



The 21st Century and India's Foreign Policy: Continuity and Change

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Abstract: The most often used theme among scholars, politicians, and educated citizens is "Emerging India," which influences many different types of discussions. Expert evaluations and popular commentary are both captivated by India's seemingly inevitable but delayed rise to global power status. This essay aims to deliver a partial depiction of the forthcoming "challenges and threats" that the foreign policy of India will inevitably face in the coming decades. It begins by examining how foreign policy of New Delhi has changed since gaining independence and how those changes have affected its substance and direction. Subsequently, it addresses the difficulties that modern foreign policy has encountered. Discussed in section III is the danger that China represents regionally and globally. This study also investigates if it is possible for practitioners of Indian foreign policy to adopt a paradigm shift from hard to soft power.

Keywords: India, Challenges, Foreign Policy, China, Superpower, Academics

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INTRODUCTION

India presented a plan in annual budget for the total liberalisation and overhaul of the economy in Parliament on July 24, 1991. The Finance Minister said India's economy has been in a fragile situation for the last two years, on the point of collapse owing to factors such as a currency that has lost considerable value, a lack of confidence from investors, a big budget deficit, and inflation rates in the double digits (GOI, 2021). The FM concluded his budget address by unveiling a significant reform program that would dramatically diminish government regulation of the economy. He cited Victor Hugo to make this announcement. He said that "no power on Earth can prevent an idea whose time has come from being realised." I tell the august House, "One such idea is the rise of India as a global economic power" (ibid).

It became obvious that these words were prophetic. Indian citizens had a significant improvement in their lives and possibilities as the economy grew rapidly during the next 20 years. The effects of increasing financial and commercial integration with global markets have reached almost every area of society (Cohen, 2020). After the Cold War, major nations throughout the world, including China and the USA, began to pay attention to India. Now that it felt more confident, India reached out to many countries that had previously gone unrecognised by Delhi in an effort to forge new strategic alliances. As the new millennium began, India found itself welcomed to the highest levels of influential international organisations, such as the UN and the WTO.

In January 2011, India was accepted as a member of the UNSC for the seventh time, however its membership was not permanent. For the next two years, the nation was caught up in a heated discussion among the big powers about planned actions in Libya and Syria. It would have been hard for anyone

observing Indian diplomacy and foreign affairs through the 1940s to foresee the magnitude of New Delhi's accomplishments over the following 60 years (Malone, 2023). To comprehend the substantial transformation that have occurred in India during the past several decades, it is crucial to analyse how the country's relationships with key regional and international actors have evolved over this time. This paper focusses mostly on the relationships between India, USA, China and the global politics.

In the course of Indian foreign policy, four distinct tendencies have been identified. During the Cold War, IFP was more pragmatic and less ideological, which caused many nations to avoid making alliances with the superpowers. Second, the growing economic might of India has an impact on the practical approach that the nation takes in its foreign policy. Third, IFP is growing increasingly complicated due to the large number of regional parties in the country's internal politics, which frequently establish cumbersome coalition government at the federal level (Matto and Jacob, 2020). Ultimately, India's stance on the Western-dominated international order has transformed from fervent endorsement to what an observer has termed "cautious prudence". This indicates that India is hesitant to take decisive action, depend on friends, or alter its foreign policy significantly. The nation, however, is acutely cognisant of the role that power plays in global politics (Finnermore, 2023).

REAL POLITICS VS. IDEALISM

A number of issues confronted India's foreign policymakers in 1947, including the country's split and the subsequent establishment of Pakistan, widespread poverty, a lack of military might, a lack of growth, a lack of progress in key areas of Indian industry, and underlying religious and regional tensions. However, after gaining its independence, India sought to forge relationships with all of its neighbours and other developing nations that had also just achieved independence out of a strong conviction in the need of Third World solidarity and collaboration. A shared history gave rise to a shared destiny, according to Nehru, in the Third World. This conviction sped up the development of Nehruvian policy, and India soon had diplomatic ties with almost every country in the globe. When India gained its independence, its foreign policy was controlled by Nehru and the country's strong belief in Panchsheela. It was "post-independence [relationships with the world] that grew rapidly and somewhat exuberantly," (Mattoo and Jacob, 2020). New Delhi aimed to established friendships and collaborate with the newly freed countries in Africa and Asia, a goal that Nehru sought to achieve through his optimistic diplomatic efforts.

