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The Historical Evolution of Indian Foreign Policy: From Nehruvian Mantra to Modi Doctrine

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Overview

As the world experiences rapid geopolitical and power shifts, the evolution of Indian foreign policy stands as a testament to strategic autonomy, global identity, and the pursuit of national interests. From Nehruvian idealism to Modi's staunch realism, the journey of foreign policy might not have been smooth, however, it enlightens the state's quest for relevance and resilience. Indian foreign policy has exhibited the 'strategy of incremental adjustment rather than revolutionary transformation (Mohan C. , 2015). Kenneth Waltz contends that the systematic, national, and decision-making factors helped post-independence India's foreign policy choices (Waltz, 1965). However, the evolution of Indian foreign policy reflects a complex interplay of strategic imperatives, regional dominance and global ambitions. Delving into the historical background holds great significance, as it helps elucidate the recurring patterns, continuity, shifts and adaptations in strategic priorities, and imperatives thus enabling a deeper analysis of the current policies and future trajectories.

The Scholarly Outlook

Since independence, Indian foreign policy evolution has captivated significant scholarly attention. From Nehru's legacy of Non-alignment and idealism to the strategic multi-alignment under Jaishankar, a diverse range of perspectives delves into this dynamic journey. C. Raja Mohan argues that the Indian Foreign policy embarked on a remarkable journey with Nehruvian idealism and Non-alignment along with high faith in international institutions, anti-colonial solidarity, and peaceful coexistence (Mohan, 2013). 'Non-Alignment, however, did not mean neutrality, rather it tried to protect India's freedom of action from bloc antagonism' (Ashely J. Tellis, 2022).

Amit Rajan considers that ‘India to secure its interests in a changed world has made adjustments in its foreign policy, either deliberately or out of compulsion’ (Rajan, 2022). C.Raja Mohan in another work contends that ‘Modi has fundamentally reinvigorated Indian foreign policy, finally shedding off the shibboleths that had hobbled the country's foreign policy choices’ (Mohan C. R., 2015). Although foreign policy has been shifting, changing or evolving, Tellis considers ‘Modi’s ambition for India to become a leading power rather than a balancing one is thus a return to Nehruvian ambition, albeit in more vaulting form’ (Ashely J. Tellis, 2022).

Ian Hall sees ‘More continuity in Indian foreign policy than change and Modi’s approach is more an attempt to deliver a long held promise, rather than defining a new course’ (Hall, 2015). Similarly, Sumit Ganguly argues that ‘Despite Modi’s interest in changing the contours of foreign policy, doing so is not an easy task and his regime has not fundamentally altered the orientation of Indian foreign policy’ (Ganguly, 2017).

Akash P. Vaishnav asserts that ‘Because of the harsh realities of the world, India moved from Non-alignment to Multi-alignment. Indian foreign policy has moved from Nehruvian idealism to strategic realism, and economic pragmatism’ (Vaishnav, 2023). Shreya Upadhyay states ‘A multipolar international order is presenting India the opportunity to practice economic and security interests based multipolar and multi-layered alignments’ (Upadhyay, 2022) Brahma Chenally considers ‘India, under Modi, appears to be moving from Non-alignment to Multi-alignment’ (Chellany, 2015).

However, for Ian Hall ‘the Multi-alignment is result of a decade long consolidation approach, rather than the result of the Modi doctrine’ (Hall, 2016). Nonetheless, ‘Pursuing multi-alignment through multilateral settings strengthen India’s security architecture and raise India’s global stature’ (Upadhyay, 2022). ‘Although S. Jaishnakar’s multi-alignment approach has made Indian posture aggressive about national interests, however, the international crises such as Russia-Ukraine war has exposed India’s unpreparedness and little inexperience’ (Vaishnav, 2023).

