



India's Foreign Policy: A Strategic Application of Power

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Abstract

The Indian economy freed up to global markets after liberalization in 1991. It achieved the progressive benefits of this freedom. India has quietly but steadily established itself as a contender for the global economic cake, with a stable rate of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) growth and a tiny but growing share of world commerce. The country is on the verge of becoming a significant global economic power after more than three decades of economic transformation. India's seismic shift in economic performance has drawn the attention of the whole world, particularly its neighbors and major nations. The Indian economy has gone from a moderate growth rate to a great ride, to the point where one presidential election candidate in the United States drew analogies between the Indian economy's upward trajectory and the US economy's weak growth rates. The research work is a careful and in-depth study of the gradual development of India's foreign policy under distinct phases of Indian Prime Ministers. The attempt manifests an endeavor to delve into India's shift of power and policy.

Keywords: Economic Liberalization, India's Relations, Nehruvian Era, Indian Prime Ministers, India's Foreign Policy.

Introduction

The Indian economy opened up to global markets after liberalization in 1991, and it gradually reaped the benefits of this freedom. With a consistent rate of GDP (Gross Domestic Product) growth and a small but growing proportion of global commerce, India has gradually but surely established itself as a contender for the global economic cake. After over three decades of economic reform, the country is on the verge of becoming a significant global economic force. The world's attention has been drawn to India's tectonic shift in economic performance, particularly its neighbors and major nations. The Indian economy has gone from a sluggish growth rate to a fantastic ride, to the point where one American presidential election contender made parallels to the Indian economy's upward journey while criticizing the US economy's low growth rates.

India has already surpassed China as Asia's new economic superpower. However, there are some grey areas in this dazzling image. Some of these are concerned with internal socioeconomic concerns such as poverty, healthcare, education, and federalism difficulties. Others concern India's external difficulties, such as energy supply, cross-border terrorism, environmental issues, especially climate change, and recognition as a *de jure* nuclear power, among others. But, in the larger and more enlightening image of an 'Emerging India,' the most significant topic concerns India's foreign policy. Has India's foreign policy matured to the point where it can claim the title of economic powerhouse? Is Indian foreign policy capable of sustaining the grandeur of a Rising India, to put it another way? For a long time after independence, India's foreign policy seemed to be bereft of strength, much like the Indian economy.

Even two decades after Independence in 1947, India had no policy toward its neighbours or a cohesive security policy. However, at this point, it appears appropriate to concentrate on the phrases 'Foreign Policy' and 'Foreign Relations,' as well as how these terms have been utilized in the present context. International policy is the theoretical part of a country's foreign policies, whereas foreign relations are the practical side. Foreign relations may be compared to the fruits of a huge tree called Foreign Policy. Foreign relations are endeavors to secure national interests if foreign policy comprises elements of national interest. In reality and in mental exercises, the two are interdependent, since a country's foreign policy incorporates and is influenced by interactions among nations and other players. As a result, theory and practice are tightly entwined in foreign policy issues. As a result, the statement that Indian foreign policy lacking strength in the past could equally be interpreted to suggest that India's foreign ties was insufficient at the time. In this research work, the phrases 'Foreign Policy' and 'Foreign Relations' have been used interchangeably, keeping in mind their barely separated, overlapping identities.

The Nehruvian Era Marking the Beginning of India's Foreign Policy

The first Prime Minister of India, Pandit Jawaharlal Nehru (1947-64) laid the theoretical groundwork for his country's foreign policy. Nehru made two major contributions to the philosophical foundations of Indian foreign policy: (i) foreign policy autonomy; and (ii) non-alignment. Non-alignment was the foundation of Indian foreign policy for a long time, particularly during the Cold War. When world politics became involved in superpower rivalry

