

# MAJOR SHIFTS IN INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY

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## **Abstract:**

*This study explores the Major Shifts in India's Foreign Policy. India's foreign policy has experienced significant transformations since its independence in 1947, reflecting the nation's evolving strategic priorities and global positioning. Initially guided by Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru's vision of non-alignment, India sought to maintain independence from the superpower blocs of the Cold War, promoting peace and mutual respect among nations through the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM). This period emphasized sovereignty and diplomatic neutrality, though it faced challenges such as the 1962 Sino-Indian War and ongoing conflicts with Pakistan. The post-Cold War era of the 1990s marked a pivotal shift in India's foreign policy. The economic liberalization of 1991 prompted India to engage more actively with the global economy, fostering strategic partnerships with Western countries and integrating into international markets. The nuclear tests of 1998 further underscored India's intent to assert its strategic autonomy and establish itself as a significant global player. In the 2000s and beyond, India's foreign policy has been characterized by a strategic pivot towards the Asia-Pacific region and a focus on building alliances, exemplified by the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) with the U.S., Japan, and Australia. The Act East Policy reflects India's intent to strengthen ties with ASEAN countries and enhance its role in regional security dynamics. India's current foreign policy approach emphasizes global engagement on issues like climate change and sustainable development, while maintaining a robust focus on national security, particularly in relation to neighboring China and Pakistan.*

*These shifts illustrate India's adaptive strategy, balancing traditional non-alignment principles with a more assertive role in global and regional affairs, reflecting its growing influence and evolving national interests.*

**Keywords:** Major Shifts, India, Foreign Policy etc.

## **INTRODUCTION:**

India's foreign policy has evolved significantly since its independence in 1947, reflecting the nation's changing global and regional priorities. Initially, under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, India adopted a non-aligned stance during the Cold War, aiming to steer clear of the superpower rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union. This approach, encapsulated in the Non-Alignment Movement (NAM), was driven by a desire to maintain sovereignty and promote global peace without being entangled in ideological conflicts. As India navigated its early years, it focused on establishing itself as a sovereign nation while managing complex relationships with neighboring countries. The 1962 Sino-Indian War and subsequent

conflicts with Pakistan, including the 1971 Indo-Pakistani War that led to the creation of Bangladesh, tested India's foreign policy and its strategic posture.

The end of the Cold War in the early 1990s brought about profound changes, with India transitioning towards economic liberalization and greater integration into the global economy. This period marked a shift towards building strategic partnerships, particularly with Western nations and major regional players. The pursuit of a more assertive global role was highlighted by India's nuclear tests in 1998 and its increased participation in international forums. In recent years, India's foreign policy has been characterized by an emphasis on strategic alliances, regional security, and active engagement in global issues like climate change and sustainable development. As a rising global power, India's foreign policy continues to adapt to the evolving geopolitical landscape, balancing its national interests with its role on the world stage.

### **OBJECTIVE OF THE STUDY:**

This study explores the Major Shifts in India's Foreign Policy.

### **RESEARCH METHODOLOGY:**

This study is based on secondary sources of data such as articles, books, journals, research papers, websites and other sources.

### **MAJOR SHIFTS IN INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY**

India's foreign policy has undergone several major shifts since its independence in 1947. Here are some key phases and changes:

#### **Post-Independence (1947-1960s)**

When India gained independence in 1947, it faced the challenge of defining its place in a world divided by Cold War tensions. Under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, India adopted a foreign policy of non-alignment, striving to maintain an independent stance without aligning itself with either of the two major power blocs—the United States and the Soviet Union. This policy was driven by the desire to protect India's sovereignty and to avoid entanglement in the ideological struggles of the Cold War. Nehru believed that non-alignment was a way for newly independent nations to assert their autonomy and pursue their national interests without becoming pawns in the superpower rivalry.