Historical Background: From Nehruvian Mantra to Modi doctrine

The historical venture of Indian foreign policy commenced with Indian independence in 1947. The journey started with Jawaharlal Nehru, India’s first prime minister, championing Non-alignment, practicing idealism, advocating peace and India’s global role, and promoting decolonization. After

Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri came to power and prioritized India's national security, and commitment to Non-alignment amid the Cold War. Indira Gandhi with her staunch personality navigated the intricate balance between two superpowers and practiced pragmatism in foreign policy. Morarji Desai reiterated commitment to 'genuine Non-alignment'. Rajiv Gandhi ushered cautious modernization and tried to shed off India's reluctances towards the West. Narasimah Rao steered India towards economic liberalization, and introduced the 'Look East' policy to engage with Southeast Asia. I.K Gujral introduced 'Gujral Doctrine' to revise India's neighborhood policy. Atal Bihari Vajpayee championed India's nuclear deterrence and forged 'Multi-alignment'. Manmohan Singh's era witnessed strategic partnerships with the USA and continued economic integration. Under Modi's ongoing India seems practicing assertive pragmatism and actively seeking a place at the global high table, at the same time balancing its traditional ties through its own 'multi-alignment' model. India's foreign policy evolution reflects a complex medley of continuities and changes to achieve India's aspirations of strategic autonomy, economic prosperity, and greater global role.

The Nehru Era:

"In the sphere of foreign affairs India will follow an independent policy, keeping away from the power politics of groups aligned one against the other. She will uphold the principles of freedom for dependent peoples and will oppose racial discrimination wherever it may occur. She will work with other peace loving nations for international cooperation and goodwill without exploitation of one nation by another" New Delhi Press Conference, Sep 26 1946

The Indian foreign policy during the initial years was the brainchild of one person; Nehru. His preeminent leadership as well as his dual role as the prime minister and the foreign minister, led him to not only manage but also to create an independent foreign policy for India. The Nehruvian Consensus about the means, i.e Non-alignment and non-violence, and the ends i.e Idealism and world peace, of Indian foreign policy was made at independence (Sagar, 2015). Nehru did consult foreign policy matters with his inner circle, which included Mountbatten, Girja Shankar Bajpai, K. Panikar, Indira Gandhi and V.K.Krishna Menon, nonetheless he was the ultimate master of his thoughts on international affairs (F.Power, 1964). During the colonial period, Gandhi had influence, he defined the framework, while Nehru fashioned its details and orientations. The

colonial past, anti-imperialist struggle and socialist thoughts shaped Nehru's foreign policy (Kapur, 2009).

Guiding Principles

A high decibel Universalism and idealism marked the first phase of Indian foreign policy as the leaders such as Gandhi and Nehru had high faith in the virtues of non-violence and international institutions (Kuamr, 2022). Nehru was preoccupied with the idea of 'One World', and believed that 'non-violent activism, moral authority and truth telling can transform world politics with India's aid, just as they had transformed India's own circumstances (Breacher, 1998). He was also the preacher of 'Panchsheel' or 'the five principles of coexistence' which were introduced in 1954 between the Tibet region of China and India. The five principles included mutual respect for each other's territory and sovereignty, mutual non-aggression, mutual non-interference, equality and mutual benefit, and peaceful coexistence. This framework of 'Panchsheel' intended to provide a solid framework for world peace and security.

Non-Alignment Movement

Nehru's faith in the UN was shaken when the Kashmir issue was not addressed according to Indian expectations. A gradual shift in Indian strategy occurred when India went for 'Parallel Institutionalization', and Non-alignment Movement and Group of 77 were constituted (Kuamr, 2022). NAM evolved as a response to the power politics of two blocs. Its foundational stones were set at the Bandung Asian-African conference in 1955, and its name was proposed by V.K. Menon. However the organization was formed in 1960 and its first conference was held in Belgrade in 1961. At the conference of Non-Aligned nations 1961, Nehru stated:

"We call ourselves non-aligned countries. The word 'non-aligned' may be differently interpreted but basically it was coined and used with the meaning of non-aligned with the great power blocs of the world. Non-aligned has a negative meaning. But if we give it a positive connotation it means nations which object to lining up for war purposes… We keep away from such as approach and we want to throw our weight in favor of peace"

Among others the major objectives of NAM were to protect the nascent freedom, to oppose colonialism and imperialism, to advocate sovereign equality and to foster friendly relations. These

institutions were intended to make the global institutions more responsive to the Global South. For India the Non-alignment movement was coined to protect the newly acquired independence, strategic autonomy, also India was too naïve to join any bloc during the cold war period. Nehru was also worried that alignment would lead to conflict entrapments, so for him Non-Alignment was the means of maximizing influence (Kennedy, 2015).

