

MODI 3.0 AND INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

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ABSTRACT

Since Prime Minister Narendra Modi assumed power in May 2014, there have been substantial changes to India's foreign policy. With the goal of raising India's profile and influence internationally, Modi's strategy has been characterized by a fusion of conventional diplomacy with cutting-edge tactics or a unique blend of hard and soft power. During his leadership, a bold and assertive foreign policy that prioritizes strategic alliances, economic diplomacy, and a strong defense posture has been implemented. This paper examines the main tenets of Indian foreign policy under Modi, such as its economic goals, regional engagements, strategic components, and reactions to international issues. It is also an attempt to explore the future course of IFP under Modi 3.0.

Keywords: India's Foreign Policy, Modi, Multi-Alignment, Global South.

Introduction

An understanding of India's Foreign Policy (IFP) under PM Modi brings to fore a crucial fact that it now hinges on being multi-aligned rather than non-aligned. In a number of regional and international organizations and accords, India has taken the lead. Modi's India is a firm proponent of multipolarity, seeing India as an indispensable member of the SCO, BIMSTEC, ASEAN, QUAD, BRICS, and so on. India has been forming strategic alliances with the world's leading nations concurrently. Prime Minister Modi has pushed for regional integration and improved bilateral ties with South Asian nations. Additionally, the Modi administration upgraded the "Look East," policy into "Act East" strategy along with the "Neighbourhood First" initiative aimed at relooking and revamping India's relations in its neighbourhood. Modi's IFP pledged to secure its defence and diplomatic connections across the globe. By restructuring Indian foreign policy on a set of values more in line with what it sees as its traditions, the Modi administration also pledged to restore India's standing in the international community and ensure that its interests and status are respected by all parties, including superpowers like the US and China. Under PM Modi's leadership, foreign policy has been reinvigorated and modernized, national pride and India's "soft power" have been strengthened globally, ties with significant allies have been strengthened, and the credibility of India and faith of foreign investors have been reinstated.

India's Foreign Policy: Trends and priorities

Pillars of Indian Foreign Policy

"The Modi government has mainly relied on culture and political values (democracy) to promote Indian soft power. As opposed to the Nehruvian foreign policy doctrine Panchsheel whose five principles were "mutual respect for each other's territorial integrity and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual noninterference in each other's internal affairs, equality and cooperation for mutual benefit and peaceful co-existence", the Modi government has formulated its own foreign policy doctrine labeled Panchamrit. Panchamrit's five pillars are "dignity, dialogue, shared prosperity, regional and global security and cultural

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and civilizational links" [1] Modi hasn't been the leader in the use of soft power in foreign affairs, but he has been more assertive in its projection. Although earlier administrations have also supported foreign policy through the deployment of soft power, their initiatives were generally more haphazard and lacked a planned and coherent strategy. However, the Modi administration is making modest progress toward creating a coherent, calculated, and institutionalized soft power strategy, which will probably boost its efficacy in international relations.

The Use of Soft power

India has traditionally relied on soft power diplomacy as the largest democracy in the world, with a rich cultural legacy and aspirations, but never more so than under the present PM Modi. The Modi government's emphasis on soft power is associated with century-old Indian principles, such as the idea of "vasudhaiva kutumbkam," which suggests that the world is one huge family, and Bharat's position as a "vishwaguru." "The four broad categories of the display of soft power are ancient heritage or civilizational ties, democracy, economic aid and Bollywood".[2] India is unafraid to advocate for democracy wherever it sees fit. This is accomplished by actively supporting the strengthening and capacity-building of democratic institutions, but with the concerned government's express permission.

Another important soft power weapon in India's toolbox is yoga, which is hailed as "India's gift to the world" and has millions of ardent practitioners around the globe. Modi was successful in getting the UN to mark 21st June as the World Yoga Day in 2014. Yoga is a powerful tool for promoting the Indian way of life and for portraying India as a non-aggressive, peaceful nation. Using yoga's holistic benefits to foster goodwill among nations is beneficial for foreign policy. In addition, Modi employs Buddhist diplomacy to further his objectives in terms of foreign policy, both strategic and financial. The primary objectives are countering China's soft influence and increasing India's religious tourist industry. Yet another The Indian diaspora the world over has been an invaluable instrument in strengthening a positive image for India.