after World War II, Nehru's India had just two choices: join one of the two power blocs or stay out. Nehru desired to keep aloof from power blocks rather than foreign politics. His independent thought and determination to pursue India's own foreign policy drove him to look for an alternative, which he discovered in non-alignment ideas. Despite the fact that non-alignment sparked debate both inside and beyond India, there was little doubt that India could not have chosen a better path after independence. With non-alignment as its guiding principle, Nehru's India was unable to establish positive ties with either of the superpowers, who accused India of being uncommitted. Ironically, Nehru's non-alignment approach propelled him into the world scene, but it also separated him and India from the superpowers, which was crucial in international politics throughout the Cold War. Nehru lacked a well-defined regional policy, which he should have established because India had multiple hostile neighbors during his period, including Pakistan, China, and Burma (now Myanmar). Nehru did not have a good time in Nepal, as the country shifted its allegiance to China.

Indira Gandhi: More Strategic Policies than Nehru

Indira Gandhi, who spent two terms as Prime Minister, is credited for establishing a strong military for India as a back-up mechanism for Indian foreign policy (1966-77 and 1980-84). Even though the trend of military build-up began during Lal Bahadur Shastri's presidency (1964-66), it gathered traction and came to fruition during Indira Gandhi's first term. With a fast and convincing victory over Pakistan in the 1971 War waged over the destiny of East Pakistan, now Bangladesh, Indira solidified India as a regional power. Indira Gandhi maintained very strong security, political, and economic links with the Soviet Union prior to the conflict by signing the Treaty of Friendship with the socialist country in 1971, which proved useful to India throughout the war and thereafter. Indira Gandhi's achievement in India's international affairs was not insignificant: the 1971 Treaty with the Soviet Union began building a security policy for India to preserve her national interests. (i) The Soviet Union-U.S. Friendship Treaty of 1971 (ii) India's convincing win over Pakistan in the 1971 War, which cemented India's position as a regional power; (iii) India's first nuclear tests in Pokhran in 1974, which matched India's expanding military prominence as a regional force. Whether the 1974 nuclear tests aided India's international relations was never in doubt; yet, the tests boosted India's ambitions for regional power status even further. As a result, Indira Gandhi received more accolades for her foreign policy accomplishments than her father.

Morarji Desai's Take on United States

Morarji Desai, who succeeded Indira Gandhi in 1977, was the first Indian prime minister to go against the grain in order to improve relations with another superpower, the United States. The first reciprocal visits of Indian and American leaders of the government in a single calendar year occurred in 1978, when American President Jimmy Carter visited India in January and Indian Prime Minister Desai returned to the United States in June. Following these reciprocal visits, the impact of these high-level visits on bilateral relations could be felt, as India-US relations improved. In August 1978, the US government sanctioned \$60 million for India under the USAID initiative.

Rajiv Gandhi's Policies: Bilateral Relations

In terms of India's international relations, the Rajiv Gandhi government (1984-1989) had a mixed bag. While the youthful and astute Indian prime minister was able to impress US President Ronald Reagan and Soviet Union President Mikhail Gorbachev and enhance relations with both superpowers, some of his visits next door were fruitless. Rajiv Gandhi's neighborhood policies appeared hollow after the failure of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka, as well as increased tensions with Pakistan and Bangladesh. Rajiv Gandhi's visit to China in 1988, on the other hand, was a huge success, since bilateral relations returned to normalcy after the visit. The decision to form Joint Working Groups (JWGs) to explore border issues was the most major outcome of this visit. The JWG was decided to convene once a year, alternately in New Delhi and Beijing. The JWG mechanism, which was established by Rajiv Gandhi in 1988 to resolve various bilateral issues, is still in place between the two countries. The two countries also signed agreements on cooperation in civil aviation, science and technology, and cultural exchange programmes during Rajiv Gandhi's visit. Rajiv Gandhi's visit in 1988 sparked a new round of high-level visits between the two countries, which has continued to this day.