Lyon considered non-alignment roughly synonymous with neutrality (Lyon, 1969), while Tellis 'non-alignment did not intend passivity in international engagements. Rather it was designed to protect India's freedom of action amidst the bloc antagonism, and to cooperate with each of the competing powers to secure Indian interests while remaining clear of imperialistic rivalries' (Ashely J. Tellis, 2022). The NAM provided smaller states a forum away from the superpowers, recognized India's leadership, and popularized the idea of reforming international institutions. Non-alignment, however, did not guarantee India's national security, as Nehru's clever diplomacy failed to ward off the Chinese attack in 1962, also it did not provide as much space for global peace as Nehru had expected. The subsequent events led the establishment to face the realities of power politics.

Idealist or Realist?

India's national and systematic factors led India to choose 'ideational foreign policy' (Ganguly S. , 2015). K. Subramanyam, however, finds tenets of realism in Nehru's foreign policy. While Nehru is perceived as an idealistic leader, Kennedy's work, however, challenges this notion and asserts that Nehru's approach was to reconcile both realism and idealism. His endeavor to transform international institutions on moral principles depicts his idealism, however, in doing so he also tried to secure Indian interests which shows a realist hedge (Kennedy, 2015). Similarly, Raghvan considers Nehru a liberal realist whose liberal idealism morphed into liberal realism (Raghvan, 2010). C. Raja Mohan observes contradictions in Nehru's worldview of liberal internationalism and pragmatic realism at regional level. Nehru was an internationalist and his non-alignment was a classical 'balance of power' policy in a bipolar world (Pant, 2011). Thus it can be inferred that Nehruvian policy was a farrago of his liberal ideas of peaceful coexistence, and non-violence, and his realism of securing national interests by crafting non-alignment.

Criticism

Nehru’s foreign policy is criticized for mishandling China, refusing to accept a permanent seat at the United Nations Security Council, and taking the Kashmir issue to the UNSC. During his annual lecture ‘India’s place in world’, organized by British lord Bhiku Parikh slammed Nehru’s policies as he gave India a ‘misplaced self-righteousness’ with its neighbors and a sense of moral superiority. Nehru's notion of India’s role in the world hindered the Indian army to complete its duty and this generated little bargaining and little political gain (Parekh, 2010).

Aspect	Description
Tenure	Served as the first Prime Minister of India from Independence till his death (1947-1964)
EAM	Himself
Core Principles	● Non-Alignment: Avoiding alignment with power blocs during the Cold War ● Panchsheel: Five Principles of peaceful coexistence with China ● Anti-Colonialism: Advocated for freedom and equality ● High faith in International institutions
Foreign Policy Goals	● Upholding international peace and cooperation ● Safeguarding India’s newly acquired independence and strategic autonomy ● Promoting India’s global role ● Advocating for decolonization and representation of weaker states at global level
NAM	Initiated in response to the cold war power politics; aimed to protect nascent freedom, oppose colonialism, and foster sovereign equality
Major Events	1955 Bandung Conference: Foundation of NAM was laid

	1962 Indo-China war: Highlighted the limitations of NAM in ensuring India's national security
Criticism	• Mishandling of China leading to 1962 war • Refusal to accept permanent seat at United Nations Security Council

The Brief Shastri Era

The changing structural and domestic realities along with shaking faith in international institutions led Indian leaders to face the power politics of the international system. The year 1964 holds great significance, this was the year Nehru died and India got its 2nd prime minister, Lal Bahadur Shastri. Shastri stepped into Nehru's shoes but with less glamorous political stature and much difficult regional realities. This was the period when USA's funding for Pakistan was at its zenith and China became the world's fifth nuclear armed state by conducting nuclear tests in 1964. Thus India was compelled to pay greater attention to its national security.

