
India's Foreign Policy in a Changing Global Order: Challenges, Strategies and Emerging Opportunities

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Abstract

This study undertakes an examination of the evolution of India's foreign policy in the context of a changing global order, focusing on critical aspects such as strategic relationships, economic diplomacy, regional cooperation, and security arrangements. This study also undertakes a critical examination of India's relations with other global powers, namely the United States, China, and Russia, as well as its relations with international organizations such as BRICS, G20, and the United Nations, as well as its new role in the Indo-Pacific strategy, which has emerged as a critical aspect of global governance, along with climate change, which has emerged as a critical aspect of global governance in the context of a changing global order. This study undertakes a critical examination of the role of India in the context of a changing global order based on secondary data, reports, and publications of government agencies, international organizations, as well as publications of various scholars, over a period of 2010-2024, which reveals that India's economic growth, technological advancements, and proactive foreign policy have strengthened its role as an emerging global power in the context of a changing global order in a new multipolar world order.

Keywords: Foreign Policy, Global Order, Strategic Autonomy, BRICS, Global South, Diplomacy

1. Introduction

The role of foreign policy in developing a nation's international relations and global stature is critical. Since gaining independence in 1947, India's foreign policy has been based on principles of peaceful coexistence, non-alignment, and international cooperation. However, in response to the changing geopolitical scenario in the 21st century, India's foreign policies have undergone a series of changes.

The end of the bipolar world in accordance with the Cold War and the beginning of globalization have led to a significant change in the global political scenario. The rise of new economic powers in the world, regional conflicts, technological advancements, and global warming have all impacted international relations in a significant manner. In this regard, India's foreign policies have gradually moved from a traditional non-alignment strategy to a strategy of strategic autonomy and multi alignment.

Indian participation in global institutions such as the G20, BRICS, United Nations, and World Trade Organization proves India's growing importance in global relations. Further, India's active participation in the Indo-Pacific region and its growing relations with countries such as the US, Japan, Australia, and European countries clearly indicate India's strategic importance in global relations. India's changing foreign policies in accordance with the changing global scenario and evaluate India's growing importance as a global power in the years to come.

Research Methodology

2. Objectives of the Study:

- 1) To identify the challenges and opportunities faced by India in global diplomacy.
- 2) To evaluate India's role in international organizations and global governance.
- 3) To identify the challenges and opportunities faced by India in global diplomacy.

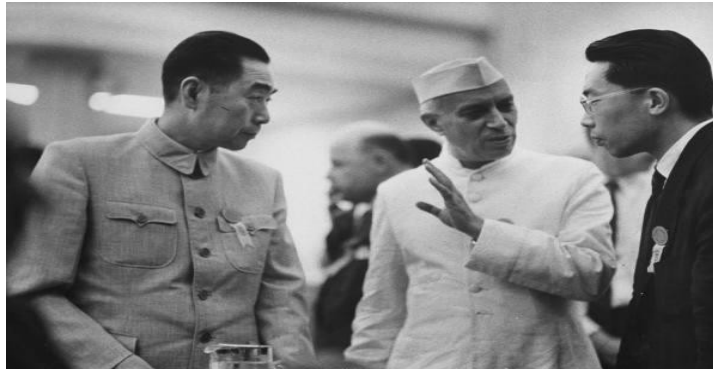
Sources of Data and Period of Study

The scope of the current study extends from 2020 to 2025. This period is particularly noteworthy as it marks a series of significant changes in the global political and economic scenario, including: The COVID-19 pandemic and its impact on global relations The Indian Presidency of the G20 and its growing global outreach The growing importance of the Indo-Pacific region The growing cooperation among BRICS and Global South countries The growing global role of India in climate diplomacy.