Narasimha Rao's Strategy to Attract Commercial Interest of the West

Due to more pressing home compulsions, the governments of V. P. Singh (1989-1990) and Chandra Sekhar (1990-91) were unable to make a significant impact on India's foreign relations. However, for the first time since India's independence, the P.V. Narasimha Rao government (1991-96), which pioneered 'open door' liberal economic policies, drew the attention of the industrialized West. India's vast market potential, for example, drew American commercial interest. Major American corporations formed the 'India Interest Group' in early 1994, which included Coca-Cola, Ford, General Electric, IBM, and Morgan Stanley. The continued economic reforms in India, as well as the growing readiness of American businesses to pursue commercial interests in India, prompted the foundation of this association. India was also named one of the world's top ten rising markets by the US Commerce Department in 1993. For the first time in India, the favourable impact of economic issues on foreign policy could be seen during the Rao presidency. The Rao government's brave move to liberalize the Indian economy in the face of local opposition has undoubtedly opened up new horizons in international relations.

The Diverse Outcomes of H. D. Deve Gowda and I. K. Gujral's Foreign Policies

In terms of India's foreign policy, the two United Front (UF) governments of H. D. Deve Gowda (1996-97) and I. K. Gujral (1997-98) achieved diverse outcomes. While there were no significant changes in Indian foreign policy under the Deve Gowda presidency, since the first UF prime minister wanted to continue the Rao government's external policies, the Gujral presidency introduced a brief but brighter time in Indian foreign policy. The Gujral Doctrine' produced a positive atmosphere in South Asia and helped to eliminate mistrust and schism in the Indian community. It also aided in the improvement of relations with the United States. However, these gains were short-lived as tensions in South Asia rose following India's and Pakistan's nuclear tests in May 1998.

Atal Behari Vajpayee and Nuclear India

As a result, during Prime Minister Atal Behari Vajpayee's first term in office in 1998-99, India's international relations deteriorated, as India's neighbours were scared of a nuclear India, and the United States, the main proponent of non-proliferation, was outraged. Following that, the US put economic and military sanctions on India in retaliation for Pokhran II, urging its allies to do the same. Due to Pokhran II and the Kargil crisis, India's foreign policy was severely tested during Vajpayee's first term. However, there were few bright spots in an overall bleak picture of India's foreign policy during this time. Positive wins for India's diplomacy include the Lahore Declaration with Pakistan and American assistance for India during the Kargil crisis. Despite the fact that the Vajpayee government handled the issue admirably, India did not emerge successfully from the crisis until Vajpayee's second term (1999-2004).

The second term of Atal Behari Vajpayee as Prime Minister of India yielded positive outcomes for India's foreign policy objectives. During the second term of the Vajpayee government, the government's foreign policy became more refined and focused. This administration was able to enhance relations with the United States, Russia, Pakistan, the Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN), the European Union (EU), Nepal, and Iran. It also re-established diplomatic ties with Afghanistan, which had been severed under the Taliban's tenure. Bill Clinton, the president of the United States, paid a five-day official visit to India in March 2000. After President Carter's visit to India in 1978, Clinton was the first American president to visit India in 22 years. On March 21, 2000, in New Delhi, Vajpayee and Clinton signed the '*US-India Relations: A Vision for the Twenty-First Century*,' a comprehensive and futuristic bilateral pact. As a result, it may be concluded that the 'Vision Document' had a significant role in the current development of India-US ties.

Marked Official Visits During Vajpayee's Term: Strengthening Foreign Policies

In October 2000, Russian President Vladimir Putin paid a visit to India. Following his visit, Russia and India inked agreements on defense cooperation, in which Russia offered to supply India with vital armaments and aircrafts. The Russian President's visit aided the two countries in resuming close security ties that existed during the Soviet era. Vajpayee visited Russia in November 2001. During his visit, Vajpayee and Putin signed the '*Moscow Declaration*,' pledging to work together closely in the areas of trade, security, and politics.

