



## India's foreign policy: From 1947 to 2022: A journey of diplomacy and transformation

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### Abstract

India's foreign policy has evolved significantly since Jawaharlal Nehru's vision of non-alignment. The Nehruvian era focused on sovereignty and the Non-Aligned Movement, advocating for global peace and decolonization. Indira Gandhi's leadership marked a shift towards pragmatism, resulting in the Bangladesh Liberation War and strengthened ties with the Soviet Union. The Cold War led to economic liberalization under a coalition government, and post-1998 nuclear era under Vajpayee reinforced India's global strategic stature. Under Modi, India adopted a multi-alignment strategy, expanding economic diplomacy and strengthening defense ties with major powers. India's increasing role in multilateral institutions reflects its ambition to shape global governance.

**Keywords:** Non-aligned movement, cold war diplomacy, economic reforms, and a multi-alignment strategy, global governance

### Introduction

India's foreign policy has evolved significantly since gaining independence in 1947, responding to global political, economic, and security challenges. Jawaharlal Nehru's vision of non-alignment laid the foundation for India's diplomatic approach, emphasizing self-reliance, peaceful coexistence, and leadership among decolonized nations. Over the decades, India's foreign policy has adapted to regional conflicts, economic liberalization, nuclear deterrence, and the evolving dynamics of a multipolar world. This thesis aims to examine India's foreign policy evolution from Nehru's era to the present, analyzing strategic decisions that have shaped its global standing. Key phases include the Cold War period, economic liberalization, nuclear deterrence, and the transition to a multi-aligned foreign policy under Narendra Modi. The research is structured into several key sections, each addressing critical developments in India's foreign policy. The first chapter examines Nehru's foundational policies, followed by India's pragmatic shift under Indira Gandhi, the impact of Cold War dynamics, and economic transformations following the 1991 liberalization. The thesis then explores India's emergence as a nuclear power, the significance of coalition governments in shaping diplomatic engagements, and the strategic recalibrations under Modi's leadership. The final section evaluates India's role in global governance, engagement with multilateral institutions, and its future trajectory as an emerging power.

### Evolution of India's Foreign Policy

Jawaharlal Nehru, India's first Prime Minister from 1947 to 1964, shaped India's foreign policy based on his vision of a non-aligned, independent, and democratic nation. After independence, India was partitioned into India and Pakistan, leading to communal violence and tensions. The Panchsheel (Five Principles) guiding relations between nations were established, including mutual respect for sovereignty, non-aggression, non-interference in domestic affairs, equality, and peaceful coexistence. India became a founding member of the United Nations in 1945 and played a key role in decolonization and disarmament. Nehru also established the

Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), promoting cooperation among countries not aligned with major power blocs. The Sino-Indian War in 1962 shifted India's focus to military modernization and strategic alliances. India developed close political and economic ties with the Soviet Union, which became one of its main sources of foreign aid and military assistance.

Lal Bahadur Shastri served as India's Prime Minister from 1964 to 1966. The Indo-Pakistan War of 1965 emerged from tensions over Kashmir. Following the war, the leaders signed the Tashkent Declaration, calling for an end to hostilities and restoration of diplomatic relations. India-Soviet Union relations were crucial during this time, with the Soviet Union providing foreign aid and military assistance. The US provided concessional food aid to countries under the Public Law 480 program, which India received in the 1960s. This period marked the evolution of India's foreign policy.

Indira Gandhi was the Prime Minister of India from 1966 to 1977 and 1980 to 1984. The Indo-Pakistan War of 1971, a conflict between India and Pakistan over East Pakistan, resulted in the creation of Bangladesh, solidifying India's status as a regional power. The Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation (1971-1991) reaffirmed the close political and economic ties between the two countries, including provisions for mutual defense and assistance in case of external threats. India's nuclear test in 1974, known as "Smiling Buddha," made India the sixth country to develop nuclear weapons, causing international concern about the proliferation of nuclear weapons in South Asia. Gandhi played a key role in the establishment of SAARC in 1985, promoting cooperation among South Asian countries. Rajiv Gandhi served as India's Prime Minister from 1984 to 1989, fostering strong relations with the Soviet Union. India intervened militarily in the Sri Lankan civil war in 1987 and facilitated the signing of the Indo-Sri Lanka Peace Accord in 1989. The 1985 Air India bombing escalated the conflict between the Indian government and Sikh separatists in Punjab. Gandhi implemented economic reforms that liberalized India's economy, opening it up to foreign investment.

