



Original Article

India's Foreign Policy in Multi Polar World

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Abstract

India's foreign policy in a multipolar world reflects a strategic shift from non-alignment to multi-alignment, driven by evolving geopolitical, economic, and security dynamics. As global power structures transition from a unipolar order dominated by the United States to a more diffused configuration involving the China, the Russia, and emerging middle powers, India has recalibrated its diplomatic approach to maximize strategic autonomy while enhancing global influence. Rooted in the principles of sovereignty, non-interference, and peaceful coexistence, India's contemporary strategy emphasizes issue-based partnerships rather than rigid alliances. India actively participates in multilateral forums such as BRICS, Quad, Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and the United Nations to balance power dynamics while advocating reforms in global governance institutions. Its Indo-Pacific vision underscores maritime security, connectivity, and a rules-based order, reflecting concerns over regional stability and freedom of navigation. Simultaneously, India maintains strategic defense cooperation with Russia, deepens economic and technological ties with the United States, and manages complex border and trade relations with China. Energy security, counterterrorism, climate diplomacy, and diaspora engagement remain central pillars of India's external engagement. Initiatives such as Act East, Neighborhood First, and strategic partnerships with African and Gulf nations illustrate India's expanding global footprint. Moreover, India positions itself as a voice of the Global South, promoting equitable development and sustainable growth. In a multipolar world marked by strategic competition and interdependence, India's foreign policy demonstrates pragmatic flexibility, balancing power politics with normative commitments. By leveraging its demographic strength, economic growth, and geopolitical location, India seeks to shape emerging global norms while preserving decision-making autonomy. This evolving doctrine underscores India's aspiration to emerge as a leading power and a stabilizing force in the twenty-first-century international order.

Keywords: India, Foreign Policy, Multipolarity, Strategic Autonomy, Multi-alignment, Indo-Pacific, BRICS, Quad, Global Governance, Global South.

Introduction

India's foreign policy has undergone a significant transformation in response to the emergence of a multipolar world order. During the Cold War, India championed non-alignment to safeguard its sovereignty amid rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. In the post-Cold War era, however, the diffusion of power across regions and the rise of new centers of influence particularly the China and a resurgent Russia—have reshaped global politics. This evolving environment has compelled India to recalibrate its diplomatic strategy to protect national interests while enhancing its global standing. In the contemporary multipolar framework, power is distributed among multiple actors, including established powers, emerging economies, and regional blocs. India has responded by moving from traditional non-alignment to a policy of strategic autonomy and multi-alignment. Rather than adhering to fixed alliances, India engages in issue-based partnerships across diverse platforms such as BRICS, Quad, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and the United Nations. This flexible engagement reflects India's intent to balance competing interests while expanding its influence in global governance. Geopolitical challenges, including border tensions, maritime security concerns in the Indo-



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Pacific, terrorism, energy security, and climate change, further shape India's foreign policy priorities. Simultaneously, economic growth, technological advancement, and demographic strength provide India with new opportunities to assert leadership in regional and global affairs. As the international system continues to evolve, India seeks to position itself as a responsible power, a voice of the Global South, and a key stakeholder in shaping a stable, inclusive, and rules-based international order.

The Constitutional Principles

The constitution of India lays down certain principles in Article 51 under the Directive Principles of State Policy. These principles focus on the promotion of international peace and security

As per the principles laid down in Article 51, the state shall endeavour to-

1. Promote international peace and security.
2. Maintain just and honourable relations between nations.
3. Foster respect for international law and treaty obligations in the dealings of organized people with one another
4. Encourage settlement of international disputes by arbitration

5. Basic Principles Governing India's Foreign Policy

The principles have stood the test of time and are ingrained in international law and India's foreign policy practice. The principles of Indian foreign policy are as follows –

1. Panchsheel
2. The policy of non-alignment
3. The policy of Anti- Colonialism and Anti Racism
4. Peaceful settlement of International Disputes
5. Foreign Economic Aid – Support to UN, International Law and a Just and Equal World Order

The principles of India's Foreign Policy are discussed in detail below-

A. Panchsheel

Indian Policymakers understood the linkage between peace and development and the survival of mankind. Without global peace, social and economic development is likely to be pushed to the background. In view of the destruction caused by two world wars, they realized that for the progress of a nation a durable world peace was needed. Thus, the founder of India's foreign policy, Nehru gave utmost importance to world peace in his policy planning.

Also, read about the following –

1. [World War I \[1914 – 1918\]](#)
2. [World War II \[1939 – 1945\]](#)
3. [Global impact of World War II](#)
4. [Cold War](#)

India desired peaceful and friendly relations with all countries, particularly the big powers and the neighbouring nations. While signing a peace agreement with China; he advocated adherence to five guiding principles known as Panchsheel. Panchsheel also called the Five Principles of Peaceful Co-existence was signed on 29p April 1954 and since then it has become a guiding principle of India's bilateral relations with other countries.