Nehru predominantly shaped India's foreign policy in the initial decades following independence. The foreign policy of the nation was built around the grand strategy, which had two pillars—non-alignment and self-reliance—and was rooted in Nehru's idealism (Bajpai et al, 2014). India was far from neutral during its non-alignment, as it actively participated in decolonisation, the struggle for equitable worldwide economic development, UN peacekeeping forces, among other issues (Bullion, 2019). It was believed that New Delhi's foreign policy after independence was a powerful statement against racism, colonialism, and the unequal and undemocratic distribution of world power. The newly established Asian and African republics had taken a stand against nuclear weapons and excessive military spending, which India had joined in condemning.

However, Indian leaders abruptly awakened from their Nehruvian "idealism" following their nation's catastrophic military defeat in the Indo-Chinese war. The policies were evidently not based in reality, and

Nehruvian idealism exhibited its constraints. Even though power politics were brought to the Indian government, the Nehruvian influence lived on in other ways (Raghavan, 2017).

At the beginning of the 1970s, when Indira Gandhi took office, there was a noticeable shift in New Delhi's foreign policy. The most notable aspects of this era's foreign policy were the first nuclear testing at Pokhran in 1974. The founding of Bangladesh, New Delhi's role in East Pakistan, and the strong and amicable ties during that period with the Soviet Union were all significant historical events. A new era in Indian foreign policy began with the 1974 nuclear test. Indian foreign policy entered a realism phase after the test, which helped to legitimise the program's *raison d'être*. The reasoning, "side lined the post-colonial considerations of earlier times while reinforcing India's size, regional importance and new found military clout" (Abraham, 2017)

The liberalisation of India commenced in the early 1990s, signalling the onset of a new epoch in the nation's political and economic advancement. During this time, there were also significant changes in foreign policy. Since the mid-1980s, realism has characterised New Delhi's foreign policies. It is possible that this pragmatic and proactive materialisation of New Delhi's foreign policy began with the second series of nuclear testing at Pokhran in May 1998. As Matto and Jacob put it, "conducting a series of nuclear bomb tests... defying traditional assumptions, analytical predictions, and international opinion" was the 1998 tests, which marked "a new phase of Realism in India's foreign policy" (Mattoo and Jacob, 2020). India has been very good at handling the problems that globalisation has brought about to keep its freedom in important areas of making choices and to keep up its growing involvement in the world. India's foreign policy has changed significantly since 2014, exhibiting both forceful changes in strategic goals and continuity with historical customs. Proactive diplomacy, economic integration, regional leadership, and a readiness to take strong stances on global problems were all given more importance with the establishment of the Narendra Modi-led administration. The government of India implemented a number of significant measures that reshaped the nation's foreign policy while maintaining its long-standing commitment to strategic autonomy and multi-alignment (Pant & Super, 2015).

THE MODERN DIFFICULTIES WITH THE PRESENT-DAY INDIAN FOREIGN CORNERSTONES

Recent years have been fraught with a wide range of difficulties for India's foreign policy. This section aims to highlight and catalogue some of the long-standing difficulties as well as some of the possible future dangers that may arise. In the past two decades, New Delhi's top officials have had to deal with a number of pressing problems – the growing animosity between USA and China in the Asia-Pacific region largely due to Chinese rise to power; uncertainty in West Asia regarding energy security and sustainability; revival and reevaluation of India's ties to Africa; the growth and consolidation of ties with Japan and Southeast Asia; and the resolution of nuclear disputes.

These problems are on top of the more traditional ones, such as the Kashmir dispute, India's conflicted anti-terrorism policies, the relationship between India and S-Asia, and the Indo-Pacific region as a whole. Conversely, India's potential and enormous capabilities were acknowledged in the 123 civil nuclear agreement between India and USA, which placed India as nuclear state. Joining the Nuclear Suppliers Group further solidified India's position and gave it the respect it deserved. In pursuit of this goal, India has

intensified its multilateral contacts with nations all over the globe and joined several multilateral organisations in the previous ten years, covering a broad range of economic and non-economic topics. India is actively involved in several organisations and fora that promote economic cooperation such as the G-20, BRICS, IBSA, ASEAN, EAS, WTO, and BIMSTEC (Sidhu, 2021).

Even in the wider area, India has always been on the lookout for new allies to cement its ties with neighbouring nations. To promote progress and stability in Afghanistan, India has maintained a long-standing partnership with the Northern Alliance Government, contributing over \$750 million in aid and infrastructural support (Mohan, 2017). In the field of humanitarian aid, India has also achieved great achievements; for example, in the initial 24 hours following the December 2004 tragedy, it was one of four nations that formed the Asian Tsunami Core Group. Despite being one of the most hit, India outdid everyone except the US in terms of help and support supplied. The Indian military plays a significant role in promoting peace in the world today.

