

REVIEW ARTICLE

Adapting to Change: India's Foreign Policy in the Modern Geopolitical Context

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ABSTRACT

In an era marked by rapid geopolitical shifts, India's foreign policy has evolved to address emerging challenges and opportunities on the global stage. This paper examines the adaptive strategies employed by India in response to the changing dynamics of international relations, including the rise of multipolarity, the resurgence of great power competition, and the increasing significance of regional alliances. By analyzing key diplomatic initiatives, strategic partnerships, and India's role in multilateral organizations, the study highlights how India navigates complex geopolitical landscapes while striving to enhance its global standing. The findings underscore the importance of flexibility and pragmatism in India's foreign policy, as it seeks to balance national interests with global responsibilities in a rapidly changing world.

KEYWORDS

• India, Foreign Policy • Geopolitical Context • Multipolarity • Great Power Competition • Strategic Partnerships • Regional Alliances • Multilateral Organizations • Diplomacy • Global Standing

INTRODUCTION

In the contemporary world, characterized by rapid technological advancements, shifting power dynamics, and complex interdependencies, India's foreign policy has emerged as a critical area of study. As one

of the largest democracies and a significant player in the global arena, India faces a myriad of challenges and opportunities that necessitate a nuanced and adaptive approach to its international relations. The geopolitical landscape is increasingly defined by the rise of multipolarity, where traditional power

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structures are being challenged by emerging economies and regional powers. India has sought to redefine its foreign policy to not only safeguard its national interests but also to contribute to global stability and prosperity. The nation's strategic partnerships, particularly with major powers such as the United States, Russia, and its neighbours in South Asia, reflect a pragmatic approach aimed at enhancing its influence and addressing security concerns. Furthermore, India's active participation in multilateral organizations and regional forums underscores its commitment to collaborative solutions in an interconnected world.

OBJECTIVES

The objectives of the research paper can be outlined as follows:

- Examine the Impact of Geopolitical Changes
- Identify Key Security Concerns
- Evaluate Economic Diplomacy Initiatives
- Assess Climate Change and Global Health Policies
- Contribute to Academic Discourse

These objectives aim to provide a holistic understanding of India's foreign policy adaptations in response to the complexities of the current global environment, offering valuable insights for policymakers, scholars, and practitioners in the field of international relations.

The literature review

The literature review will encompass a range of scholarly works, articles, and analyses that provide insights into the evolution, challenges, and strategies of India's foreign policy. This review will highlight key themes and contributions from various authors, offering a comprehensive understanding of the subject.

1. Scholars such as **Sumit Ganguly and Rajiv Bhatia** have extensively examined the historical trajectory of India's foreign policy, emphasizing its roots in anti-colonialism and non-alignment. Ganguly's work, "India's Foreign Policy: Retrospect and Prospect," provides a foundational understanding of how historical experiences have shaped contemporary policy decisions. Bhatia's analysis in "India's Foreign Policy: A

Strategic Perspective" further explores the shifts in India's approach post-Cold War, particularly in response to globalization and regional dynamics.

2. The rise of China and its implications for India's foreign policy have been a focal point in recent literature. **C. Raja Mohan's** "India's Foreign Policy: The Challenges Ahead" discusses the strategic recalibrations India must undertake in light of China's assertiveness. Additionally, works by scholars like **Harsh V. Pant** highlight the importance of the Indo-Pacific region and the need for India to strengthen alliances with countries like the United States, Japan, and Australia to counterbalance Chinese influence.
3. The literature on India's security challenges is rich and varied. Authors such as **K. Subrahmanyam and Ajit Doval** have contributed significantly to understanding the complexities of India's security environment, including the threats posed by terrorism and regional instability. Doval's writings emphasize the need for a comprehensive security strategy that integrates military, economic, and diplomatic dimensions.
4. The role of economic diplomacy in India's foreign policy has garnered attention from scholars like **Shyam Saran and Rakesh Mohan**. Saran's work discusses how economic engagement can enhance India's global standing and security, while Mohan explores the implications of trade agreements and investment strategies for India's foreign relations. The concept of "Make in India" and its impact on foreign investment is also a critical area of study.
5. The intersection of climate change and global health with foreign policy is increasingly recognized in contemporary literature. Scholars like **Navroz Dubash and Soumya Swaminathan** have examined India's commitments to international climate agreements and its role in global health initiatives, particularly during the COVID-19 pandemic. Their analyses highlight the importance of integrating environmental and health considerations into foreign policy frameworks.
6. The literature also addresses India's engagement in multilateral institutions. Works by authors such as **Shashi Tharoor**

and Ramesh Thakur discuss India's aspirations for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council and its role in organizations like BRICS and the G20. These discussions emphasize the need for India to leverage multilateral platforms to advance its interests and contribute to global governance.