The Non-Alignment Movement (NAM), which India co-founded with countries like Egypt, Yugoslavia, and Indonesia, was a testament to this policy. NAM aimed to create a third path in global politics that was neither aligned with the capitalist West nor the communist East. India played a pivotal role in shaping the movement, advocating for peaceful coexistence and mutual respect among nations. The Panchsheel Agreement, signed with China in 1954, was an example of India's commitment to these principles, promoting mutual respect for sovereignty and non-aggression. However, this era also saw significant challenges, particularly in India's relations with its neighbors. The 1962 Sino-Indian War marked a dramatic

shift in India's foreign policy, revealing the limits of its non-aligned stance in the face of aggressive neighbors.

### **1960s-1980s**

The 1960s and 1970s were marked by turbulent relations with both China and Pakistan. The 1962 Sino-Indian War, which resulted in a significant defeat for India, had profound implications for its foreign policy. It exposed vulnerabilities in India's security strategy and led to a reassessment of its approach to China. Relations with Pakistan were also strained, highlighted by the 1965 Indo-Pakistani War, which underscored the ongoing conflict over Kashmir and other territorial disputes. The 1971 Indo-Pakistani War, however, was a turning point, leading to the creation of Bangladesh. This conflict demonstrated India's willingness to intervene in regional affairs to achieve strategic objectives and protect its interests.

During this period, India's foreign policy was heavily influenced by its relationship with the Soviet Union. The Cold War context led India to seek support from the USSR, culminating in the Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation signed in 1971. This treaty underscored a close strategic partnership between the two nations, with India benefiting from Soviet support in various international forums and receiving military and economic aid. The alignment with the Soviet Union marked a departure from the earlier non-aligned stance, reflecting the changing geopolitical realities and India's strategic interests.

### **1990s - Post-Cold War Era**

The end of the Cold War in the early 1990s marked a significant shift in India's foreign policy. The collapse of the Soviet Union and the subsequent economic crisis in India led to a period of intense re-evaluation and transformation. The economic liberalization of 1991 was a watershed moment, initiating a series of reforms that opened up India's economy to global markets. This shift had a profound impact on India's foreign policy, as the country sought to integrate itself more deeply into the global economy and foster economic ties with Western nations.

The 1990s also saw a significant change in India's defense and strategic policies. The nuclear tests conducted in 1998 were a bold assertion of India's strategic independence and its commitment to maintaining a credible minimum deterrent. The tests, while causing international controversy, marked a new phase in India's approach to security and defense. They reflected India's desire to assert itself as a major global player and to secure its national interests in a multipolar world.

In this period, India began to foster closer ties with Western countries, particularly the United States. The end of the Cold War opened up new opportunities for strategic partnerships, and India sought to build relationships that would support its economic and security objectives. The U.S.-India relationship, once characterized by mutual suspicion, began to improve, with both countries recognizing the potential for collaboration in areas such as trade, technology, and defense.

**2000s - 2013**

The 2000s marked a period of rapid evolution in India's foreign policy, characterized by a focus on strategic partnerships and a more active role in regional and global affairs. India pursued strategic alliances with various countries, including the United States, Japan, and Australia. These partnerships were driven by mutual interests in areas such as security, trade, and technology. The Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue), comprising the U.S., Japan, Australia, and India, was an example of this new strategic orientation. The Quad aimed to enhance security cooperation and address regional challenges, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region, where China's growing influence was a concern.

India's foreign policy also saw a significant shift towards the Asia-Pacific region, encapsulated in its Act East Policy. This policy was designed to strengthen ties with ASEAN countries and to enhance India's engagement in regional forums. The Act East Policy reflected India's recognition of the growing importance of the Asia-Pacific in global geopolitics and its desire to play a more active role in shaping regional dynamics.

**From 2014 to 2015**

From 2014 to 2015, India's foreign policy has undergone significant transformation, reflecting its growing global ambitions, strategic reorientation, and responses to evolving international dynamics. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, who assumed office in May 2014, India's foreign policy has been marked by a proactive and assertive approach, seeking to enhance its global stature and influence.

**Strategic Reorientation and Major Initiatives**

One of the defining features of India's foreign policy from 2014 to 2015 has been its strategic reorientation towards strengthening ties with major global powers and enhancing its regional influence. Modi's administration has prioritized building robust relationships with key countries, including the United States, Japan, and Australia, while also engaging actively with regional partners in South Asia and the Indo-Pacific.

