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## India's Shift From Non-Alignment To Multi-Alignment In Global Politics

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### Abstract

This study examines India's transition from the policy of Non-Alignment to the contemporary strategy of Multi-Alignment in global politics. Rather than representing a complete departure from earlier foreign policy principles, the shift reflects a strategic adaptation shaped by structural changes in the international system, including the rise of China, renewed great-power competition, and the emergence of multipolarity. Grounded in realist theory and the concept of strategic autonomy, the study combines historical analysis with perception-based survey data to evaluate India's evolving diplomatic approach. The findings indicate that India's foreign policy represents a pragmatic balancing strategy aimed at maximizing national interest while maintaining decision-making autonomy. The paper concludes that Multi-Alignment represents an evolutionary continuation of Non-Alignment within a changing global order.

**Key Words:** Non-Alignment, Multi-Alignment, Indian Foreign Policy, Strategic Autonomy, Multipolarity, Global Politics

### Introduction

India's foreign policy has undergone substantial transformation in response to changing global power dynamics and emerging geopolitical realities. While the doctrine of Non-Alignment shaped India's diplomatic posture during the Cold War, contemporary international politics characterized by multipolarity and strategic competition has encouraged a more flexible engagement strategy.

In recent decades, India has simultaneously deepened relations with multiple global powers through participation in platforms such as BRICS, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. This diversified diplomatic engagement is increasingly described as Multi-Alignment, reflecting India's effort to expand cooperation while preserving strategic autonomy. Scholarly debate continues regarding whether this approach represents a departure from traditional Non-Alignment or an adaptation consistent with India's long-standing foreign policy principles. Existing studies primarily focus on geopolitical strategy, while limited attention has been given to public perception of this transformation.

This study examines India's transition through theoretical analysis and perception-based survey data, arguing that Multi-Alignment represents pragmatic realist balancing rather than a fundamental ideological shift.

## Literature Review

Scholars have interpreted India's foreign policy evolution through historical and realist perspectives. Appadorai (1981) emphasized that Non-Alignment emerged from India's developmental priorities and the desire to preserve sovereignty in international decision-making. Bandyopadhyaya (2003) described the policy as a pragmatic diplomatic strategy combining idealism with national interest.

In the post-Cold War period, Raja Mohan (2003) highlighted India's strategic engagement with major powers as a response to systemic transformation in global politics. Similarly, Tharoor (2012) characterized contemporary Indian diplomacy as flexible and interest-driven, aimed at expanding partnerships without formal alliances.

While existing literature recognizes strategic autonomy as a consistent guiding principle, limited attention has been devoted to understanding public perception of India's transition toward Multi-Alignment. This study seeks to address this analytical gap.

## Methodology

This study adopts a mixed-method research approach combining qualitative and quantitative analysis. The qualitative component relies on secondary sources including academic literature, policy speeches, and government documents related to Indian foreign policy. A realist theoretical framework is applied to interpret India's strategic behavior within an evolving international system.

The quantitative component consists of a perception-based survey conducted through structured questionnaires distributed online. Descriptive statistical methods were used to analyze public understanding of India's foreign policy orientation and balancing strategy among major powers.

The integration of theoretical interpretation and empirical perception data enables a comprehensive assessment of India's transition from Non-Alignment to Multi-Alignment.

## HISTORICAL FOUNDATIONS: NON-ALIGNMENT

India's policy of Non-Alignment during the Cold War reflected an effort to maintain decision-making independence while avoiding formal alliance commitments.

Although India maintained closer relations with the Soviet Union in certain sectors, the broader objective remained preservation of strategic autonomy within a bipolar international system.

## The making of Indian Foreign Policy

The foreign policy of India has evolved from Nehruvian idealism, strategic realism and economic pragmatism.

After the end of the world war, the world was divided into two blocs on the basis of ideologies, capitalism and communism. Capitalism was promoted by USA and communism was promoted by the USSR; India, during that time, was a newly independent country, so India did not join any blocs but India chose to maintain strategic autonomy with the help of Non-Alignment.

According to Bandyopadhyaya, J. (2003). The foreign policy of India after independence ie is NAM was not for isolation but was a diplomatic strategy of India.

## POST-COLD WAR TRANSFORMATION

After the end of the cold war and the disintegration of the Soviet Union, there was a shift from the bipolar to a multipolar world, so in response to changes in the international system, the rise of China, the US-China rivalry the is a shift in the foreign policy of India from non-alignment to multi or all alignment.

