

Original Article

India's Role in International Geo-Political Scenario

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India's geopolitical role has evolved significantly from its early non-alignment policy to its current multi-alignment strategy, positioning itself as a key global actor. With strong participation in platforms such as BRICS, QUAD, SCO, and the G20, India balances strategic autonomy with proactive engagement in global governance. Its geographic location in South Asia and access to vital Indian Ocean routes enhance its maritime and security relevance, while economic growth and demographic strength reinforce its international influence. India has expanded its diplomatic, defense, technological, and energy partnerships with major powers, while also playing a pivotal role in shaping sustainable development and climate governance through initiatives like the International Solar Alliance. However, challenges remain, including border disputes with China, strained relations with Pakistan, and balancing alliances in a polarized multipolar order. India's long-term vision, encapsulated in Viksit Bharat @2047, underscores its ambition to transition from a rule-follower to a rule-shaper in global geopolitics, contributing to both regional stability and global progress.

Keywords: India, Geopolitics, Foreign Policy, Strategic Autonomy, Multipolar World, Indo-Pacific, BRICS, QUAD, Energy Diplomacy, Cybersecurity, Climate Governance, Global South.

Introduction

The international geopolitical role of India has undergone a remarkable transformation, from a policy of non-alignment to one of strategic autonomy. This transformation is in response to India's wish to chart its own course within a multipolar world, participating in several international groupings like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), BRICS, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). India's pragmatism towards foreign policy enables it to be in equilibrium with great powers as well as exercising its sovereignty and freedom of choice. This diplomacy is reflected through India's engagement with the European Union, exploring cooperation in themes such as climate change, digitalization, and trade. India's development of multiple partnerships leads it to take a central position in advancing the stability of the world and finding solutions to problems that transcend nation-states. Geographically, India's location in South Asia, with access to key sea lanes in the Indian Ocean, increases its geopolitical importance. Economically, India has become one of the fastest-growing major economies of the world, with a GDP growth rate of 8.2% in FY2023-24. The World Bank estimates India's growth to continue robust, at 7% in FY2024-25. Demographically, India has a young population, 65% below the age of 35. This demographic dividend provides India with an enormous workforce and consumer market, drawing in foreign investment and shaping international economic trends. All these combined make India's power in international affairs greater, allowing it to significantly contribute to economic growth and stability globally.

Historical Evolution of India's Foreign Policy and Geo-Political Identity:

India's external policy has been drastically reformed since it gained independence, mirroring changes in international politics as well as local concerns. The development can be generally divided into three phases: the Nehruvian non-alignment period during the Cold War, the post-1991 economic liberalization and diplomatic diversification era, and the modern-day "Act East," "Neighborhood First," and "Indo-Pacific" strategies. Following independence, Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru promoted a foreign policy of non-alignment in the interests of keeping India sovereign and out of the Cold War bipolar entanglements.

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This foreign policy prioritized peaceful coexistence, respect for others, and non-interference in other countries' affairs. India was at the forefront of the formation of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) with the aim of offering a forum for newly independent nations to express their concerns without joining either the Western or Eastern blocs. But the operationality of non-alignment was not without problems, particularly in situations like the Sino-Indian War of 1962 and the Indo-Pakistani Wars, where the actions of India were seen by some as siding with one block against the other. Notwithstanding these problems, the policy of non-alignment provided the base for India's focus on strategic autonomy in foreign affairs.

The economic crisis in 1991 was a turning point in the foreign policy of India. Confronted by a critical balance of payments crisis, India launched a series of economic reforms directed towards liberalization, privatization, and globalization. These not only opened the Indian economy to foreign investment but also required more active and diversified diplomatic outreach to the international community. India set about developing economic relations with significant economies such as the United States, the European Union, and East Asia nations, breaking its previous insularity. This decade also witnessed India taking a pragmatic approach at global forums, taking its foreign policy goals and following them through from an economic direction. The shift highlighted the recognition that economic prowess was key to projecting Indian greatness on the international stage and adding to its strength and power in the global landscape. In the 21st century, Indian foreign policy has also developed to deal with emerging global and regional issues. The "Act East" policy, a follow-up of the previous "Look East" policy, is intended to enhance economic and strategic ties with Southeast Asian nations as the region is increasingly playing a significant role in international affairs. Simultaneously, the "Neighborhood First" policy underscores India's commitment to fostering strong ties with its immediate neighbors, promoting regional stability and integration. Furthermore, India's engagement in the Indo-Pacific reflects its strategic intent to play a more active role in ensuring a free, open, and inclusive regional order. These strategies collectively signify India's shift towards a more assertive and multidimensional foreign policy, balancing traditional principles with contemporary geopolitical imperatives.