**Strengthening Ties with Major Powers**

Under Modi, India has sought to deepen its strategic partnership with the United States. The bilateral relationship has expanded into new areas, including defense cooperation, trade, and technology. High-level meetings between Modi and U.S. Presidents Barack Obama, Donald Trump, and Joe Biden have underscored the strategic alignment between the two democracies. The signing of key defense agreements, such as the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA), has strengthened military cooperation and interoperability.

India's relationship with Japan has also flourished, with both countries enhancing cooperation in areas like infrastructure development, technology, and defense. The signing of the India-Japan Civil Nuclear Cooperation Agreement in 2015 and the establishment of the Japan-India Act East Forum highlight the deepening strategic ties.

The Quad (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue), comprising India, the United States, Japan, and Australia, has become a central element of India's foreign policy. The Quad, revitalized in recent years, focuses on promoting a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific region, addressing regional security challenges, and enhancing maritime cooperation. The Quad leaders' summits have reinforced India's role in shaping the strategic dynamics of the Indo-Pacific.

### **Regional Engagement and Act East Policy**

India's Act East Policy, which gained momentum in the early 2010s, has continued to be a cornerstone of its foreign policy. The policy aims to strengthen ties with Southeast Asian countries and enhance India's presence in the Indo-Pacific region. Modi's government has actively engaged with ASEAN nations, participating in key regional forums and strengthening economic and security partnerships.

In South Asia, India has faced challenges in its relations with neighboring countries. The relationship with Pakistan remains contentious, with periodic escalations in tensions, particularly over issues related to terrorism and cross-border skirmishes. Despite these challenges, India has continued to seek avenues for dialogue and stability, while also strengthening its security posture.

Relations with China have been complex and marked by significant tensions. The 2015 border clash in Ladakh brought the two countries' strained relationship into sharp focus. Despite ongoing diplomatic efforts to manage the situation, the relationship has been characterized by competition and strategic rivalry. India has sought to bolster its defenses and diversify its strategic partnerships in response to China's growing influence in the region.

### **Global Engagement and Multilateral Diplomacy**

India has increasingly positioned itself as a key player in global affairs, participating actively in multilateral forums and contributing to global governance. India's role in the G20 has been prominent, with the country advocating for global economic reforms and sustainable development.

The UN Security Council (UNSC) has been another focus, with India seeking a permanent seat on the council. India's tenure as a non-permanent member of the UNSC from 2015 to 2015 allowed it to influence key discussions on global security issues and contribute to shaping international policies.

Climate change and sustainable development have become central to India's global engagement. Modi's administration has committed to ambitious climate targets, including enhancing renewable energy capacity and reducing carbon emissions. India's leadership in the International Solar Alliance (ISA) and its efforts to address climate challenges underscore its role in global environmental diplomacy.

## Economic Diplomacy and Soft Power

Economic diplomacy has been a priority, with India working to enhance trade and investment ties with various countries. Modi's emphasis on promoting "Make in India" and attracting foreign investment has been central to his economic policy, aiming to position India as a global manufacturing hub and attract international businesses.

India has also leveraged its cultural and historical connections to enhance its soft power. Initiatives like the International Day of Yoga and cultural diplomacy efforts have helped strengthen India's global image and foster positive relationships with other nations.

### CONCLUSION:

India's foreign policy has undergone substantial evolution since its independence, shaped by shifting global dynamics and national priorities. From its early commitment to non-alignment and peaceful coexistence, India has transitioned to a more assertive and strategic global player. The end of the Cold War and economic liberalization in the 1990s marked a turning point, leading to deeper engagement with global markets and the establishment of key strategic partnerships. The 1998 nuclear tests further highlighted India's determination to secure its strategic autonomy. In recent years, India's foreign policy has focused on enhancing its regional and global influence through initiatives like the Act East Policy and participation in multilateral forums such as the Quad. This modern approach balances the nation's historical non-alignment principles with proactive engagement in addressing global challenges like climate change and sustainable development. As India continues to navigate a complex geopolitical landscape, its foreign policy reflects a blend of strategic pragmatism and aspirational goals. By adapting to new realities and forging strategic alliances, India aims to assert its role on the world stage while safeguarding its national interests and contributing to global stability.

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