"Modi's government has instigated a number of soft power initiatives to improve India's image abroad. Make in India, for example, encourages home-grown manufacturing and development. The Swachh Bharat Mission, meanwhile, aims to end open defecation and improve sanitation. Atmanirbhar Bharat translates as 'self-reliant India'. It is an umbrella concept for the Modi government's plans for India to become more efficient, competitive and resilient in the world economy".[3]

Multi-Alignment under Modi

In contrast to its previous strategy of non-alignment during the Cold War and later strategic autonomy, India is pursuing a multi-alignment strategy under Modi. "There are four goals being sought by this multi-alignment program. India's goals are to, further its economic and social development; enhance its national security in terms of both internal and external threats; elevate India's stature and expand its role as a major player in international affairs; and promote Indian political and social ideals and values abroad. In his International Institute for Strategic Studies Fullerton Lecture in 2017, delivered in Singapore, S. Jaishankar, reaffirmed India's commitment to multi alignment which he argued was underpinned by a desire to realise a multipolar world". [4]

Contrary to non-alignment, multi-alignment is a strategy intended to keep a safe distance from the other great powers, especially the US and China. Its goal is to prevent any kind of reliance on any other nation. Additionally, the strategy seeks to maximize India's interest in a global system in which rules are subject to change in relation to change in the power dynamics of the United States and Europe, as well as the emergence of China and other significant developing countries. With its focus on strategic relationship development, normative hedging, and participation in regional institutions, multi alignment would remain a favoured approach in the future. However, it may encounter serious difficulties if power dynamics in the Asia Pacific area change. One of the critical foreign policy issues the Modi's administration would be to deal with is countering unfavourable opinions of multi- alignment among its many allies.

The Strategic Dimension

Under PM Modi, India's strategy for handling international geopolitics is built upon four main pillars. In terms of international relations, these include "strategic autonomy," advancing the interests of the Global South, fortifying civilizational links with similarly focused nations, and increasing interaction with neighbors. "It is the pursuit of strategic autonomy, rooted in the Indian philosophy of *Madhyam Marg* or the "Middle Path". The strategic doctrine of the "Middle Path" propels India to play a major role in global geopolitics. For instance, India is playing an important role in balancing relations with Russia in the

Indo-Pacific geopolitics". [5] It is well known that Russia is strongly opposed to the Indo-Pacific geopolitical paradigm. Similarly, India was able to obtain electricity from Russia even with the protracted sanctions imposed on it following the start of the Russia-Ukraine war. One might also highlight the fact that India and Iran have established a strong partnership based on shared civilizations, even in the face of sanctions against Iran. This shows how adept India is at balancing geopolitics on a global scale.

- **Act East Policy**

India's "Act East" policy is an effort to foster diplomatic ties at all levels with the large Asia-Pacific region by promoting economic, geopolitical, and cultural ties. As its predecessor, the "look East policy was initiated during the period of Narasimha Rao in 1992 for better engagement with ASEAN and East Asian countries". [6] It was initiated as an economic policy to strengthen India's trade and investment opportunities with the region.

"With Modi's adoption of the Act East policy, the strategic factor has assumed greater salience. India has now forged strategic partnerships with Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Japan, South Korea and Australia. In addition, it has also established close links with countries of the BIMSTEC group of countries and the IOR".[7]

Furthermore, India's commitment to help the infrastructural developmental of the region in terms of communication, roads and transport is augmented "by a long-term vision of developing its Northeastern region (NER) which is considered as a gateway to Southeast Asia".[8]

- **Indo-Pacific Strategy**

India is seen as a crucial participant in the Indo-Pacific, which has played a significant role in influencing world politics in the modern era. The US and China are engaged in a major power competition that is particularly noticeable in this region. The majority of nations, including the United States, Australia, Japan, South Korea, United Kingdom (UK), and the members ASEAN and the EU, have made the Indo-Pacific region the focal point of their foreign policy. "India's Indo-Pacific policy has been to strengthen partnerships with like-minded countries, and form issue-based coalitions to address a new strategic and security environment. This is clearly visible in how India's engagement has been deepening with countries like the US, Japan, and Australia among others. India has been engaging with these countries in multilateral platforms like the Quad for instance, but India's bilateral relationships with these countries have also grown exponentially in the past few years".[9]