The disintegration of the Soviet Union in 1991 significantly altered the strategic situation and led to a change in strategy.

The book *Crossing the Rubicon* by C. Raja Mohan (2003) highlights how India, perplexed by its relationship with the US, ultimately chose to engage with the US pragmatically.

In *Pax Indica*, Shashi Tharoor (2012) characterizes India's diplomacy in the 21st century as the capability to assert one's influence without becoming trapped.

The advent of China as a major regional competitor increased the situation where India felt the need to balance the power even more. According to a realist framework, states are expected to react to the emergence of a powerful state by:

- strengthening their own military capabilities (internal balancing)
- forming alliances with other states (external balancing)
- India's conduct with the Quad is an illustration of its external balancing approach.

## Principle of Indian foreign policy

The Indian foreign policy aims to promote world peace, as it is also written in Article 51 of the Indian constitution directive principle of state policy, which directs the state to maintain international peace and security and the resolution of disputes by encouraging arbitration.

Besides, peace not only helps to maintain security but also helps in the economic development of the country

The Indian foreign policy opposes colonialism, neo-colonialism, neo-imperialism, and racism

India also protested against the apartheid system in South Africa by snapping its diplomatic relations in 1954

Panchsheel agreement -India signed an agreement with Indo-sino agreement known as panchsheel agreement or the five principles of peaceful coexistence it was signed with china but India used it as a foundational agreement to deal with other neighbourhood nation as well

## CONTEMPORARY MULTI-ALIGNMENT

India's contemporary foreign policy demonstrates simultaneous engagement with multiple power centers. Participation in the Quad reflects maritime security concerns in the Indo-Pacific region, while continued involvement in BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization underscores India's engagement with Eurasian and Global South platforms. This diversified engagement strategy represents Multi-Alignment, enabling India to expand cooperation while preserving strategic autonomy.

Modi speech at Raisina Dialogue 2017 An integrated Neighborhood is my dream .There is need to strengthen connectivity and bring the region together .

People of South Asia are joined by blood and cultural history.

## India and South Asia, Southeast Asia and Indo pacific region

India Mult alignment foreign policy is also seen with the South Asian, Southeast Asian, and Indo-Pacific regions' countries

India is the largest country in South Asia in terms of population, economy, and military power.

India emphasizes developing relations with South Asia by following the Neighborhood First policy with South Asia and also aims to build political trust, economic cooperation, people-to-people contact, countering China's intervention in South Asia etc.

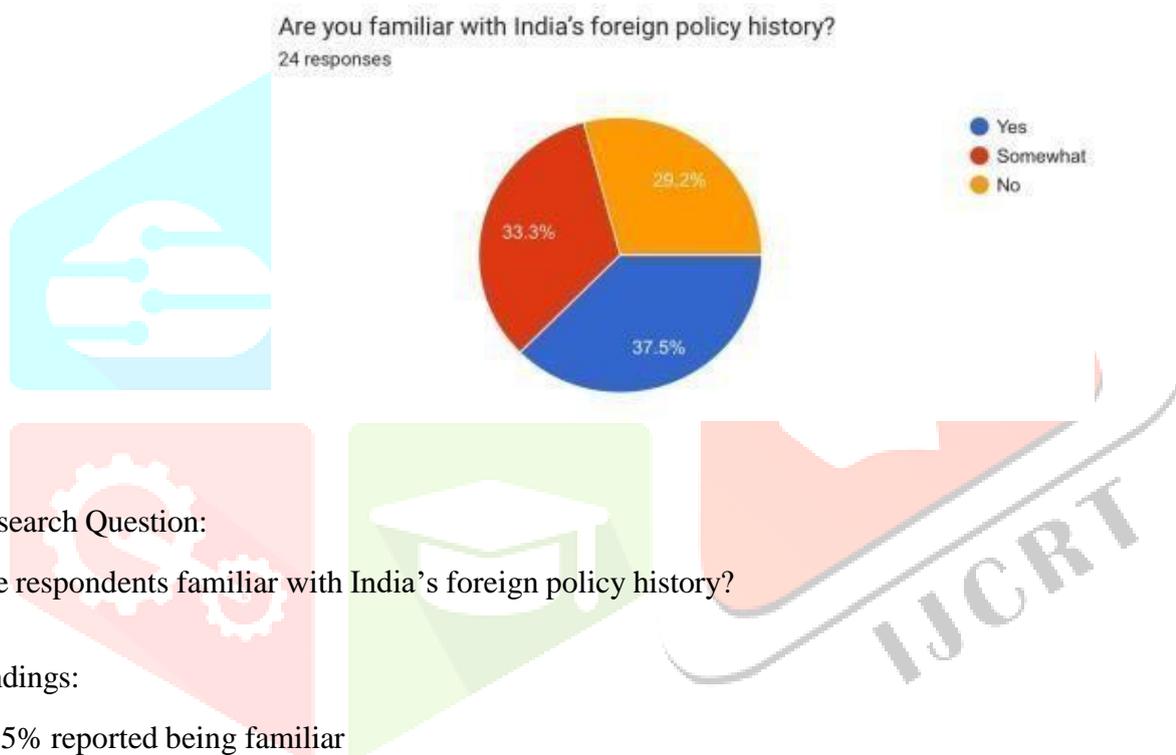
Regional cooperation in South Asia is promoted through institutions such as the South Asian Association of regional cooperation SAARC.