Fledgling Realism

During this period the Indian foreign policy started showing shades of realism. In spite of the tough regional environment, Shastri made Sardar Sawaran Singh an eminent politician, the External minister of foreign affairs. Shastri increased the defense budget to the highest level since independence and 'agreed to the policy of keeping the option of nuclear weapons open' (Sarkar, 2015). Owning to the issues of China, NAM, superpowers, and atomic bomb ' for the first time in the history of independent India, foreign policy decisions have become subject to strongly nationalistic domestic pressures' and 'no prime minister could resist a demand couched in terms of national survival' (Edwardes, 1965). However, he reaffirmed commitment to non-alignment and abnegated the acquisition of nuclear weapons (Ganguly S. , 2010).

Although Shastri did continue Nehru's legacy of NAM, however, India's stature was reduced. As there was very little sympathy for India among the non-aligned states at the Cairo conference and attributed it to China and Sukrano who were convincing the African nations that Indian nationalists

were not anti-colonial fighters but political bourgeois (Ankit, 2020). Shastri's foreign policy was more focused on bilateralism than projecting India's regional hegemony. After becoming prime minister he met Nasser, Tito, Sukrano, Ayub Khan and Harold Wilson bilaterally. Sirimavo-Shastri pact was also signed in 1964 to resolve Indo-Sri Lanka tensions.

Another important event was the Indo-Pak war of 1965 with the consequential Tashkent Agreement. According to the American history department "India came out of the recent war with a new sense of self confidence and pride…. The war's outcome has greatly strengthened Prime Minister Shastri's position and that of the congress party. The war, nevertheless, aggravated India's serious economic problem" (Foreign Relations of the United States, 1964-68). However, Surjit Mansingh argues that India could not reap the benefit of its military victory because of the Tashkent Agreement mediated by Alexei Kosygin between Shastri and Ayub Khan and restored the territorial status (Mansingh, 2015). Shastri worked hard enough during the periods that he suffered a heart attack within three weeks of his office and he died eventually and mysteriously 12 hours after signing the Tashkent Agreement.

Tabular Summary

Aspect	Description
Tenure	India's 2nd Prime Minister (1964-66)
EAM	Sardar Sawran Singh
Foreign Policy Stance	● Continuation of Non-alignment but with emerging shades of realism due to regional and international pressures ● Continued support for NAM but with reduced stature within the movement ● Increased focus on national security and defense, kept the nuclear weapons option open
Regional engagements	● Tense relations with China after 1962 war, maintained cautious and vigilant stance after China conducted nuclear tests in 1964

	• 1965 Indo-Pak war and the subsequent Tashkent Agreement mediated by the Soviet Union • Signed Sirimavo-Shastri Pact in 1964 to resolve tensions with Sri-Lanka
Criticism and Legacy	Despite his efforts, India's stature didn't significantly elevate. His tenure ended abruptly with his mysterious death after signing the 'Tashkent Agreement'

Indira Gandhi Era

"Diplomacy and the conduct of foreign policy are generally thought to require certain shrewdness. Perhaps this is important, Machiavelli and Chanakya certainly thought so. But more important are the larger perspectives and farsighted vision. .. Foreign policy cannot be very different from domestic aspirations and policies" *(Gandhi, 1985)*

Following the death of Lal bahadur Shastri India got its first female Prime minister who was regarded as 'the only man in her cabinet', Indira Gandhi; a pragmatic and shrewd leader who regarded herself a 'tough politician' and considered her father Jawahar lal Nehru as 'a saint who strayed into politics'. Indian foreign policy underwent tremendous changes during almost 15 years of her tenure. The contours of realism started getting more prominent as unlike her father she weighted national interests in the terms of tangible power rather than morality. Indian foreign policy was not organized around a distinct strategic doctrine, except for under the period of Indira Gandhi (Chellany, 2021).

The broader Context

The broader context in which Indian foreign policy was operating under Indira Gandhi was shaped by both the international as well as the domestic political happenings. While the external world was still bipolar and the cold war was experiencing the period of Détente, India's standing in the international environment was relatively low. Domestically Indira Gandhi was experiencing a rather unfavorable environment as Congress was faction ridden and its hegemony was declining.

She tackled the internal challenges by adopting centralized policies and adopted leftist economic polic ies, through her populist mantra of 'garibi hatao' she re-established Congress's hegemony in India.