- **Relations with Major Powers**

Under Modi, India-US relations have grown defense cooperation, people-to-people relationships, and commercial links to new heights. Military interoperability has been strengthened by the signing of important defense agreements such as "the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA), Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), and Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)". [10] The two nations have a comprehensive strategic collaboration as seen by their cooperation in space exploration, cybersecurity, and counterterrorism. "In a geopolitically fractious world, few major powers have managed to induce cooperation with the U.S. while publicly courting its biggest foes. India has been a striking exception. By exploiting Washington's fears of China adeptly, Modi has managed to elicit extraordinary support from the White House while actively refusing to give anything in return. India refuses to pledge support to the U.S., for instance, on any of its major geopolitical goals — whether in Europe or the Middle East. It also continues to rebuff requests for access to bases in the Indo-Pacific, unlike the Philippines. And it won't commit to fighting alongside U.S. forces in the event of a conflict with China, unlike other U.S. allies in Asia".[11]

China and India have had a complicated and varied relationship that is marked by both rivalry and collaboration. Territorial conflicts and strategic rivalries have endured despite the expansion of economic linkages. In addition to interacting with China in multilateral forums like BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), Modi's government has taken a strong stand on border problems.

"India-China relations are unlikely to see much progress in the coming year. despite 19 rounds of military-level talks and several meetings between the foreign ministers—and even between the two leaders on the sidelines of other summit meetings—there has been no disengagement of the military forces. There are still more than 60,000 troops on each side of the border on regular deployment, which brings with it serious risk of escalation. There is little sign that either side has much flexibility, which means that the border issue is unlikely to be resolved anytime soon". [12]

India's historical ties with Russia have remained strong under Modi, with continued cooperation in defense, energy, and space sectors. Despite India's growing engagement with the US, it has maintained a balanced approach towards Russia, recognizing its strategic importance. The annual India-Russia summits have facilitated high-level exchanges and reinforced the partnership, particularly in defense procurement and joint ventures.

"India will continue to expand its relations with Russia while sustaining ties with other major powers of the world including the US and Europe, under a potential Modi 3.0 government, Russia will continue to be an important partner for India". [13]

"Part of this partnership with Russia is supporting India's goal of becoming a leading voice in a "multipolar" world, which entails a greater role for the Global South, for example, through organizations like BRICS of which Russia and India are founding members".[14]

- **Economic Diplomacy**

The use of soft power and economic diplomacy have been the critical instruments of Modi's foreign policy to achieve India's national interest. The Make in India initiative seeks to position India as a global manufacturing hub. India's robust internal economic growth also positions New Delhi to be a key player in the world economy. The same is clear from India's participation in different global organizations. India received an invitation to take part in the G-7 Summit, as was previously mentioned. This illustrates India's rising prominence in world geoeconomics. India has signed several Free Trade Agreements with regional organizations like the ASEAN. "In March 2024, India signed an FTA with European Free Trade Association (EFTA) countries (Iceland, Switzerland, Norway and Liechtenstein). Efforts are going on for similar FTA arrangements with the European countries. Similarly, India is mulling to sign an FTA with Great Britain". [15]

- **Energy Security**

India's foreign policy has made ensuring energy security a top priority. "The Modi administration has procured long-term contracts for the import of gas and oil from nations like Saudi Arabia, the US, and Russia by diversifying its energy supplies". [16] India's dedication to "sustainable energy solutions are demonstrated by its participation in renewable energy projects like the International Solar Alliance (ISA), which was co-founded by France and India. Strategic alliances in civil nuclear energy, such as those with the US and Russia, have also improved India's energy portfolio".[17]

- **Connectivity and Infrastructure**

To improve trade and economic integration, regional connections and infrastructure development have been given top priority. "The goal of projects like the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC), which is being carried out in partnership with Japan, is to develop an equitable and sustainable growth model for Asia and Africa".[18] In order to promote trade and economic cooperation, "India is participating in the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC) in an effort to increase connectivity with Russia, Europe, and Central Asia".[19] "The IMEC presents a blueprint to boost economic growth among the participating economies by connecting the 2 continents of Asia and Europe. With the participating economies accounting for us \$47 trillion- what about half the global GDP the formidability of the IMEC as an economic force is undeniable". [20]

"The G7 industrialised nations recently committed to promoting concrete infrastructure initiatives such as IMEC Which envisages a vast road, railroad and shipping network among Saudi Arabia, India The US and Europe to ensure integration among Asia, the Middle East and the West. The iMac is also seen as an initiative by likeminded nations to gain strategic influence in the face of China's Belt and Road initiative (BRI)".[21]