The literature on India's foreign policy reflects geopolitical assessments and contemporary challenges. This review underscores the need for a comprehensive understanding of how India is adapting its foreign policy in response to changing global dynamics, providing a solid foundation for the research paper.

Strategic autonomy and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

Strategic autonomy and the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) are important concepts in understanding India's foreign policy, particularly in the context of its historical and contemporary geopolitical stance. Strategic autonomy refers to a nation's ability to make independent decisions in its foreign policy, free from the influence of major powers or blocs. This concept is deeply rooted in India's post-colonial identity and its desire to assert itself as a sovereign state in a multipolar world. The Non-Aligned Movement, established during the Cold War, was a collective response by countries that sought to avoid alignment with either the Western or Eastern blocs led by the United States and the Soviet Union. India, as one of the founding members of NAM, played a crucial role in advocating for the principles of non-alignment, which emphasized respect for sovereignty, territorial integrity, and the right of nations to choose their own paths without external coercion. The movement aimed to provide a platform for developing countries to voice their concerns and promote cooperation among them, thereby fostering a sense of solidarity in the face of global power dynamics. In the contemporary geopolitical landscape, India's commitment to strategic autonomy remains evident as it navigates complex relationships with major powers while maintaining its independence. For instance, India has engaged in strategic partnerships with the United States, Russia, and other nations, balancing its interests without fully aligning with any single power. This approach allows India to leverage its position to enhance its security and economic interests while

promoting a multipolar world order. Scholars have noted that India's strategic autonomy is not merely a relic of its non-aligned past but a dynamic principle that continues to shape its foreign policy decisions. As noted by Rajiv Bhatia, "India's strategic autonomy is a reflection of its historical experience and its aspirations as a rising power in a complex global environment" (Bhatia, 2019). This perspective underscores the importance of maintaining an independent foreign policy that aligns with India's national interests while contributing to global stability.

Economic diplomacy

Economic diplomacy has emerged as a cornerstone of India's foreign policy, particularly in the context of adapting to the rapidly changing geopolitical landscape of the 21st century. As India seeks to enhance its global standing and secure its economic interests, economic diplomacy serves as a vital tool for fostering international relationships, attracting foreign investment, and promoting trade. This approach reflects a broader understanding that economic strength is intrinsically linked to national security and geopolitical influence. In recent years, India has actively pursued economic diplomacy through various initiatives aimed at strengthening bilateral and multilateral ties. The "Act East" policy, for instance, underscores India's commitment to engaging with Southeast Asian nations to enhance trade and investment flows, thereby positioning itself as a key player in the Indo-Pacific region. This policy not only aims to boost economic ties but also to counterbalance China's growing influence in the area. As noted by former Indian Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran, "Economic diplomacy is not just about trade; it is about leveraging economic relationships to enhance our strategic interests" (Saran, 2017). This perspective highlights the dual role of economic diplomacy in both fostering economic growth and enhancing India's geopolitical leverage. India's participation in regional trade agreements, such as the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), and its engagement with platforms like the G20 and BRICS, reflect its strategic approach to economic diplomacy. These platforms provide India with opportunities to advocate for its interests while also collaborating on global economic governance issues. The

emphasis on economic diplomacy is further illustrated by India's efforts to attract foreign direct investment (FDI) through initiatives like "Make in India," which aims to transform the country into a global manufacturing hub. By creating a conducive environment for investment, India seeks to bolster its economic resilience and enhance its bargaining power on the international stage. COVID-19 pandemic, India's economic diplomacy has also adapted to address new challenges, such as supply chain disruptions and the need for global health cooperation. The country's initiative to supply vaccines to various nations underlines its commitment to global health security and its desire to position itself as a responsible global player. This adaptability in economic diplomacy not only serves immediate national interests but also reinforces India's image as a leader in international cooperation.

Security Concerns

It plays a vital role in shaping India's foreign policy, particularly as the country adapts to the evolving geopolitical landscape of the 21st century. With a complex array of challenges, including territorial disputes, terrorism, and regional instability, India's approach to security has become increasingly multifaceted and proactive. The rise of China as a regional power, coupled with its assertive posture in the Indo-Pacific, has prompted India to reassess its security strategies and alliances. This shift is evident in India's efforts to strengthen its defence partnerships with countries like the United States, Japan, and Australia, as part of a broader strategy to counterbalance Chinese influence in the region. India faces persistent security threats from non-state actors, particularly terrorism emanating from neighbouring countries. The need to address these threats has led India to adopt a more robust stance in its counter-terrorism efforts, emphasizing intelligence sharing and regional cooperation. As noted by former National Security Advisor Ajit Doval, "India's security concerns are not just about military might; they encompass a comprehensive approach that includes economic stability, diplomatic engagement, and counter-terrorism" (Doval, 2018). This holistic view underscores the interconnectedness of security and foreign policy in India's strategic framework. The changing nature of warfare, including cyber

threats and hybrid warfare has necessitated a re-evaluation of traditional security paradigms. India has begun to invest in cyber capabilities and enhance its defence infrastructure to address these emerging challenges. The integration of technology into defence strategies reflects recognition that modern security threats require innovative and adaptive responses.