Evolution of India's Foreign Policy

The evolution of India's foreign policy reflects the changing political and economic conditions at both national and global levels. In the early years after independence, India adopted the policy of non-alignment, focusing on peaceful coexistence and independence from major power blocs during the Cold War. After the end of the Cold War in 1991, India shifted toward economic diplomacy and globalization, strengthening trade and strategic relations with many countries. In the 21st century, India has adopted a pragmatic and multi-aligned foreign policy, developing strategic partnerships with major powers such as the United States, Russia, and Japan. India also actively participates in international organizations like BRICS, G20, and the United Nations to influence global governance. Overall, India's foreign policy has evolved from non-alignment to a more dynamic approach aimed at promoting national interests, economic growth, and regional stability.

A. Nehruvian Era and non-alignment.



India's foreign policy in the initial stages was significantly influenced by Jawaharlal Nehru, who was very keen on non-alignment, peaceful coexistence, and anti-colonial solidarity. The Non-Aligned Movement offered India an avenue to sustain its independence in the face of the Cold War bloc politics. The Nehru period (1947-1964) is the formative period of India's foreign policy history. Under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, India chose to adhere to the principles of peaceful coexistence, anti-colonial solidarity, and non-alignment. The Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) aimed at preserving its independence from the two Cold War alliances dominated by the US and the Soviet Union. This foreign policy helped India to pursue an independent foreign policy and foster global peace, decolonization, and cooperation among the developing world.

B. Post-Cold War Transformation of India's Foreign Policy (1991–2025)

The end of the Cold War in 1991 marked a significant shift in India's foreign policy. Economic liberalization and globalization encouraged India to expand its diplomatic and economic relations with multiple countries. The post-Cold War period, or the post-Cold War era, starting from 1991, marks a notable change in the foreign policy of India. This is because the Cold War had come to an end with the disintegration of the Soviet Union, giving way to a unipolar world led by the United States.

At the same time, India faced an economic crisis in 1991, requiring economic reforms and liberalization to engage in economic activities with the rest of the world. This led to a change in the foreign policy of India, from being non-aligned to being economically active. The economic reforms were initiated by the then Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao and Finance Minister Manmohan Singh.

C. Contemporary Foreign Policy Approach

In the 21st century, Indian foreign policy has taken a pragmatic and multi-aligned turn. Instead of non-alignment, Indian foreign policy is now seeking multiple alignments on a given issue. This is because India is now economically, security-wise, and internationally positioned to be a major player in global governance.

1. Strategic Partnerships

The recent phase of Indian foreign policy has witnessed the expansion of strategic relationships with the major world powers. In the year 2000, the initiation of the strategic dialogue between India and the United States marked the beginning of the enhanced relations between the two countries, which included economic cooperation, security cooperation, and the exchange of technology. One such significant achievement in the foreign relations between the two countries was the signing of the India-US Civil Nuclear Agreement in the year 2005, which marked the end of the nuclear apartheid that had been imposed on India since its inception as an independent country. Further, in the year 2010, the strategic partnership between India and Japan was enhanced, which included cooperation in the development of infrastructure, economic investments, and regional security in the Indo-Pacific region. To take the defines relations with the United States to the next level, the two countries signed the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in the year 2016, which allowed the two countries to access the military facilities and infrastructure of each other for military logistics and operations. Further, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) was revived in the year 2017 between the four countries India, the United States, Japan, and Australia which included the enhancement and development of the free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region and the enhancement of security cooperation in the region. Recently, in the year 2023, the strategic partnership between India and the European countries was enhanced, particularly in the areas of technology exchange, digital cooperation, and the signing of trade agreements.

2. Economic Diplomacy

Economic diplomacy has become a central pillar of India's foreign policy, focusing on trade, investment, and technological cooperation.