- **Regional Engagements- Neighborhood First Policy**

"India's neighbourhood policy encourages it to focus on national security and economic development to strengthen its position as a regional power while motivating it to become a global power. The nation's geopolitical and geostrategic position has also prompted New Delhi to pursue relationships with its neighbours. With the foundation of Gujral's development model and inspiration from the Gujral doctrine, PM Narendra Modi, after coming to power, embarked on a pragmatic and proactive foreign policy of neighbourhood first".[22]

The significance of having stable and productive connections with neighboring countries is highlighted by Modi's "Neighborhood First policy, India has prioritized connectivity, security, and economic cooperation in its interactions with the nations that make up the South Asian Association for

Regional Cooperation (SAARC)".[23] But there have been difficulties due to issues like political unrest in the area and cross-border terrorism. Particularly tense relations have existed with Pakistan, characterized by ongoing hostilities and diplomatic impasses.

Under Modi, the relationship between India and Bangladesh has significantly improved, marked by collaboration in trade, connectivity, and security. A major accomplishment was reached in 2015 when the long-running border dispute was settled through the Land Boundary Agreement. Bilateral relations have been further reinforced by increased cooperation in the areas of energy, water resources, and counterterrorism.

Political trends and geopolitical factors have influenced the ups and downs of India's relationship with Nepal. Although historical and cultural links are still strong, the relationship has been put to the test by events like the border blockade in 2015 and Nepal's increasing diplomatic connections with China. The goals of Modi's high-level meetings and trips to Nepal have been to strengthen the alliance and solve shared issues.

The relationship between India and Sri Lanka has been characterized by initiatives to strengthen infrastructural development, marine security, and economic collaboration. The Modi administration has addressed issues pertaining to the rights of the Tamil minority while also promoting Sri Lanka's post-war development and rehabilitation. India's strategic interests are reflected in initiatives like the construction of the Trincomalee port and collaboration in the Indian Ocean region.

India has prioritized infrastructure projects, capacity building, and development assistance in its interactions with Afghanistan. "Through its contributions to initiatives like the Afghan-India Friendship Dam and the Zaranj-Delaram route, the Modi administration has persisted in promoting the stability and rehabilitation of Afghanistan".[24] An important component of India's policy continues to be its position on the Taliban's comeback and how it affects regional security.

India and the Maldives have had a complex relationship that includes humanitarian, economic, and defense facets. In the past, India has always been the first to arrive in the Maldives during emergencies, as demonstrated by the Male water crisis in 2014 and the coup attempt in 1988. India's strategy is primarily motivated by the need to keep the IOR stably secure. Because of its advantageous location, India values the Maldives as a partner in counterterrorism, maritime security, and regional stability.

Relationship issues have arisen between India and the Maldives as a result of the recent "India Out"[25] movement spearheaded by former President Yameen and current President Muizzu. This movement opposes what it sees as India's increasing influence in the Maldives and the deployment of Indian military forces as threats to Maldivian sovereignty. This Maldivian domestic political movement is a result of a complicated interaction between external pressures and national sovereignty concerns. "In terms of regional stability, the dynamics between India, China, and the Maldives are significant. The rivalry between India and China in the Indian Ocean region has implications for regional power balance and maritime security. The Maldives, caught in the middle of this geopolitical tug-of-war, faces the challenge of balancing its relationships with both regional powers. The outcome of this balancing act has broader implications for the stability and security of the Indian Ocean region".[26]

"Because of its strategic location and the larger geopolitical competition in the Indian Ocean, the Maldives are important to both China and India". [27] The dynamic patterns of these relationships will persist in molding the regional terrain, influencing not only the mutual relations but also the general stability of the area.

Voice of the Global South

"India, during its presidency of the G20, has prioritised being the voice of the global South and has taken action to raise concerns. This includes sending vaccines and medicines to developing countries during the COVID pandemic. India hosted the Voice of the Global South Summit ensure the region remained central at the G7 summit. India is advocating for the Global South by adding the African Union as a full member of the G20". [28] According to Bhutan's Minister of Foreign Affairs Dr. Tandi Dorji, "In many respects, India stands as a stalwart leader of the Global South advocating for the interests and concerns of developing nations on the international stage. Through its stewardship of the G20 Presidency, India has played a pivotal role in amplifying the concerns and interests of the Global South, embodying the spirit of solidarity and cooperation among nations." [29] "In the coming months, India will present itself more squarely as the "voice of the Global South". The foreign ministry is planning to open 19 more missions and posts abroad, increase India's passport coverage to 10% of the population and

open “videsh bhawans” in select state capitals. This is to expand the diplomatic footprint. There are plans to open six new missions and two consulates in the first 100 days of the new government. This will also help in safe international migration and the mobility of skilled workers from India”. [30]