In July 2001, Pakistani President Pervez Musharraf visited India with the goal of normalising relations between the two nations. Vajpayee and the Musharraf met in Agra for a summit meeting to address bilateral concerns. However, due to Musharraf's adamant stance on Kashmir, the summit failed to produce any significant results. The Agra Summit, on the other hand, demonstrated the two countries' desire to enhance relations. The Vajpayee government created extensive trade and political links with ASEAN as part of his '*Look East*' policy. With its increased focus on this policy, India was able to reinforce its ties with ASEAN, which had previously been strained.

In addition, Prime Minister Vajpayee travelled to Vietnam and Indonesia. There, he inked trade and commercial agreements with countries, boosting government and private investment into and out of both. The Vajpayee government was also the first to develop close ties with the European Union. In June 2000, the first India-EU summit took place in Lisbon, Portugal's capital. Since then, the two have met on a regular basis for summits. India's commerce with the EU accounts for approximately a quarter of all Indian trade; nevertheless, initiatives to improve relations with the EU began during Vajpayee's second term as Prime Minister of India. As a result, Vajpayee can be credited with adopting a more mature foreign policy in his second term, as India had built connections with key powers and sent favourable signals to its neighbours during this time, as stated above.

Manmohan Singh and Some Unique Foreign Policies

Manmohan Singh was instrumental in developing close relations with the United States, as well as some industrializing nations and regional organisations that are essential in the international order today, during his first term as India's prime minister. The United Progressive Alliance (UPA)-I Government, led by Manmohan Singh, has made several ambitious and unique foreign policy measures (2004-09). One of these projects was India and the United States' proposal, announced in a joint statement on July 18, 2005, during Singh's official visit to the United States, to embark into '*Civil Nuclear Energy Cooperation*' (CNEC). The CNEC proposed that the two countries work together on nuclear issues as actual partners rather than enemies. The CNEC was a brave initiative by India and the United States, given India's refusal to sign the Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) and the Comprehensive Test Ban Treaty (CTBT), as well as India's nuclear testing only seven years ago, in 1998.

The Manmohan Government hoped that the CNEC, which was signed as an 'Agreement' between India and the United States later in October 2008, would assist India reintegrate into the international nuclear mainstream, from which she had been shut off due to her reluctance to sign the NPT and the CTBT. This government was also successful in forging close strategic and political ties with Japan, the United Kingdom, France, and Russia. India, led by Manmohan Singh, joined other countries to form the BRIC group, a crucial multilateral platform. Brazil, Russia, India, and China, collectively known as BRIC, are four fast-growing economies. Later, South Africa entered the forum. The Manmohan Singh government steadily improved economic and political ties with significant regional organisations such as ASEAN and the EU. During this time, India's relations with its neighbours, such as Bangladesh, Myanmar, and Sri Lanka, improved. Any attempts at peace were thwarted by the 2008 Mumbai attacks and the subsequent revelation that the attackers were aided by the Pakistani military and intelligence establishment. Peace is yet to be achieved between the two countries.

Manmohan Singh's second term as Prime Minister of India began in May 2009, when he became the leader of the United Progressive Alliance II government (2009-14). The Manmohan Singh government's performance in international relations during its second term was not as impressive as it had been during its first term. The government was more concerned with dealing with corruption allegations levelled against cabinet members. A trilateral security agreement between the United States, Japan, and India, which began in late 2011, signaled India's aspirations to strengthen its position in multilateral fora. India's desire to cooperate with Japan, a large Asian economy, was also demonstrated by this endeavour. The UPA II government, on the other hand, was unable to give the Indo-US Nuclear Agreement a final shape. This caused some scepticism in the bilateral relationship. Under this government, ties with neighbours and other important countries such as the United Kingdom, Russia, the EU, and ASEAN did not improve significantly.

