistan. Relations with Islamic nations have also improved. The animosity with China and Pakistan was agreed upon, and steps were undertaken to curb and defeat them. The grounds of contention are set aside, and emphasis is placed on the points of mutual agreement for the improvement of cooperation. (meena, 2024)

- India and China compete for superiority. It has led to the politics of challenges. India's major competitor is China, not Pakistan. China is economically and militarily stronger than India. China has always been hostile on India's frontiers. Narendra Modi has been successful in this regard with China. He has not given in to Chinese pressure and has signed contracts with Japan and Vietnam. In addition, by developing links with Iran, India gained access to the Chabahar port. As a result, China has faced challenges in the South China Sea.
- India requires funds for development. The government continued to seek foreign investment in this direction. Several contracts were struck with foreign countries to encourage them to invest in 'Make in India'. Countries such as Japan, China, America, Singapore, Canada, Germany, South Korea, and France have admitted to making investments in India. Construction projects worth around \$100 billion have been inked under the 'Make in India' initiative. This investment will fund the development of railways, highways, smart cities, ports, metros, and other infrastructure projects. It will lead to more employment and growth in the country. Narendra Modi has emphasized '3D' to encourage international investment, which stands for Democracy, Demography, and Demand. This has led to greater international investment.
- As the country's economy grows, so does the demand for energy. To meet India's growing energy demand, new electrical energy must be generated. To that end, India has invested in a hydroelectric project in Nepal and worked to ensure the supply of electricity. Contracts with various countries are also signed while keeping the necessity for nuclear power in mind. Important nuclear power contracts are signed with the United States, France, Australia, Canada, Japan, and South Korea. Vietnam has awarded the contract to extract oil from the sea to the Indian company ONGC. This means that power-security is a priority in India's foreign policy.
- India's influence in global politics was limited due to its focus on Asia, lack of alignment, and balanced power dynamics. However, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has prioritized national welfare and realist foreign policy, indicating a clear stride forward in India's quest to become a leading country. For this objective, India must focus on economic development, improving governance and system capabilities, and positioning itself as Asia's leader. (Pant, Out With Non-Alignment, In With a 'Modi Doctrine', 2014)

- The Modi government prioritizes intra-national development while implementing foreign policy. One example of this is the organization of the 'Raisina Dialogue' by the Ministry of External Affairs in collaboration with a private platform named the 'Observer Research Foundation' from March 1 to March 3, 2016. More than 450 representatives from 40 countries attended the event. The central theme of 'Raisina Dialogue' is 'Connecting Asia'. It included discussions about linking parts, creating communication facilities between intra-national production centres, ocean security, cyber technology, women's empowerment, and other topics related to the 'Sagar Mala' project.
- States were formerly excluded from foreign policy due to their inclusion on the central list. However, the Modi government has embraced a strategy of including them. The 'State Vision' initiative is established in the Ministry of External Affairs to educate governments about diplomatic abilities. The presence of West Bengal's Chief Minister at the time of the agreement with Bangladesh, as well as the Chief Ministers of Gujarat and Maharashtra during their visits to China, Magnolia, South Korea, and the organization of the 'Pravasi Bhartiya Sammelan' in Gujarat, Maharashtra, Madhya Pradesh, Uttar Pradesh, and Bihar, demonstrate that states are given importance in foreign policy. India is the union of states and because of the communication with them the frame of the union has become strong and the system of decentralization is boosted.
- Every nation's foreign policy aims to safeguard itself. By implementing strong policies, the Modi government has prioritized national security. India's policy is shifting from defensive to aggressive. The surgical strike, defense-related accords, Japan's participation in the Malabar military exercise alongside the United States, and Defence Minister Manohar Parrikar's involvement in the defense-related Shangri-la agreement all make this evident. The impact of Modi's leadership is seen in defence strategy. The primary goal of the 'Make in India' and 'Digital India' projects is to achieve self-reliance in the production of arms.
- India has attempted to challenge China, rather than Pakistan, in both South Asian and global politics. India's measures to fight China militarily include increased cooperation with Vietnam, the decision to provide Vietnam with the 'Brahmos' missile, an agreement with Japan, and the desire to create the 'Chabahar Port'. India cannot openly declare war on China, given its military and economic dominance. China, on the other hand, regards India as a rival and is in a state of confrontation. Therefore, it is critical to beat China strategically. The Modi government was effective in doing so. It is also successful in the case of Pakistan, addressing the subject of Baluchistan. (Chandra, 2017)

## Conclusion-

- Proactive Engagement: Modi's "Neighbourhood First" strategy reaffirmed India's commitment to regional cooperation and leadership in South Asia.

- Improved Bilateral Ties: India strengthened ties with Bangladesh, Bhutan, and the Maldives through infrastructure, commerce, and energy cooperation.
- Strategic Setbacks: Border conflicts, nationalistic policies, and political misunderstandings all contributed to an increase in tensions with Nepal and Pakistan.
- Chinese Challenge: China's footprint in India's neighbourhood has grown, posing a challenge to New Delhi's traditional area of influence.
- Approach Change: India's foreign policy became more forceful and strategic, depending on bilateralism, assistance diplomacy, and regional outreach to offset external pressures. (Ganguly, 14 June, 2017)
- Humanitarian Diplomacy: India fostered goodwill using techniques such as vaccine diplomacy, development funding, and capacity building.
- Overall Impact: India partially succeeded in reaffirming its leadership in South Asia, though geopolitical challenges and competing influences remain key hurdles.

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