Modi's Multilateralism

PM Modi has been of the opinion that, “the world is interconnected as well as interdependent. This reality compels us to recognise that absolute agreement on all matters cannot be a prerequisite for collaboration. We need to accept the fact that we are living in the era of multilateralism”. [31] Since 2014, multilateral engagement has been the cornerstone of IFP and has been used to further the interests of the Global South. India has used various multi-lateral platforms like the UN, G7, G20, SCO, BRICS etc. for reiterating the need to reform multi-lateral institutions and make them more responsive to the requirements of the developing countries. The same forums have also been utilized to further the cause of sustainable development. Under India's presidentship, “the G20 declaration underscored her commitment to climate justice and equity, calling for substantial financial and technological support from the Global North. For the first time, there was a recognition of the quantum jump needed in the magnitude of development financing, moving from billions of dollars to trillions. G20 members acknowledged that developing countries require \$5.9 trillion to fulfil their climate action pledges under the Paris Agreement by 2030. Concurrently, India is taking a leading role in U.N. reforms, especially the restructuring of principal organs like the Security Council to ensure a more equitable global order”. [32]

India's presence at the recent G7 Summit in Italy, “affirmed the nations' increasing heft within the broader G-summitry. The G7's focus on Africa hey follows the inclusion of the African Union in the G20 as a permanent member at the Delhi Summit. There is a unified global consciousness that there is no progress without Africa, an integral part of the global South. The G7 confirmed that the voice raised by India for the global South during its G20 presidency last year by facilitating the inclusion of the AU, is instrumental in steering the global multilateral agenda”. The consistent invites to India from a G7 which remains locked in strained relationship with China suggests that the western democracies find India as an interoperable partner in the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, Prime Minister Modi's bilateral meetings with France Italy Japan and the UK at the summit were also a signal to China”. [33] Therefore, India's participation in the G7 has increased along with its geopolitical and economic prominence.

“At the same time, India is playing an active role in the Indian Ocean region. The unveiling of the SAGAR doctrine by PM Modi in 2015 gave a greater push to India's maritime diplomacy in the Indian Ocean region. Similarly, the Maritime Vision 2030 outlined in 2021 by the Ministry of Ports, Shipping and Waterways, the Government of India has also focused on a greater role for India in maritime diplomacy. Along with maritime diplomacy, India has recently strengthened its presence in outer space. The success of the Chandrayaan Mission enhanced India's presence in outer space. It is a known fact that Outer Space is going to play an important role in shaping the future of mankind”. [34].

Conclusion

Under PM Modi, IFP has been characterized by an assertive and proactive stance, with the goal of bolstering India's strategic autonomy and global influence. Modi's administration has strived to place India as a pivotal player in the global arena with a combination of economic diplomacy, regional engagements, strategic alliances, and solutions to global issues. Even while there are still difficulties and complexity, India's foreign policy trajectory under Modi shows a clear picture of a self-assured and aspirational country. Strategic autonomy will be India's top foreign policy priority going forward. India's foreign policy environment is in a precarious state during the first few months of Modi 3.0. The Modi administration has given foreign policy a great deal of thought. Debates over foreign policy were previously viewed as an elite phenomenon, apart from discussions of domestic affairs. On the other hand, foreign policy debates have become more democratic over the past ten years. India now has deeper ties to the West, the Middle East, and the Indo-Pacific, three areas it considers essential. India has mainly been successful in building a reputation for itself through its strong democratic credentials, significant diaspora linkages, and civilizational traits.

In addition, trade and economic interactions—particularly with the UK, EU, and Gulf countries—will support India's manufacturing industry and influence how it integrates into global supply chains. The government wants to increase India's influence abroad, alleviate poverty, generate wealth, and create jobs. Therefore, the government will concentrate on trade and investment agreements that would enable India to fully participate in global supply chains and more strongly integrate its manufacturing sector with other nations.

Furthermore, Modi 3.0 will focus on forging a peaceful perimeter for itself, which would entail addressing China's threat and reviving relations with neighbors and Indo-Pacific countries. India will firmly establish itself as the "voice of the Global South" in the upcoming months.

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