Strategic Bilateral and Multilateral Alliances:

India's foreign policy has developed to include strong bilateral interactions with key global powers, attesting to its strategic autonomy and quest for national interests. India- U.S. relations have intensified, especially in defense and technology areas, as the two countries cooperate on such initiatives as the U.S.-India Major Defense Partnership, raising cooperation across the board. India's relations with Russia continue to be strong, particularly in energy and defense, as indicated by cooperation to establish civil nuclear power facilities in Tamil Nadu. India's biggest trade partner is the European Union, representing 12.2% of India's total trade, with both countries striving for an overall trade agreement. India's relationship with China is multifaceted, characterized by competition and cooperation; there have been recent attempts at containing border tensions and exploring economic cooperation. India also has a "Special Strategic and Global Partnership" with Japan, with key areas of cooperation being infrastructure development, maritime security, and regional stability.

India is an active player in various multilateral forums, reflecting its interest in global governance and regional cooperation. In BRICS, India promotes multipolar world order and balanced economic progress, and is a key connector between global East and West. As part of the G20, India supports inclusive growth and has been pivotal in representing the voice of the Global South. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), which includes India, the U.S., Japan, and Australia, is a vehicle for the promotion of a free and open Indo-Pacific ocean. India's participation in the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO) involves regional security and counter-terrorism measures. Through BIMSTEC, India aims to improve connectivity and economic integration in the Bay of Bengal area. The ASEAN-India relationship has been further bolstered by moves such as the 10-point plan during the 21st ASEAN-India Summit to promote trade, digital connectivity, and resilience against disasters. India's quest for a permanent UNSC seat is fueled by its major contributions to UN peacekeeping and being the largest democracy of the world. The United States has endorsed India's application, with President Biden reaffirming this during bilateral negotiations with Prime Minister Modi. India is also among the G4 countries, together with Brazil, Germany, and Japan, which reciprocally endorse one another's membership applications for permanent UNSC. In spite of these endorsements, India's candidacy is under threat, particularly from China and the Uniting for Consensus group, who support other models of UNSC reform. However, India remains to pursue diplomatic efforts to secure wider support for its membership in a reformed and more representative Security Council.

India and the Indo-Pacific Geopolitical Dynamics:

India's strategic presence in the Indo-Pacific has grown more crucial, with emphasis on maritime security and the concept of freedom of navigation. In realizing the Indo-Pacific as a key channel for international trade, India has increased efforts to advance maritime domain awareness and coastal defense. Projects like the Sagarmala project have sought to develop port infrastructure, thus enhancing India's maritime capacity. In addition, India's robust engagement in regional organizations such as the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) reflects its interest in collective maritime governance. Through these efforts, India aims to maintain a rule-based maritime order and secure the stability of critical sea lanes. In balancing China's increasing footprint in the Indo-

Pacific, India has taken a multi-faceted approach in the form of strategic partnerships and infrastructure diplomacy. Partnerships with like-minded countries like Japan and Australia have been crucial in creating alternative infrastructure initiatives, providing credible alternatives to China's Belt and Road Initiative. Furthermore, India's participation in the Supply Chain Resilience Initiative with Japan and Australia seeks to diversify and make regional supply chains resilient. These attempts are in line with India's approach of offering credible options and repositioning itself as a major actor in regional growth. Indian naval diplomacy has further been strengthened by its outreach towards security alliances such as the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD) and interaction with the AUKUS bloc. The QUAD involving India, the United States, Japan, and Australia has become a major platform engaging regional security issues, such as combined military maneuvers and cooperation in cybersecurity. Though not a member of AUKUS, India recognizes its role in determining the Indo-Pacific security architecture and wants to complement its aims through deeper defense cooperation. Through these interactions, India wishes to contribute to a secure and stable Indo-Pacific region.

India's Energy Diplomacy and Resource Security:

India's energy diplomacy has changed to respond to its increasing energy requirements and to increase its strategic autonomy. In the Middle East, India has deepened relations with important oil-producing countries. For example, Bharat Petroleum Corporation Limited (BPCL) has enhanced its imports of Middle Eastern crude to compensate for cuts in Russian supplies. Besides, India's Oil and Natural Gas Corporation (ONGC) is diversifying investments in the Middle East, Africa, and Latin America for acquiring energy sources. India, in Central Asia, is engaged in the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline project, in order to import natural gas from Turkmenistan. India is interested, in Africa, to buy crude oil from Guyana, having offshore oil reservoirs. India is also making strategic investments in oil, gas, and renewable energy partnerships. India has entered long-term liquefied natural gas (LNG) supply contracts with QatarEnergy, such as a 20-year contract with Petronet LNG for 7.5 million metric tons a year over 2028-2048. India is supporting renewable energy domestically through programs such as the International Solar Alliance (ISA), started jointly with France in 2015, which seeks to raise \$1 trillion in solar investments by 2030. India's renewable energy industry has received considerable investments, with solar and wind capacities being planned to be upgraded to achieve its climate targets. Within the sphere of climate diplomacy, India has emerged as a leader of developing countries. Through the ISA, India is promoting the adoption of solar energy among the Global South, advancing energy access and sustainability. India's climate goals include a 45% reduction in emission intensity and 50% cumulative power capacity through non-fossil fuel sources by 2030. These actions reflect India's contribution to global climate governance and sustainable development.