The Diplomatic Odyssey

Indira Gandhi's diplomatic odyssey encapsulates a transformative era in Indian foreign policy, characterized by pragmatism, strategic maneuvering, and assertiveness. Her foremost foreign policy objectives were to safeguard India's Independence and forging friendships with every nation (Gandhi, 1972). Harish Kapur describes Indira Gandhi's foreign policy underpinned by four goals i.e 'enhancing India's security, seeking optimal external economic relations to accelerate modernization, realizing India's hegemony over the region, and amplifying India's voice in third world politics' (Kapur, 1987). And to attain these goals Indian diplomacy was centered on maintaining a balanced but assertive non-alignment as well as crafting closer ties with the Soviet Union to meet security needs.

Indian foreign policy sought to sustain two competing visions of foreign policy under Indira Gandhi. On the one hand, India was still championing the cause of decolonization and representing the weaker states and on the other hand it realized the importance of defense preparedness and overcame its reservations about use of force (S.Pardesi, 2009). She believed that the notion of considering 'non-alignment' as the whole of foreign policy was misguided, rather 'non-alignment was a policy and not an objective in itself'. For her the practical interests of the country could not be ignored, therefore, amidst the cold war she regarded both the USA and the USSR as India's friends (Gandhi, 1970) and chose to visit USA as her first state visit in 1966 where she did evoke President Johnson's gallantry.

Nevertheless, she preferred self-reliance over alliances. She refused to comply with US's demand of modifying Indian policies and resented dependence reminders by Washington (Mansingh, 2015). Her attitude towards the Soviet Union was also cautious in 1968 when it promised military assistance to Pakistan, however, later in 1969 the Soviet pledged support for India in case of any external threat. In 1971, Indian foreign minister Sardar Sawran Singh and Soviet foreign minister Andrei Gromyko signed the Indo-Soviet Treaty for Peace and Cooperation. This treaty symbolized mutual convergence of interests on war and peace and strengthened India's strategic autonomy.

This consequential treaty was a calculated decision made at the critical juncture as international configuration was changing as US-China relations were blooming and US was indebted to Pakistan for her efforts in the Afghan war.

While signing of the Indo-Soviet treaty was considered as a shift away from non-alignment, EAM Sawaran Singh stated that 'it strengthens our policy of non-alignment and will be further strengthened and will become an effective instrument in strengthening our national interests as well as an important factor in the maintenance of universal peace and international security'. Stephen Cohen described her as 'Militant Nehruvian' for her pragmatic devotion to 'Non-alignment' (Chiriyankandath, 2004). India's stature after the fall of Dhaka and creation of Bangladesh was enhanced in South Asia and 'Indira Doctrine' is credited for assuring India's hegemony in South Asia.

The Nuclear Question

India under the leadership of Nehru was too engraved in its idealist stance to envision a nuclear program, however until the third decade of independence profound changes have happened. The cold war was looming, Nehru's optimism about Indo-China relations was shaken by India's humiliating defeat in the 1962 war, China had conducted nuclear tests and the US's tilt towards Pakistan was obvious. Nehru's successor Lal Bahadur Shastri was hesitant on the nuclear issue, rather during his visit to London in 1964 he sought 'nuclear powers to provide some sort of guarantee to India along with other non-nuclear countries' (Noorani, 1967). However the then EAM Sawaran Singh was of the view that "a big power guarantee to protect non-nuclear countries against the threat of nuclear aggression is feasible".

Nonetheless Sawaran Singh was optimistic that nuclear powers would agree to never use nuclear option against non-nuclear ones, however, the optimism was taken aback when India didn't receive an encouraging response. The Indo-Pak war broke out in 1965 and till this time China has exploded its second nuclear weapon. Indian ambassador to US B.K Nehru stated "there is great pressure on the Indian government to explode a nuclear bomb. This pressure has come after the Chinese nuclear explosions". Later Sawaran Singh assured that "in the matter of peaceful development of atomic energy we are pushing ahead and giving it top priority".

In 1968, Non-Proliferation treaty was introduced and India faced pressure for not signing it, however, with the popular support Indira Gandhi sustained the pressure and 'Operation Smiling Buddha' was conducted and "it was one of the most consequential decision made by India" says a Mr. Varma a former envoy to Moscow (Peri, 2022). India's reluctance in signing the NPT emanated from its regional strategic insecurities as well as bilateral tension with the USA.