Tebal No.1 India's Export Growth & Military Expenditure

No	Year	Total Exports (US\$ Billion)	Military Spending (US\$ Billion)
1	2010	220	46
2	2015	310	51
3	2020	497	72
4	2023	776	83
5	2024	778	86

Sources SIPRI. *Trends in World Military Expenditure 2023*

The data also depicts that there is a significant increase in India's total exports and military expenditures from 2010 to 2024. India's exports have been steadily increasing from 2010 to 2015, from 220 billion dollars to 310 billion dollars, respectively. However, in subsequent years, India's exports have been growing at a faster rate, from 497 billion dollars in 2020 to 776 billion dollars in 2023 and 778 billion dollars in 2024. Therefore, it is clear that India's international trade, economic diplomacy, and global engagement are on the increase.

Furthermore, India's military expenditures have also been on the increase from 2010 to 2024, from 46 billion dollars in 2010 to 51 billion dollars in 2015, and then to 72 billion dollars in 2020. Moreover, in 2023, India's military expenditures reached 83 billion dollars, and in 2024, it increased to 86 billion dollars. Therefore, it is clear that India is enhancing its security, which is also responsible for its growing influence in the global political and economic order.



The above graph depicts a steady and considerable increase in India's export growth and military spending from 2010 to 2024. India's exports have grown from US\$220 billion in 2010 to US\$310 billion in 2015, and this growth has continued to increase significantly to US\$497 billion in 2020. This growth has become even more prominent in recent years, reaching US\$776 billion in 2023 and US\$778 billion in 2024, showing considerable growth in international trade. On the other hand, India's military spending has also grown gradually from US\$46 billion in 2010 to US\$86 billion in 2024. This demonstrates India's efforts to enhance both economic and military power, thereby increasing its position in international politics and international relations.

3. Regional Cooperation

Regional cooperation has emerged as an essential element of the foreign policy of India in the contemporary period. India is an active participant in regional organizations such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation, which facilitates political, economic, and cultural cooperation among the countries of the region. In addition, India is an active participant in the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, which aims to improve regional connectivity, economic cooperation, and economic integration in the Bay of Bengal region. Further, the country has strengthened its relations with the Association of Southeast Asian Nations to improve economic cooperation, trade relations, and regional security.

4. Security Collaborations

India's regional cooperation has also increased through the initiation of the Neighbourhood First Policy in 2014, which aims to improve relations with the neighbouring countries and promote regional stability and development. In the year 2017, the cooperation between the regional organizations has strengthened with the objective of improving regional connectivity and economic cooperation in the region through the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation. Recently, during the G20 summit in the year 2023, the country has promoted cooperation among the developing countries and has emphasized the importance of the Global South in the international arena.

Security collaboration has emerged as an essential aspect of India's foreign policy in the contemporary world. India has significantly enhanced its defines strategy since 1998, when it achieved nuclear deterrence capability and thus enhanced its strategic security position. In 2004, India's strategic defines collaboration with the US enhanced, and this led to increased military collaboration and joint defines exercises between the two nations. Further advancements in defines collaborations were achieved in 2016 when India signed significant defines collaborations with the US and France. The revival of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue in 2017 enhanced collaborations among India, the US, Japan, and Australia in maintaining security and stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

Military expenditure figures have shown significant growth in India's defines preparedness in the contemporary world. India's military expenditure has been steadily increasing from US \$46 billion in 2010 to US \$51 billion in 2015 and further to US \$72 billion in 2020. In the recent past, India's defines expenditure has been increasing steadily to US \$83 billion in 2023 and US \$86 billion in 2024. These figures indicate India's commitment to strengthening its defines preparedness and thus becoming one of the top five nations in the world in terms of military expenditure.

D. India's Relations with Major Global Powers.

India–United States relations have witnessed a major transformation in recent times, from minimal engagement during the Cold War to a wide-ranging strategic partnership in the 21st century. Both countries are cooperating in defines, trade, technology, and issues of energy security and combating terrorism in the region. The enhancement of bilateral ties between India and the United States is primarily due to their shared democratic values, economic interests, and common strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region. One of the major developments in India–United States ties is the India–United States Civil Nuclear Agreement, which provided India access to global

nuclear technology and ended its isolation in global nuclear politics. The agreement marked a historic shift in their diplomatic ties and enhanced cooperation in civil nuclear issues.