Panchsheel includes the following five principles of foreign policy:

1. Mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty.
2. Non-aggression against each other.
3. Non-interference in each other's internal affairs.
4. Equality and mutual benefit.
5. Peaceful co-existence.

These principles of Panchsheel were later incorporated in the Bandung Declaration, signed in the Afro-Asian Conference held in 1955 in Indonesia. They are the core principles of the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) and still guide the conduct of India's foreign policy.

B. Policy of Non-alignment

1. Non-alignment is the most important feature of India's foreign policy. Its core element is to maintain independence in foreign affairs by not joining any military alliance formed by the USA and the Soviet Union, which emerged as an important aspect of Cold War politics after the Second World War.
2. Non-alignment was neither neutrality nor non-involvement nor isolationism. It was a positive and dynamic concept. It postulates taking an independent stand on international issues according to the merits of each case but at the same time not committing to coming under the influence of any military bloc. Furthermore, Non-Alignment gained popularity in developing countries. Thus, keeping away from the military alliances and superpower blocks was important for the independence of Foreign Policy.

3. India played a lead role in popularizing and consolidating the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM). India, under the leadership of [Jawaharlal Nehru](#), convened the Asian Relations Conference in New Delhi in 1947 to forge the idea of Asian solidarity. Read more on the [Non-Alignment Movement \(NAM\)](#) on the given link.
4. Another Asian Relations Conference was convened by India in 1949 on the question of the independence of Indonesia as India stood firm-against the colonial rule in other countries.
 - A larger Conference, known as the Bandung Conference of 29 countries of Asia and Africa was convened in Bandung (Indonesia) in 1955 to forge the Afro-Asian unit. The Bandung Conference was a precursor to the NAM, which held its first Summit in 1961 at Belgrade. Since then, the Non-Aligned Movement has not looked back.
 - The Seventh NAM Summit was hosted by India in New Delhi in 1983. In this Summit, India took up the cause of development, disarmament, and the Palestine issue.
 - The conference laid down ten fundamental principles of international relations. The leaders pledged to work together for colonial liberation, peace, cultural, economic, and political cooperation among developing countries.
 - It provides all its members, regardless of their size and development, an opportunity to participate in the global decision-making process.

Continued Relevance of Non-alignment

As NAM was a product of Cold War politics and the bipolar world, many scholars have questioned the relevance of NAM after the end of the Cold War and the disintegration of the Soviet Union. Again, globalization led to the change in the priorities of even its chief votaries like India, which tried to adopt neo-liberal market economy principles in order to integrate with the emerging global order. This new situation generated the impression as if NAM is sidelined and its relevance is declining. However, if we go deep in the basic features of NAM, it appears to be equally significant also in the changing context due to the following factors:

1. After the disintegration of the Soviet Union, the NAM can act as a check against undue dominance and hegemony of any country or block.
2. The developed (North) and developing (South) worlds have divergent views over several global and economic issues. The NAM may provide a forum for third-world countries to engage the developed nations in a productive dialogue.
3. The NAM can prove to be a powerful mechanism to forge cooperation, which is essential for their collective self-reliance in the present market-driven global order.
4. NAM can provide an important forum for developing countries to discuss and deliberate upon various global problems, issues, and reforms including the reform of the UN and other international financial institutions like the World Bank and IMF in order to make them more democratic and effective.

Aspirants preparing for the Principles of India's Foreign Policy should also go through the following relevant articles-

1. [Overview of India's Foreign Policy](#)
2. [Objectives of India's Foreign Policy](#)
3. [Achievements of India's Foreign Policy](#)
4. [Foreign Policy Making in India](#)

C. The policy of Anti – Colonialism, Racism and Imperialism

The foundations of India's foreign policy were laid during independence struggle when our leaders fought the evils of colonialism and racism. India has been a victim of colonialism and imperialism and considers these as a threat to international peace and security. It firmly believes in the equality of all human beings. Its policy is aimed at opposition to all forms of racial discrimination. It is always opposed to it in any form.