When it came to nations sending troops to fight in conflicts on behalf of the UN, India ranked third as of March 2007 (Bullion, 2019). Contrary, India's position in its South Asian neighbourhood is stuck in a rut; ties with nations like the Maldives, Bangladesh, and Myanmar showing almost no development at all. Despite these efforts at bilateral and regional diplomacy, the Kashmir problem and India's ties with Pakistan remain front and centre. As a proactive measure, India has chosen to stay out of conflict zones and has encouraged its neighbours to do the same.

The need for a constant supply of electricity is one of the most significant difficulties arising from India's requirement for securitisation. One of the primary focusses of Indian foreign policy is energy and energy security, with the goal of maintaining economic growth at roughly 10%. Historically, energy supplies for India have come from the African continent and the Middle East. India is looking to expand its supplier network and has reached out to ONGC Videsh and other Latin American oil corporations for potential cooperation.

India has broadened its energy resource quest to include not just the Gulf but also Africa and Latin America, moving beyond its close neighbours. For example, India has generally lost bids while competing with China in Latin America and Africa. In other cases, like as Sudan, however, India and China have worked together to propose offers, and these bids have often been successful. Nuclear power is another "feasible" energy option with huge promise. India and the US reached a civilian nuclear deal in July 2005, in part because of their low production levels.

In recent years, there has been an upsurge in piracy in ocean and sea lanes, which are strongly linked to the securitisation of energy. Indian cargo ships and people have been severely affected by sea piracy in the Indian continent, leaving India susceptible to attacks. For its own sake and the sake of broader energy security, New Delhi can play a vital role in providing assistance to secure the Malacca Straits, which receive more than half of the world's oil shipments every year. The region is also very vulnerable to piracy. People in the area are worried by India's growing naval might, and some have even gone so far as to suggest that India is trying to exert its dominance in the region. When China enters the Indian Ocean, whether to assist in port building in Pakistan, Sri Lanka, or Myanmar, the situation becomes very ambiguous. Considerations for the development of India's diplomatic stance, the "strings of pearl" approach

has broad support (Athwal, 2018). Better control of territorial waterways and greater security against terrorist attacks from the sea have also resulted from the 26/11 Mumbai assault. This is significant since India has a long coastline.

Over the last decade, India has joined a plethora of multilateral organisations in the fields of economics and beyond, and its multilateral links with nations throughout the globe have become tremendously stronger. India has actively participated in organisations like the G-20, BRICS, IBSA, and WTO, in addition to ASEAN, EAS, BIMSTEC, and others (Sidhu, 2021). However India's involvement in the several East Asian and South East Asian organisations is more formal than substantial. India has often sought admission to the APEC arrangement, but has been repeatedly refused due to "China's" demands that it leave the group. As a last step in its Look East strategy, India helped set up a security and political dialogue with East Asian countries. In the meantime, India has been actively participating in ASEAN and EAS summits, as well as playing a crucial bilateral role within a framework that allows for regular yearly interaction between foreign ministers and summit attendees. India has deepened its ties to the ASEAN Regional Forum in order to strengthen collaboration across regions on security issues, such as the protection of maritime communication routes. A cooperative approach is essential, particularly in light of the variety in East Asia, and India has announced its intention to establish a polycentric security regime based on this principle (Pant and Super, 2015). With reasonably fruitful partnerships with nations like Japan, Singapore, Malaysia, Vietnam, etc., New Delhi's Look East Policy (LEP) has been widely regarded as a very effective strategy from its start. After coming into office in 2014, Modi rechristened the LEP the Act East Policy, signifying a change from symbolic outreach to real engagement with nations in Southeast and East Asia. Additionally, this featured deeper cooperation in the Indo-Pacific is frequently regarded as a counterweight to China's regional ambitions. Nevertheless, it is essential to thoroughly examine China's stance and opinions on India's LEP if any evaluation of this strategy is to be comprehensive. The influence and impact of China in the area are unsurpassed (ibid).