Défense ties between India and the United States have also been enhanced considerably in recent times. Both countries are conducting regular bilateral defines exercises like Exercise Yodh Abhyas and Exercise Malabar, which are enhancing their defines ties considerably. Apart from this, several defines agreements like LEMOA in 2016, COMCASA in 2018, and BECA in 2020 have also enhanced defines ties between India and the United States. Economic ties between India and the United States are also witnessing rapid growth in recent times. Trade between India and the United States has increased significantly, making it one of India’s largest trading partners.

Strategic ties between India and the United States are also very high in recent times, as both countries are part of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, which also includes Japan and Australia. The grouping aims at realizing a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region. Thus, it may be concluded that the growing ties between India and the United States are primarily due to their shared economic, technological, and security interests in the region, which are playing a vital role in shaping regional stability in the Indo-Pacific region.

1. India–China Relations.

The relationship between India and China can be characterized by cooperation, competition, and strategic rivalry. The two countries established their diplomatic relationship in 1950, with sustained economic and political engagement pursued through trade and participation in international forums. China has emerged as one of India’s major trading partners, indicating a high level of economic interdependence between the two countries. However, the relationship has often been marred by long-standing border issues along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), especially in Ladakh and Arunachal Pradesh.



The tensions between India and China escalated in the post-Sino-Indian War in 1962. The border confrontations are ongoing in the contemporary period as well. This is evident from the Doklam incident in 2017 and the border tensions in Ladakh in 2020. Despite the tensions and confrontations between the two countries, there are instances of cooperation in multilateral forums such as the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). Overall, the relationship between India and China can be described as inherently complex.

2. India–Russia Relations.

The relations between India and Russia can be said to be deeply rooted in a number of aspects since they can be viewed as a critical component in India’s strategic partnerships. The relationship between India and Russia can be traced back to the cold war era when India received significant

support from the Russians in different fields, including defines, technology, and politics. After the end of the cold war, the relationship between India and Russia has continued in a number of critical fields, including defines, nuclear technology, and energy. Currently, Russia can be viewed as one of India’s key suppliers of military equipment since India imports advanced fighter jets, submarines, and missile systems from Russia, including the supersonic cruise missile developed by both countries.

The relationship in terms of cooperation in the energy sector can be viewed as a critical aspect in India-Russia relations since India has received significant support from Russia in developing nuclear power plants in India, including the Kurakula Nuclear Power Plant in Tamil Nadu. In recent times, India has sought to enhance imports of crude oil from Russia while at the same time strengthening cooperation in the energy sector. India and Russia can be viewed as having cooperation in different global forums aimed at enhancing stability in different regions in the world through bodies such as BRICS, SCO, and RIC dialogues aimed at enhancing stability in different regions in the world. India-Russia relations can be said to be critical in India’s foreign relations in different fields.

E. India’s Role in International Organizations

India plays a significant role in various international organizations that govern global policies, economic collaborations, and global security. Being one of the biggest and strongest democracies and growing economies in the world, India is an active member of these international organizations in promoting and fostering world peace and development through multilateral collaborations.



India has always been a strong advocate for multilateralism and has been promoting reforms in international organizations for the proper representation of developing nations in the world community. India has been an active member of the United Nations and has been contributing significantly towards world peace through its deployments of thousands of soldiers in UN peacekeeping missions to uphold world peace and security in troubled nations of the world. India has repeatedly emphasized the need for reforms in the United Nations Security Council for the proper representation of emerging economies and developing nations in the world community. India has been a significant member of the BRICS nations and has been fostering collaborations among the major emerging economies of the world, including Brazil, Russia, China, and South Africa, in promoting reforms in global financial institutions and fostering economic collaborations for the growth and development of these nations and economies in the world community. India has

been a significant member of the G20 nations and has repeatedly emphasized its commitment to addressing global economic crises, promoting world development, and fostering collaborations between the developed and developing nations of the world through its G20 presidency in 2023.