"The decision for a peaceful nuclear explosion was taken along with the signing of the Indo-Soviet treaty, following Dr. Kissinger's visit to China. During that period two aspects got highlighted- how exposed India was to the manipulation of the Big Powers and how much political importance was attached to nuclear capability by Big Powers" (Subrahmanyam, 1974). India's peaceful explosion made the big powers ambiguous about India's ambitions and also it reaffirmed India's non-alignment posture of Indian decision making independence. Subrahmanyam also believed that Nuclear India constituted high stakes in international politics.

Hard Realist?

Indira Gandhi's political venture is characterized by realism, as the Soviet-Indo treaty of 1971 showed a turn away from Non-Alignment rhetoric. She viewed national interests in the term of tangible power rather than morality. Her foreign policy was characterized by a blend of pragmatism and principle, emphasizing India's independent stance while pragmatically engaging with global powers (Raghvan, 2015). She used a cautious tone and took measured actions to prevent direct conflict with either of the superpowers. When measured against her father's record her foreign policy reflects a shift towards hard realism, however, if hard realism is measured in terms of building 'comprehensive national power' and exerting it her foreign policy falls short (Mansingh, 2015). 'Indira Gandhi, in short, was pragmatic, goal-oriented, non-ideological, and flexible in her foreign policy, qualifying her as a realist but not a hard-realist' (Steinberg, 2008).

Criticism

Shashi Tharoor in his extensive work 'Reasons of State: A study of Indira Gandhi's Foreign Policy' has assessed and criticized Indian foreign policy in the period 1966-77. He states "throughout her tenure Mrs. Gandhi indicated no desire to formulate a vision of the world and to direct Indian foreign policy towards it". In her foreign policy she ignored smaller states and formed an image of being pro-soviet and anti-American. "She alienated one superpower, the U.S by

identifying it as the enemy and of her type of regime; tied India increasingly to other superpower, the USSR, whose intentions in the region are causing more and more concern in the non-aligned world; maintaining antagonistic relations with a powerful neighbor, China…She ignored a major region, Southeast Asia, and snubbed important economic power, Japan, in a policy which often appeared to prefer empty slogans to tangible gains" (Tharoor, 1981). Also, Indian political choices and economic weakness could not enhance India's stature in global standing. (S.Pardesi, 2009).

Aspect	Description
Tenure	First female PM of India; first tenure 1966-77, second term 1980-1984
EAM	M.C Chagla (1966-67) Indira Gandhi herself (1967-69) Dinesh Singh (1969-70) Sardar Sawaran Singh (1970-74) Y.B Chavan (1974-77) Narashimah Rao (1980-84)
Foreign Policy Stance	• Focused on realism, weighing national interests in terms of tangible power • Emphasized safeguarding India's independence, enhancing security, fostering economic relations • Asserting regional hegemony • Refused to sign NPT due to regional insecurities
International Relations	• Initial efforts to build rapport in the USA but later preferred self-reliance. Resented US's demands of policy modifications • Strengthened Indo-Soviet ties for strategic support, signed 1971 Indo-Soviet Treaty for Peace and Cooperation

	• Pragmatic approach to normalizing Indo-China relations but maintained strategic caution due to regional security concerns
Nuclear Policy	Shifted from Nehruvian idealism to pragmatic stance. Conducted India's first nuclear tests in 1974 (Operation Smiling Buddha) asserting strategic autonomy
Criticism	Criticized for pro-Soviet and Anti-American stance, ignoring smaller states, and not formulating a clear global vision

Desai Era

In March 1977, the Janata Party ousted Indira Gandhi and selected Morarji Desai to be the 4th prime minister of India. Since independence this was a fundamental political transition as for the first time a non-congress member became prime minister. The outlines of foreign policy of the Janata party stated "will reflect the nation's enlightened interests and its aspirations and priorities at home. It will oppose all forms of colonialism, neocolonialism, and racialism. It will stand for all". Desai having more than 20 years of political experience was critical of Indira Gandhi's practice of non-alignment. During an interview with New York Times in 1977 he stated "her father never became subservient to anybody, but she has done so. When she signed a treaty with Russia and not one with America also, this was not proper".