There are several dimensions to the complex and multidimensional Sino-Indian relationship. India and China have been embroiled in power conflicts over a number of problems pertaining to Southeast Asia and the East, in addition to the regional focus, border disputes, and economic disputes. China's response to India's LEP has been uneven, with some seeing it as an effort to expand Chinese regional influence through bilateral agreements with Japan, Singapore, and Vietnam and multilateral groups like ASEAN and the East Asian Summit, however, there are many who view it as an attempt to expand China's sphere of influence, which they consider their own. While China openly agrees with India that "there is enough space in the world for the development of both India and China and (...) enough areas for the two to cooperate and that relations among them now go beyond their bilateral scope and have acquired global and strategic significance." Chinese officials and media have criticised Indian naval visits to Vietnam and the Philippines as part of a hidden "containment of China" strategy and branded India's LEP as a "containment of China" plot (Rajan, 2021).

THE QUESTION OF CHINA

The boundary dispute between the two biggest Asian governments is only one of many unresolved disputes in India and China's lengthy, tumultuous, and animose history. With the hope of moving beyond the typical

concerns that cast a shadow over the two countries' bilateral relations, this section examines India-China ties within the framework of Asian regionalism. In 2005, the three requirements for participation in the East Asian Summit have been met, and both Beijing and New Delhi were in support of including countries outside of eastern Asia, such as New Zealand, Australia, and India. Yet, the two nations' stances varied somewhat. The then Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao made the following statement: "regional integration should be promoted by the countries in the region, with characteristics of the region and suited to the needs of the region," while also stating that "full consideration to reasonable interests in the region of non-East Asian countries." This contradicts India's position, it maintains that nations such as India ought to participate in regional integration programs within the pan-Asian community (Rajan, 2021).

To the three non-regional EAS partners, the word "full consideration" suggested a demotion. The absence of support from regional states in 2005 was perceived as indicative of Japan and Korea's overarching intention to position India as a counterbalance to China's increasing dominance in the area. This was in response to China's diplomatic efforts to discourage member states from lobbying for New Delhi's membership. Consequently, Beijing attempted to divide the East Asian Community membership into two blocs: one for the "core" states, in which China would lead within the 10 plus 3, and another for the "outsiders"- the three states on the periphery - consisting of India, Australia, and New Zealand.

When discussing ASEAN, China and India agree that the organisation is "central" to East Asian cooperation. As an additional stipulation, Beijing has said that preexisting summits such as the China-ASEAN (10 + 1), ASEAN-China-Japan-ROK (10 + 3), and China-Japan-ROK Summit should be the focal point of the endeavour. It has focused on the 10 + 3 system, where China provides "long term and strategic guidance" and serves as the primary conduit promoting East Asian collaboration, but it doesn't mention ASEAN plus 6, which includes India. The ASEAN-India dialogue cooperation had been seen favourably in relation to the formation of the ASEAN Community by 2015, and China voiced its complete support for this plan (Tanham, 2019).

In the larger context of the East Asia FTA, China retains its leadership role within ASEAN, including three coalitions that involve the People's Republic of China, in pursuing the objective of establishing an FTA for East Asia. Beijing has not shown any interest in the ASEAN plus 6 groupings, which includes India, but it has called for a conversation with the relevant states. Yet, India anticipates the ultimate implementation of the Asian Economic Community, which it believed would create a "arc of advantage" connecting the Pacific Ocean with the Himalayas and facilitating massive migrations of people, ideas, and technology. China has maintained its silence on this matter. The ideal security arrangement in East Asia is a topic of frequent disagreement between China and India. India's stance against any nation dominating the regional security architecture when it is established is suggested by its prescription of a "polycentric" security framework for East Asia. Conversely, China advocates for a "regional security environment of mutual trust, guaranteeing stability by bridging differences through dialogue on an equal footing". Furthermore, China favours security mechanisms at various levels and in different locations, whereas New Delhi is opposing the establishment of any "ineffective sub-regional security arrangements" (Pant and Super, 2015).

To what extent India achieves future success in the Asia-Pacific area is contingent on how China views the region's geopolitical landscape. As an example, China views the emerging security ties between Japan and

India with great suspicion because of the apparent anti-China bias in these interactions. The growing bigger geopolitical picture indicates that China's concerns about the US's attempt to 'contain' it, aided by friends like Japan and partners like India, remain unabated. The way China sees India's role in regional integration and its willingness to accept it are both affected by this line of thought. India is cognisant of China's reluctance to provide prominent positions to "outsiders" in the East Asian integration process, and both countries seem to be cognisant of the current constraints on regional integration. Therefore, India is not only willing to foster economic partnerships at the regional level, but it is also actively working to improve bilateral engagement with East Asian states. India may have shown evidence of this by concluding many FTAs and actively promoting economic connections with certain regional states. Above all else, China is growing more concerned that these bilateral interactions may soon have political and military components in addition to their purely economic ones. India is cognisant of the fact that it is unable to compete with China's extensive bilateral contacts with Asia-Pacific regional states (Tanham, 2019).