In the 1990s, India's foreign policy focused on economic liberalization and strengthening relationships with the US and Western countries. The Liberalization Privatization and Globalization (LPG) reforms increased emphasis on economic diplomacy, opening up for foreign investment and trade. The government also strengthened economic ties with other countries through trade agreements and investment deals. The Gujral Doctrine outlined five principles for foreign relations with South Asian neighbors: non-reciprocity, territorial integrity, non-interference in internal affairs, respect for territorial sovereignty, and peaceful bilateral negotiations. India launched its "Look East" policy in 1991 to strengthen economic and political ties with Southeast Asian countries. The 1998 nuclear tests led to international sanctions and strained relations with the US and other countries. India's participation in the World Trade Organization (WTO) in 1995 allowed it to liberalize its economy and increase trade with other countries.

The NDA-1, led by Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee, was in power from 1998 to 2004. The Pokhran-II nuclear tests in 1998 led to international sanctions against India but solidified its nuclear power status. The Kargil War 1999 ended with a ceasefire and Pakistani forces withdrawing from Indian territory. The 2000 visit of President Bill Clinton improved India-US relations.

The UPA government, led by Prime Minister Manmohan Singh, was in power from 2004 to 2014. India signed the Indo-US 123 Agreement in 2008, ending its nuclear isolation and promoting cooperation with the US in the civil nuclear sector. India also increased engagement with China, establishing strategic partnerships in 2005 and a border defense cooperation agreement in 2013. The Land Border Agreement with Bangladesh resolved a boundary dispute in 2014, involving the exchange of 162 enclaves. The government pursued a "Look East" policy, focusing on strengthening ties with Southeast Asia and the Asia-Pacific region. In 2010, India signed a free trade agreement with ASEAN to boost trade and investment. The government also pushed for India's permanent seat on the UN Security Council to increase its global influence.

India's foreign policy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government focuses on deepening ties with countries in the Indo-Pacific region and strengthening relations with traditional partners like the United States and Russia. The "Neighbourhood First" policy aims to strengthen relations with South Asia and the Indian Ocean region. The Act East Policy aims to enhance economic and strategic ties with Indo-Pacific countries through increased trade, investment, cultural exchanges, and infrastructure development. India and Pakistan have been admitted as full members of the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), a regional security organization. The India-US Strategic Partnership has progressed, involving cooperation on defense, counterterrorism, trade, and energy. India's participation in the Paris Climate Agreement and commitment to reducing greenhouse gas emissions and increasing renewable energy use have been significant steps in its foreign policy.

### Conclusion

India's foreign policy has evolved significantly since its independence, with Jawaharlal Nehru's era focusing on decolonization and sovereignty. Under Indira Gandhi, India adopted a more assertive and security-focused foreign policy, aligning with the Soviet Union and strengthening

regional influence. The Pokhran-I nuclear test in 1974 marked a shift towards self-reliance in defense. The economic turmoil of the 1980s and the 1998 nuclear tests under the Vajpayee government solidified India's strategic position, leading to increased diplomatic engagement with Western powers. Since Narendra Modi's ascension in 2014, India has pursued a more assertive and ambitious global strategy, strengthening defense and economic partnerships with the United States, Russia, Japan, and European nations, while deepening ties with the Global South. The Act East Policy, infrastructure-led diplomacy, and the Indo-Pacific strategy have positioned India as a key player in regional and global security frameworks. India is now shaping international trade, technology, and climate policies, advocating for UNSC reforms, global trade justice, and greater representation for developing nations in global governance bodies. Its role in multilateral organizations has expanded significantly, with leadership roles in G20, BRICS, the Quad, and BIMSTEC. India's future foreign policy will likely focus on strengthening strategic autonomy, expanding leadership in multilateral institutions, and leveraging technology for global development.

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