When Narendra Modi became prime minister in 2014, he invited the members of SAARC to his oath-taking ceremony. In 2019, he invited the members of BIMSTEC (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation ) to his oath-taking ceremony. This shows that the key principle of the Indian foreign policy is the Neighborhood First policy.

India engage in south east Asian countries and Indo Pacific regions through policy such as the Act east policy which tries to developed economic, strategic and security cooperation with Asean countries .

India tries to counter balance the economic military rise of china through quad in indo pacific regions

### DATA ANALYSIS AND FINDINGS



#### Research Question:

Are respondents familiar with India's foreign policy history?

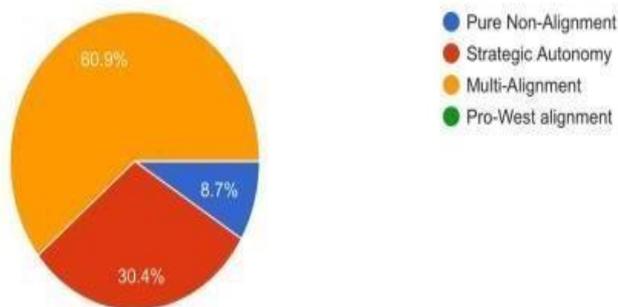
#### Findings:

- 37.5% reported being familiar
- 33.3% somewhat familiar.
- 29.2% not familiar

Although 33.3% are counted as being familiar, when you add up those who are only partially informed and those completely unaware, it comes to 66.7%, which means that the public understanding of India's foreign policy is not really strong but moderate.

This is important as the acceptance of a foreign policy in a democratic society depends, among other things, on the level of knowledge of the public. The shallow level of knowledge could be the reason why the people's views of Multi-Alignment are influenced more by current news than by the historical concept of Non-Alignment.

India today follows:  
23 responses



Research Question:

Does India today follow Non-Alignment, Strategic Autonomy, or Multi-Alignment? Findings:

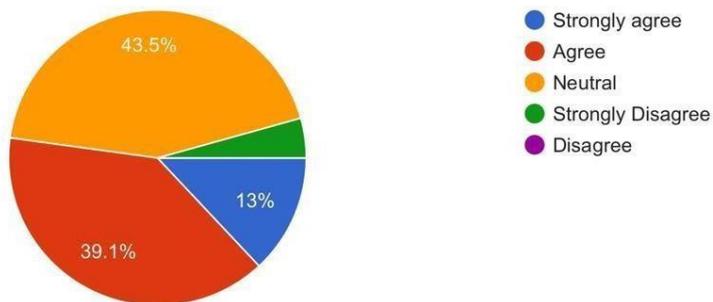
- 60.9% chose Multi-Alignment.
- 30.4% chose Strategic Autonomy.
- 8.7% chose Pure Non-Alignment.

Analytical Interpretation:

The main response being Multi-Alignment shows that most respondents see the Non-Alignment during the Cold War as being very different from today. However, the considerable minority picking Strategic Autonomy indicates that the idea of autonomy still holds some conceptual relevance.

This mixture of viewpoints is consonant with the claim that India's policy change is more of an evolution than a revolution.