While being careful not to be associated with any anti-China coalition, India is making an effort to establish connections with influential regional countries such as the USA, Japan, Singapore and ASEAN. India remains on the sidelines in the South China Sea as it avoids becoming involved in the complicated problems surrounding this disputed region. Despite the clear improvement in commercial relations, India has not expedited the execution of a Comprehensive Economic Cooperation Agreement with China.

Concerned about the expansion of economic and security cooperation in the area, China has taken notice of Japan's and India's bold moves. Since the United States and Australia are now members of the so-called "Arc of Freedom and Prosperity," the two nations' relations have expanded to a global level and include a wider range of issues. To limit its own ascent in the Asia-Pacific area, China views the 'Arc of Freedom and Prosperity idea' as a way to unite with its partners. It sees it as an attempt by Japan and India to contain China in the area. The inaugural round of trilateral discussions with India, Japan, and America was concluded in Washington DC on December 19, 2011, and the November 2011 defence ministerial conference in Tokyo between Japan and India have both confirmed the Chinese fears.

THE FUTURE: THE SOFT POWER OF INDIA

Making the most of India's influence abroad through its soft power is a common theme in contemporary foreign policy literature. Joseph Nye proposed the notion of soft power, which he defined as the capacity to influence the actions of others in order to accomplish one's own objectives. Coercion, incentives, and soft power are the three ways that Nye has characterised power (Nye, 2004)

Hard force is not the exclusive tool governments may use to achieve their national objectives anymore, according to most modern foreign policy specialists. They advanced the idea of soft power as a potent tool for persuading other nations or individuals. "The apparent choice facing India today is covered in terms of greater or lesser autonomy from existing power structures (...) India's foreign policy has not changed much," argues Itty Abraham (2017). The fundamental focus of New Delhi's foreign policy is, and always has been, India's pursuit of peace and stability in Asia, along with its desire to broaden its impact in global affairs beyond its immediate vicinity, is achieved through the heightened application of both hard and soft power. In the midst of the COVID-19 pandemic, New Delhi's Vaccine Maitri was launched, providing vaccinations to more than 90 nations. In addition to being humanitarian, this action improved India's soft

power credentials as a trustworthy and accountable partner in the Global South.

“If there is one independent India to which increasing attention should now be paid around the globe, it is not economic or military or nuclear strength, but the quality that India is already displaying in ample measure today and that is its' soft power” (Tharoor, 2018). To rephrase, this strategy would include drawing attention to India's diverse and vibrant culture in an effort to raise the country's profile abroad and, by extension, its standing in the eyes of other nations and peoples.

India's foreign policy has consistently been and will continue to be grounded in the principle of strategic autonomy. Indian foreign policy has remained mostly unchanged since the 1990s, despite the country's initiation of a “new phase” and a number of revolutionary reforms. Although India has not achieved true dominance just yet, its impact is undeniable and being used in innovative ways on a global scale. To address the new global difficulties of the 21st century, when neither autonomy nor alliance provide sufficient solutions, Tharoor argues that the motto should shift from non-alignment to what he terms “multi-alignment” (ibid).

CONCLUSION

Nehruvian idealism gave way to realpolitik, India went from non-alignment to multi-alignment dealing with issues such as energy security, multilateral engagements, and China's regional influence. A fresh feeling of purpose has settled over New Delhi's foreign policy – a realistic approach. In addition, it aims to create multi-directional interactions in global politics and is infused with a significant dose of reality. India persisted in its multi-alignment strategy, extending its participation in organizations like BRICS, SCO, and G-20 while concurrently interacting with major countries like the US, Russia, Japan, and France. Notably, India strengthened its Indo-Pacific partnership with Western nations while maintaining a balance with Russia in the face of international concerns over Ukraine.

Still, matters pertaining to India's connections with Asia seem to remain unresolved. Similarly, the ‘lack of push’ associated with Pakistan is still a sore spot in India-China ties. Equal ferocity is required to fortify ties with Central Asia, Africa, and South America. There is a clearer sense of purpose and direction in New Delhi's foreign policy now than over the times. India has taken a more proactive border posture with China after the 2020 conflict in the Galwan Valley. This includes bolstering defense connections with allies like the US, Japan, and Australia, enhancing military exercises in the Indo-Pacific, and fortifying infrastructure along the Line of Actual Control (LAC).

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