1. India was the first to bring the issue of Apartheid in the UN in 1946. India raised her voice for the independence of Indonesia and organized the Asian Relations Conference for this purpose.
2. Due to India's consistent efforts through NAM and other international forums, 14 African countries were liberated from the yoke of colonialism in 1964.
3. India firmly opposed the infamous apartheid policy in South Africa. Not only India had cut off diplomatic relations with South Africa in 1949 but also used her influence in the application of comprehensive sanctions (later) against the white minority racist Regime of South Africa.
4. At India's initiative, NAM set up the Africa Fund (Action for Resisting Imperialism, Colonialism, and Apartheid) in 1986 to help the frontline states, which were victims of aggression of South Africa and for facing the brunt of Apartheid. India made a generous contribution to this fund. The end of racialism in South Africa was a great success for Indian policy.

D. Peaceful Settlement of International Disputes

1. The unflinching faith in the peaceful settlement of international disputes is one of the core elements of India's foreign policy. This principle has been included in the Constitution of India, under the Directive Principles of State Policy as well as in the Charter of the UN.



2. India has played a leading role in the resolution of the Korean conflict and supported negotiated settlement of Palestine issue, border problems with neighboring countries, and other such disputes and problems.
3. India is always against foreign military intervention for resolving international problems. This principle continues to be the cornerstone of India's policy.
4. At present, India is in favour of the resolution of peaceful settlement of Iranian nuclear issues, the problem of the democratic upsurge in the Middle East, and so on.

E. Foreign Economic Aid – Support to UN, International Law and a Just and Equal World Order

India has a deep respect for the international law and/or the principles of sovereign equality of nations and non-interference in the internal affairs of other nations as espoused by the UN.

1. India has played a key role in preserving world peace by helping in the decolonization process, and through active participation in UN peacekeeping activities.
2. India has supported the cause of disarmament pursued by the UN. In 1988, India proposed a very ambitious program of nuclear disarmament before the UN. Although the proposal was not accepted by the other members of the UN but India stands committed to the cause of universal disarmament even today.
3. In order to make the composition of the Security Council more realistic and democratic, India has proposed and supported the reform of the Security Council and other UN agencies. India is one of the claimants of permanent membership of the Security Council.

F. Against cold war

Cold war began with the formation of two power blocs at the end of IInd world war viz. US and USSR. Rivalry between them resulted in emergence of many military alliances. Eg- NATO ANZUS SEATO CEANTO as a leader of NAM it stayed away from the two blocks.

G. Disarmament

Major concern of Indians foreign policy in the post cold War period is disarmament and arms race in the World. As a leader of NAM, India established beyond doubt that arms race is at the expense of human development. Expenditure on arms and ammunitions depletes and distorts economic progress, programs for removal of poverty, **eradication** of diseases spread of education and easy availability of basic needs. India not a signatory to the NPT, CTBT, and nuclear or war treaties

India conducted nuclear tests at pokran in 1974 and 1998. Though india one among the major nuclear power in the world. It's only for civil use and development not for armed or nuclear race.

Multipolar World

A multipolar world is an international system where power is distributed among at least three or more significant, independent, and influential states or power centers, rather than being concentrated in one (unipolar) or two (bipolar) dominant nations. This shift involves the rise of regional powers like [BRICS](#) (Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa) and others, challenging post-WWII US-dominated structures. Key characteristics include increased complexity in global affairs, more flexible, issue-based alliances, and the rise of regional, rather than universal, norms.

Key Features of a Multipolar World

- **Decentralization of Power:** Multiple major powers with significant economic, military, and diplomatic influence operate globally, such as the US, China, India, and the EU
- **Rise of Regionalism:** Regional powers (e.g., Turkey, Brazil, Indonesia) exert greater influence in their own vicinities.
- **Flexible Alignments:** Unlike rigid Cold War blocs, nations may align on specific issues (e.g., [SCO](#), [Quad](#)), as seen in rising plurilateral forums.
- **Institutional Shift:** Traditional institutions (UN, IMF) are under pressure, with new institutions like the New Development Bank acting as alternatives.
- **Economic Drivers:** Emerging economies, particularly within BRICS, account for a rising share of global GDP and trade, driving the transition.

Drivers and Implications

- **Fragmented Decision-Making:** Multiple centers of power mean no single entity dominates, leading to, as noted by a more fragmented global landscape.
- **Increased Complexity/Instability:** The numerous bilateral and multilateral relationships increase diplomatic complexity, potentially causing instability compared to a single-hegemon model.
- **Alternative Orders:** Russia and China, in particular, promote a multipolar order as a fairer alternative to US dominance, emphasizing non-Western influence.
- **Geopolitical Competition:** As seen in [Foreign Policy](#), it brings back the competition for "national champions" in strategic sectors, with countries protecting industries.



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This shift reflects a transition away from the post-1991 unipolar era towards a more complex, multi-layered international structure.

Conclusion:

So, the modern World very independent nation has its own foreign policy. No country can live in isolation. The policies which have been followed by India with other sovereign countries is known as foreign policy.

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