India is successfully balancing relations between the U.S., Russia, and China.  
23 responses



Research Question:

Is India successfully balancing relations between the U.S., Russia, and China? Findings:

- 13% (Strongly agree + Agree combined) believe India is balancing successfully.
- 43.5% are neutral.
- 4.5% disagree.

interpretation :

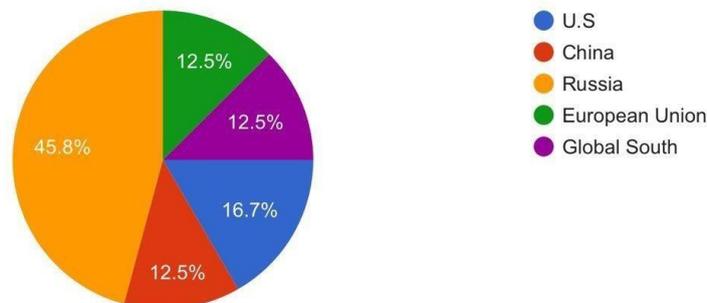
It is quite critical that the majority of people are neutral (43.5%). It indicates that people are not sure

of Indias capability to remain a balancing power when the rivalry of great powers is getting stiffer.

Such neutrality indicates that the public is subjected to structural pressure: along with the increase in U.S.China rivalry, the cost of hedging also increases. The public may become more skeptical if they can observe contradictions (for instance, defense ties with the U.S. vs oil trade with Russia).

Which partnership is most important for India today?

24 responses



Research Question:

Which partnership is most important for India today? Findings:

- 45.8% selected Russia.
- 16.7% selected the U.S.
- 12.5% EU.
- 12.5% China.
- 12.5% Global South.

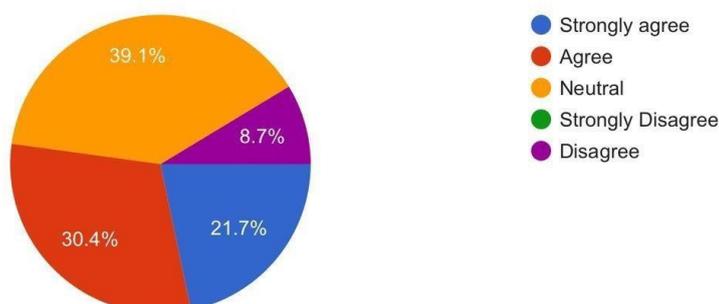
Analytical Interpretation:

On the other hand, Russia stays pretty much the focus of public perception when it comes to the U.S., even though its strategic ties have been growing. This is mostly because of the historical defense cooperation and the Cold War legacy.

The difference between the policy reality (more and more U.S. cooperation) and the public perception (favoring Russia) shows a sort of transitional phase in the strategic identity.

India's foreign policy today is more pragmatic than ideological.

23 responses



Research Question:

Is India's foreign policy today more pragmatic than ideological? Findings:

Majority agreed or strongly agreed. Analytical

Interpretation:

This is in line with the main argument that India's external relations are currently more influenced by strategic considerations rather than ideological commitments such as anti imperial solidarity or bloc neutrality.

Realist thinking would agree with this: at times of heightened structural stress, states place survival and power above normative identity.

### **WHAT DO THESE FINDINGS TELL US?**

A summary of the survey shows that:

Public perception matches the concept of Multi-Alignment. People are somewhat sure of India's balancing ability. Russia still has a charting role in people's mind. Ideology is a minor factor in people's understanding of foreign policy. This strengthens the paper's point that India's change is more of a pragmatic adjustment than a move away from ideology.

India's Multi-Alignment policy gives it more room for diplomatic maneuvering, however, at the same time, it exposes the country to some significant strategic risks.

In case the competition between the big powers becomes more intense, India might be compelled to take more definite positions, which would mean less freedom of action. While public opinion is presently in favor of diversification, the continuation of neutrality will depend on India's capacity to get benefits from different sides without provoking strategic retaliation. In other words, the results of the survey, therefore, reflect not only the perception but also the political sustainability of Multi-Alignment.

### **LIMITATIONS OF THE STUDY**

This study is limited by the relatively small survey sample size and reliance on perception-based responses, which may not fully represent broader national opinion. Future research may incorporate larger datasets and comparative analysis to enhance empirical reliability and analytical depth.

### **CONCLUSION**

India's foreign policy has evolved from the doctrine of Non-Alignment toward a flexible strategy of Multi-Alignment shaped by changing global power dynamics. Rather than abandoning earlier principles, India has adapted strategic autonomy to contemporary geopolitical realities.

The findings suggest that India increasingly pursues pragmatic partnerships guided by national interest rather than ideological alignment. Public perception broadly recognizes this transition, although uncertainty remains regarding India's long-term balancing capacity amid intensifying great-power competition.

In an emerging multipolar order, Multi-Alignment provides diplomatic flexibility while simultaneously generating strategic challenges. India's future foreign policy effectiveness will depend upon maintaining autonomy while managing relationships among competing global powers.

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