1. BRICS

The **BRICS** is an important platform for cooperation among major emerging economies including Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. Established in **2009**, BRICS aims to promote economic growth, development cooperation, and reforms in global financial institutions. India plays a significant role in BRICS by supporting initiatives such as the **New Development Bank (NDB)**, which provides financial assistance for infrastructure and sustainable development projects in developing countries. Through BRICS, India advocates for a more balanced international economic system and greater representation for emerging economies in global decision-making. In recent years, BRICS cooperation has expanded to include areas such as digital economy, trade, energy security, and climate change.

2. G20



The G20 is one of the most important global platforms for economic cooperation, bringing together the world’s major developed and developing economies. India has actively participated in the G20 to address global challenges such as economic stability, climate change, sustainable development, and financial reforms. India’s G20 Presidency in 2023 marked a significant milestone in its global diplomacy. During the summit held in New Delhi, India emphasized the theme “Vasudha Iva Kutumba am One Earth, One Family, One Future,” highlighting the importance of inclusive development and cooperation among nations. India also promoted the interests of developing countries and strengthened the voice of the Global South in international economic governance.

3. United Nations

The United Nations plays a central role in maintaining international peace, security, and cooperation. India has been an active member of the United Nations since 1945 and has consistently supported multilateral diplomacy and international law. India is one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping missions, sending thousands of troops to conflict zones around the world to maintain peace and stability. In addition, India has strongly advocated for reforms in the UN Security Council, arguing that the current structure does not adequately represent emerging economies and developing countries.



India seeks permanent membership in the Security Council to ensure a more democratic and representative global governance system. Through its participation in the UN, India promotes international cooperation, sustainable development, and global peace.

F. Indo-Pacific Strategy and Regional Security.

The Indo-Pacific strategy has come to be regarded as an integral part of contemporary Indian foreign policy, which seeks to ensure the maintenance of peace, stability, and economic cooperation in the Indian Ocean and the Pacific Ocean region. The Indo-Pacific region is of considerable strategic importance to India as it comprises some of the prominent global maritime routes and economies of some of the world's largest economies. India considers it vital to its security, economic, and foreign policy interests to engage in cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. Through its Indo-Pacific strategy, India seeks to promote the values of a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based maritime order in the region.

India has also strengthened its cooperation with regional partners in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly in the context of the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue between India, Japan, Australia, and the United States. The Quad seeks to promote cooperation in maritime security, disaster relief, infrastructure development, and maintaining maritime freedom of navigation in international waters in the Indo-Pacific region.

India seeks to promote cooperation in economic issues in the Indo-Pacific region as well. The Indian government introduced its Act East Policy to strengthen economic cooperation in the region, particularly with ASEAN countries. India also seeks to strengthen naval exercises and defines cooperation with regional partners in the Indo-Pacific region to ensure maritime security in the region in the face of emerging issues such as piracy, terrorism, and geopolitical tensions. Overall, India's Indo-Pacific strategy seeks to promote its position as a prominent regional player in fostering stability, economic cooperation, and balance in regional security in the Indo-Pacific region.

G. Climate Diplomacy and Global Cooperation

One of the important aspects of Indian foreign policy in the 21st century is climate diplomacy. As climate change has become the most pressing issue in the world, India has actively participated in international deliberations and initiatives that focus on the achievement of environmental sustainability and cooperation among nations across the world. India realizes that climate change is impacting economic development, food security, and energy resources, especially in the context of the developing world. In this context, it has actively participated in international deliberations and

initiatives that focus on the achievement of environmental sustainability and cooperation among nations across the world.