Climate Change and Global Health

Climate change and global health have increasingly become integral components of India's foreign policy as the country adapts to the challenges posed by a rapidly changing geopolitical landscape. Recognizing that environmental degradation and health crises are interconnected global issues, India has sought to position itself as a proactive player in international discussions and initiatives aimed at addressing these challenges. India has committed to ambitious targets under the Paris Agreement, aiming to reduce its carbon emissions and increase the share of renewable energy in its energy mix. The country's emphasis on sustainable development reflects its understanding that climate resilience is essential for national security and economic stability. As Prime Minister Narendra Modi stated at the 2021 COP26 summit, "India is committed to a sustainable future and will work towards achieving net-zero emissions by 2070" (Modi, 2021). This commitment not only underscores India's responsibility as a major emitter but also highlights its role in global climate governance. On the global health front, the COVID-19 pandemic has underscored the importance of health security as a critical aspect of foreign policy. India's response to the pandemic, particularly its role as a major vaccine producer and supplier through initiatives like the Vaccine Maitri program, has reinforced its position as a leader in global health diplomacy. By providing vaccines to numerous countries, India has demonstrated its commitment to global health equity and solidarity, which are essential for addressing health crises that transcend national borders. As noted by health expert Dr. Soumya Swaminathan, "India's ability to leverage its pharmaceutical capabilities for global health is a testament to its strategic foresight in foreign policy" (Swaminathan, 2021).

Challenges and the Way Forward

As India navigates the complexities of the modern geopolitical landscape, it faces a myriad of challenges that necessitate a strategic re-evaluation of its foreign policy. One of the primary challenges is the shifting balance of power, particularly the rise of China as a dominant regional force. This has led to increased tensions in areas such as the South China Sea and the India-China border, compelling India to enhance its military capabilities and strengthen alliances with other nations, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region. As noted by strategic analyst C. Raja Mohan, "India's response to China's assertiveness will define its foreign policy trajectory in the coming years" (Mohan, 2020). Another significant challenge is the need to address non-traditional security threats, including terrorism, cyber warfare, and climate change. These issues require a multifaceted approach that integrates diplomatic, economic, and military strategies. India's experience with cross-border terrorism has highlighted the importance of regional cooperation and intelligence sharing, particularly with neighbouring countries. Furthermore, the impact of climate change on food security and resource availability poses long-term challenges that India must address through sustainable development initiatives and international collaboration. In terms of the way forward, India must continue to adapt its foreign policy to embrace a more proactive and flexible approach. This includes strengthening its participation in multilateral forums and regional organizations, such as the Quad and ASEAN, to enhance its influence and foster collaborative solutions to global challenges. Additionally, India should leverage its status as a major emerging economy to advocate for reforms in global governance structures that reflect the realities of a multipolar world. Moreover, enhancing economic diplomacy will be crucial for India to secure its interests and foster partnerships that can address both security and development challenges. As highlighted by former Foreign Secretary Shyam Saran, "India's ability to navigate the complexities of global politics will depend on its economic strength and diplomatic agility" (Saran, 2019).

CONCLUSION

India's foreign policy in the modern geopolitical context is characterized by a dynamic and adaptive approach that seeks to navigate the complexities of an increasingly

multipolar world. As the nation confronts a range of challenges from regional security threats and the rise of China to the pressing issues of climate change and global health India has demonstrated a commitment to enhancing its strategic autonomy while fostering collaborative relationships with other nations. The emphasis on economic diplomacy, coupled with a proactive stance in multilateral forums, reflects India's understanding that its national interests are best served through engagement and cooperation. India's historical legacy of non-alignment continues to inform its foreign policy, allowing it to maintain a balanced approach that prioritizes national sovereignty while contributing to global stability. As India adapts to the changing geopolitical landscape, it is essential for the country to leverage its strengths, including its demographic dividend and economic potential, to assert itself as a responsible global player. The path forward will require not only a commitment to addressing immediate security concerns but also a long-term vision that embraces sustainable development and international collaboration.

Ultimately, India's ability to effectively adapt to change will determine its role in shaping the future of global governance and its standing in the international community. By embracing a comprehensive and flexible foreign policy framework, India can navigate the complexities of the modern world while advancing its national interests and contributing to a more stable and equitable global order.

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