Narendra Modi and Concentration to Enhance SAARC Foreign Policies

In May 2014, Narendra Modi, a BJP (Bharatiya Janata Party) leader, was elected Prime Minister of India. Despite the fact that the BJP won a majority in the 2014 legislative elections on its own, Modi led the NDA coalition. Prime Minister Modi has focused heavily on foreign relations from the start. He invited the heads of the SAARC (South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation) nations to his swearing-in ceremony in New Delhi in order to send a message to India's neighbours that it was eager to share closer connections with them. That after several years since the 'Gujral Doctrine,' his 'Neighbourhood First' programme was partially successful in producing pleasant vibes across South Asia. With India's ratification of the Land Boundary Agreement, which had been waiting for the past 40 years, relations with Bangladesh have improved. Ties with Sri Lanka have also improved, owing to a shift in the country's government, with Maithripala Sirisena succeeding Mahinda Rajapaksa as President. In March 2015, the Indian prime minister delayed little time in repairing relations with Sri Lanka, making the first official tour by an Indian prime minister to the country in 30 years. Relations with Afghanistan remained cordial. In June 2016, Modi paid a visit to Afghanistan. Modi reassured Afghans and their leaders that India always would stand by them in their war-torn country. In April 2015 and September 2016, Afghan President Ashraf Ghani paid visits to India. These visits amply demonstrated India's and Afghanistan's friendly relations.

However, during Modi's first three years in office, India's relations with Nepal and the Maldives did not significantly improve, owing to India's involvement in these countries' domestic politics. In order to maintain bilateral interests, India should have taken a more measured approach to occurrences in Nepal during the construction of the latter's Constitution. Because of cross-border terrorist activity, relations with Pakistan have deteriorated. Furthermore, flash strikes by both countries' security forces along the Line of Control (LoC) heightened tensions. In Uri, on the Indian side of Kashmir, militants backed by Pakistani forces attacked and killed Indian soldiers on September 20, 2016. On September 29, 2016, India reacted with a surgical strike, demolishing launch sites for terrorists being pushed into India from the other side of the LoC (supposedly by the Pakistani army). Tensions between the two neighbours rose as a result of the strikes, and bilateral relations deteriorated.

Modi, on the other hand, maintained friendly relations with Bhutan. He chose Bhutan as the destination for his first foreign trip as Prime Minister of India, emphasising India's commitment to develop strong ties with Bhutan. In the 70 years since India's Independence, no other Indian prime minister has chosen Bhutan as the destination for his or her first visit. This June 2014 visit also demonstrated that India was not taking Bhutan for granted. Bhutan's continuing support for India in all facets of international relations, including counter-terrorism efforts, was lauded. As a result, throughout the first three years of Narendra Modi's presidency, his neighbourhood programme produced mixed outcomes. In terms of big powers, Modi's foreign policy was more effective during this time period.

The Indian prime minister worked to develop India's strategic relationship with the United States. Until June 2016, he visited America four times and developed a close personal relationship with Barack Obama and the US administration. Obama also made history by becoming the first US President to visit India twice during his presidency, as well as the first US president to attend India's Republic Day celebrations as a distinguished guest. The better connection was evident during the visits by the two leaders of government. However, because a new American president took office in January 2017, India-US relations may be scrutinised more closely in the near future. In the foreseeable future, President Donald Trump's policy preferences, personal chemistry with Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi, domestic difficulties in both countries, and worldwide events will all have an impact on Indo-US relations. In the next years, however, rising economic ties between the two countries, the rise of the Indian diaspora in the United States as an economic and political pressure group, and India's continued open market policies will have a beneficial impact on India-US relations.

The signing of a long-awaited civilian nuclear cooperation deal with Japan in November 2016 marked a watershed moment for the Modi government. The Indian prime leader also struck up a friendly relationship with Japan's Prime Minister Shinzo Abe. During Abe's 2015 visit to India, he offered to support the country with a \$15 billion investment to build a high-speed railway infrastructure. Modi was able to convert India's relationships with Japan from a donor-receiver relationship to a strategic alliance. Under Modi's 'Act East Policy,' India's increasing ties with ASEAN and East Asia have also

paid off handsomely. From the financial years 2001-02 to 2014-15, ASEAN-India trade increased nearly tenfold. In terms of trade between the two countries, this is a positive trend.