Defence, Cybersecurity, and Technological Diplomacy:

India's defense strategic alliances have grown considerably in terms of its quest for diversified military cooperation. The United States continues to be a major partner, as the two countries signed a new 10-year framework for strengthening cooperation in multiple fields, including air, land, sea, space, and cyberspace. India signed an agreement to buy 31 MQ-9B drones to strengthen surveillance in the Indo-Pacific region. France and Israel also have important roles to play; India and France have strengthened military ties, with emphasis on co-production and technology transfer. With Israel, India has pursued co-development of sophisticated defense systems, such as missile defense and drones. Russia, though diversifying, is still a dominant supplier, accounting for more than 50% of India's imported military equipment, including recent shipments of Igla-S air defense systems. In the online world, India is establishing sovereignty by implementing stringent cybersecurity and data protection legislation. The enactment of the Digital Personal Data Protection Act (DPDPA) 2023 attests to India's determination to govern digital information within its country. India is taking a solution that involves mandatory data localization rules and the construction of sovereign cloud platforms to ascertain national security as well as economic development. The Indian Cyber Force (ICF) has been active in defending national interests, launching cyber operations in response to geopolitical tensions. These initiatives reflect India's strategic positioning in cyber geopolitics, balancing control, security, and individual rights. India's space diplomacy, spearheaded by the Indian Space Research Organisation (ISRO), demonstrates its technological prowess and dedication to sustainable development. In 2024, ISRO made major achievements, such as the successful launch of the SpaDeX mission, making India the fourth nation to conduct a space docking experiment. ISRO is set to launch 50 AI-based satellites within five years to improve geospatial intelligence and surveillance capabilities. International cooperation and collaborations, like the NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR) mission, are further examples of India's contribution to global space endeavors. These initiatives not only enhance national security but also regional cooperation and sustainable development.

Challenges and Future Prospects in Global Geo-Politics:

India's geopolitical situation in 2025 is characterized by ongoing border tensions with China and increasing regional instability in South Asia. Although a 2024 agreement on patrolling arrangements along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) was reached, distrust remains, and occasional clashes continue to strain bilateral relations. At the same time, India-Pakistan relations have also taken a sharp turn for the worse after recent Indian airstrikes within Pakistani territory, which caused large numbers of casualties and have been denounced by Pakistan as an "act of war". These

events highlight the precarious security climate in South Asia, where old conflicts and new threats intersect. Withdrawing from entanglements in perplexing global relationships, India strives to maintain a balance with adversarial global powers. India's strategic alliances with the United States and Israel are set against its historical and economic ties with Russia and Iran. This fine balancing act can be seen in India's strategy towards the Middle East, where it has robust defense and technology partnerships with Israel while also approaching Iran to protect energy interests and regional connectivity. Such diplomacy mirrors India's larger strategy to defend its national interests in a polarized international order. Looking ahead, India's "Viksit Bharat @2047" vision aspires to transform the nation into a developed economy by its centenary of independence. This ambitious blueprint emphasizes sustainable development, technological innovation, and inclusive growth. By positioning itself as a proactive contributor to global governance, India seeks not only to elevate its domestic prosperity but also to play a pivotal role in shaping international norms and policies. This vision will be attained through skilled management of geopolitical obstacles and a consistent dedication to multilateral action.

Conclusion:

India's shifting geopolitical path in the 21st century marks a strategic reorientation from non-alignment to multi-alignment assertiveness. The country's forward-looking interactions with global hegemony, from the United States and Russia to Japan and France, exemplify its sophistication in dealing with international diplomacy. By engaging with important multilateral platforms such as the G20, BRICS, QUAD, and the United Nations, India has not only protected its national interests but also become a representative voice of the Global South. These diplomatic interactions reflect India's increasing position as a responsible global player, with the ability to contribute to regional stability, sustainable development, and global governance. India is making the most of its geographical opportunities and demographic assets to secure energy corridors, spread technological diplomacy, and build cyber resilience. India is actively remaking the international narrative on sustainable development and security through initiatives like the International Solar Alliance (ISA), Act East policy, and Indo-Pacific maritime cooperation. Challenges remain—ranging from border disputes with China to balancing alliances in a multipolar world—but India's measured response based on strategic autonomy provides durability. As the country imagines "Viksit Bharat @2047," its path from rule-follower to rule-shaper in global geopolitics seems not merely aspirational but increasingly within reach.

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