India has taken the lead in many international initiatives related to climate change across the world. One such initiative is the International Solar Alliance, which was launched jointly with France in the year 2015 with the objective of promoting the use and development of solar energy and renewable energy sources in the context of the developing world. The alliance focuses on the development and expansion of solar energy capacity and the reduction of the usage of fossil fuels and the achievement of sustainable development. India has actively participated in international deliberations related to climate change and has agreed to reduce the emissions intensity of its economy and the development of renewable energy sources through the Paris Agreement. In recent times, India has increased its investments in the development of renewable energy sources, especially solar and wind energy, and has set ambitious targets to achieve the expansion of these sources of energy.

India's climate diplomacy is also focused on the achievement of the development and capacity expansion of the developing world across the world.

H. Challenges to India's Foreign Policy

- 1) India's foreign policy is beset with many critical challenges in the contemporary world milieu. Being one of the emerging world powers, India has to navigate its foreign policy with major world powers in such a manner that its own interests are secured. The foremost challenge for India's foreign policy is its border dispute with China, particularly in the LAC area. These border disputes are affecting regional security and thus require continued diplomatic and strategic dialogue.
- 2) Another challenge for India's foreign policy is regional volatility in South Asia, including political tensions with its neighbours and cross-border terrorism. India has to continue to maintain cordial relations with its neighbours and at the same time address the security concerns and regional cooperation in South Asia. Furthermore, the growing strategic rivalry among the world powers, particularly between the US and China, has created a complex geopolitical scenario in which India has to navigate its foreign policy relations with these world powers.
- 3) Another factor affecting India's foreign policy is economic concerns. The economic volatility in the world and its economic rivalry with other nations are affecting India's economic foreign policy and its relations with world nations. Furthermore, emerging challenges like climate change, energy security, cyber threats, and technology rivalry are compelling India to devise innovative foreign policy strategies and forge greater international cooperation.

I. Opportunities in the Emerging Global Order

- 1) The changing global order provides India with substantive opportunities to increase its influence in global politics and strengthen its involvement in global politics. The emergence of new economies in global politics also provides India with opportunities to lead other emerging economies in global politics, which are collectively known as the Global South. Through organizations such as BRICS, G20, and other global platforms, India has been actively promoting the interests of Global South countries
- 2) Another substantive opportunity for India to increase its influence in global politics is in the economic sphere. India's growing economy, domestic market, and business environment are

increasingly becoming attractive to foreign investors, thus fostering economic cooperation with other countries in Asia, Europe, and America.

- 3) India also has substantive opportunities to increase its influence in global politics in global governance institutions. Through active engagement in organizations such as the United Nations, G20, and other global platforms, India can increase its influence in global politics in global governance institutions.
- 4) Furthermore, India also has substantive opportunities in the field of technology and innovations in global politics. India's rapid advances in technology and innovations in fields such as digital technology, space technology, renewable energy, and information technology provide India with substantive opportunities to collaborate with other countries in global politics.

J. Conclusion

In conclusion, it is quite evident that India's foreign policy has seen considerable evolution in response to the ever-changing political and economic landscape of the world. From the Nehruvian period's non-aligned stance in the early days to the post-Cold War period's economic diplomacy and strategic partnerships, India has tried to reorient its foreign policy to ensure the security and advancement of national interests in the ever-evolving international arena. In the modern period, India's pragmatic and multi-aligned stance has strengthened its international relations, especially with the great powers.

India's engagement in international bodies, regional cooperation, and economic bodies around the world is a testament to India's growing influence in the international arena. Initiatives such as those in the context of the Indo-Pacific, climate change, and technology are a testament to India's growing engagement in the international arena. Simultaneously, India is also grappling with issues such as geopolitics, security, and economic issues in the international arena. In spite of the challenges, the emerging international order presents considerable opportunities for India to consolidate its position as a premier world power in the coming decades, considering the economic, technological, demographic, and democratic prospects that are in favor of India's emergence as a premier world power in the coming decades.

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