During Modi's first three years in government, relations with Russia and the United Kingdom also improved. In December 2015, Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi travelled to Moscow for the Sixteenth Annual Summit Meeting between the two countries' leaders. New documents spanning a wide area of cooperation in civil nuclear energy were signed during Modi's visit to Russia. The two countries negotiated agreements in the areas of defense, hydrocarbons, satellite navigation, railways, solar energy, heavy engineering, supercomputing, visa simplification, ayurveda, and the media. During their meeting, Prime Minister Modi and President Putin also issued a joint statement titled '*Shared Trust, New Horizons.*' In October 2016, the Russian President paid a visit to India for the Seventeenth Annual Summit Meeting between the two heads of government. During the discussion, India's prime minister reaffirmed that Russia would continue to be India's most important defense and strategic ally. President Vladimir Putin reaffirmed Russia's commitment to India's Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership. Under the Modi administration India's relations with Russia have become even more energised.

Modi has also taken steps to enhance relations with the United Kingdom. From November to December 2015, he was in the United Kingdom. The Indian Prime Minister and his counterpart signed a '*Vision Statement*' outlining the core principles on which the UK-India partnership will be founded, as well as a plan for increasing cooperation, during the visit. This is a new initiative to strengthen connections with the United Kingdom, with whom India's relationship has never reached its full potential.

During Modi's first three years in government, however, China remained a difficult problem for Indian foreign policy. As China's political, military, and economic power grew, it became more assertive in areas where India's interests were at stake. Despite frequent bilateral contacts and improved economic ties, China's unwillingness to let India join the Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) and its growing proximity to Pakistan strained Indo-China relations. Beijing's strong support for Pakistan, particularly the \$46 billion China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), which crossed Indian-claimed territory, has strained bilateral relations further. New Delhi was not pleased with China's One Belt One Road (OBOR) strategy, which aims to build roadways near sensitive Indian border areas. Furthermore, China's assertive political and economic presence in the region, particularly in Nepal, Myanmar, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, as well as Pakistan, irritated Indian foreign policy.

Here we do stop a bit and hover onto certain questions like, what is India's foreign policy's 'Modi Doctrine'? Is this a brand-new attempt to sway India away from Nehru's worldview? Is Prime Minister Modi's seamless melding of the country's foreign policy and domestic development a success? What was the BJP leader's strategy for altering India's foreign policy? Modi has actively promoted his government's hallmark projects, such as '*Make in India,*' '*Digital India,*' '*Smart Cities,*' and '*Skill India,*' not only to Indians but also to foreign investors. He has successfully engaged Indian diasporas around the world, not just in the United States, in project and domestic policies. He electrified India's foreign policy establishments to shake off their complacency and bureaucratic mindset in order to project a new and powerful India. Modi has been able to present a resurgent India to the rest of the world, complete with economic and digital prowess.

Conclusion

It is hard to evaluate a country's foreign policy in isolation, without considering the legacy of the Nehru period: the establishment of a security culture under Indira Gandhi's economic boom. It will be thus fine to comment that Modi has enhanced India's foreign policy taking up from the Nehruvian era. India's foreign policy has gone through various phases since Independence, including idealistic premierships and more practical eras under Rao and Vaipayee due to India's rising prominence as a major economic power. As a result, the storey of Indian foreign policy has progressed from ideological to pragmatic to forceful. This article seeks to capture the essence of Indian foreign policy. Although history served as a point of reference for this project, it tried to go beyond history to the present and future. Future recommendations for encouraging the expansion of bilateral relations have been an attempt in every era of Prime Ministership. These projections, which are based on realistic estimations, may be useful to students, scholars, and policymakers interested in India's foreign relations. At this point in time, in the second decade of the twenty-first century, India's foreign relations are at a critical crossroads. As India strives to become a great power, its foreign policy must be wiser in order to guide the country through the complicated web of international affairs. Now and again, glimmers of such wisdom can be seen; nevertheless, these glimmers must be transformed into guiding lights.

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