Desai chose Atal Behari Vajpayee as the External Minister for Foreign Affairs who belonged to the liberal wing of the party. Desai-Vajpayee team in foreign policy is a remarkable one as both held strong opinions on Indian foreign policy and both were somehow critical of Nehru-Indira policies (Noorani, 1978). Soon after becoming prime minister, Desai reiterated commitment to 'genuine non-alignment with no suspicion of any alliance with anybody'. For the first time the term 'genuine' was fixed in official dictation , this meant to convey that there were tilts towards East European countries and this would be corrected (PM on Foreign Policy, 1977).

While India's course of international dealings was supposed to be reconsidered, an important change was the tumultuous Indo-US relations. America was pleased with Desai's genuine non-

alignment. The New York Times considered that 'the basic reason for the optimism is that India at the polls has proved that world's most populous democracy is inclined to build upon natural affinity with world's second most populous one, the United States' (Borders, 1977). India and the US had much common, 'both are keen about freedom, liberty, and human rights. Both have gone through traumatic experiences- the US had the experience of Mr. Nixon and we have had a traumatic experience of emergency. Also prime minister Desai and President Carter have in common a deeply rooted religious inclination', said the Law Minister Shanti Bhushan. Indo-US relations deteriorated due to the 1971 war, but Carter's two day visit to Delhi was an attempt to convince the Indian leaders that the situation had changed (2014).

The Soviet blatantly supported Indira Gandhi's emergency regime, as it had high political and economic stakes in India. The Desai government initially showed cold shoulder to the USSR and was critical of India's tilt towards it. However, it didn't repudiate the Indo-Soviet Treaty of 1971 but indicated that it would not be allowed to affect relations with any other state. This sudden policy shift alarmed the Kremlin and sent foreign minister Andrei Gromyko to India with placatory economic aid. The Desai government realized that the Soviet connection was too vital to ignore and gradually softened its attitude.

Indo-China tensions have also simmered somehow and Vajpayee stated "India welcomes steps taken toward normalization of Indo-China relation". The Americans were hoping that the closer rapport among India, the US and China will weaken Russia's influence in Asia. In fact 'Americans suggested China a thaw in Indo-China relations would wean India away from Russia and China's subsequent offer of closer ties with India was relayed through Cyrus Vance, the US Secretary of the State' (Foreign Policy: Janata Government find itself in an enviable position, 2014).

On the nuclear question Desai was critical of acquiring nuclear weapons, and reaffirmed that India will not acquire nuclear weapons. He stated he was unsure whether the nuclear explosion for peaceful purposes was necessary or not "if it is not necessary, it should never be done". He opposed India acquiring nuclear weapons, "I will give it to you in writing that we will not manufacture nuclear weapons. Even if the whole world arms itself with the atom, we will not do so". And if the internal pressure for nuclear weapons became too strong then he would resign (Noorani, 1978). Desai's foreign policy represented a continuous dialogue between continuity and change. As

Vajpayee explained" There is continuity also and there is change also. Continuity is more pronounced and the change is more subtle".

Aspect	Description
Tenure	First Non-Congress government (1977-79)
EAM	Atal Bihari Vajpayee
Foreign Policy Stance	Emphasis on 'genuine Non-alignment' opposing colonialism and racialism; Critical of Indira Gandhi's stance on tilting towards the USSR
International relations	Improved relations with the USA, marked by President Carter's visit to Delhi Initially cold relations with the USSR due to its support for Indira Gandhi's emergency, gradual softening and acceptance of Soviet's aid Efforts to normalize Indo-China relations, US encouraged to counter Soviet influence
Nuclear Policy	Strong opposition to nuclear weapons

Rajiv Gandhi Era

Indian foreign policy was about to experience incipient shifts during the 1980s. In 1984, after the assassination of Indira Gandhi, India sworn in its youngest Prime minister, Rajiv Gandhi, who entered into politics was not weighed down by the ideological and political legacy of his mother. However, in his first address to the nation he evoked his family, saying: "Jawaharlal Nehru bequeathed to us a foreign policy which Indira Gandhi so creatively enriched. I shall carry it forward" (Markham, 1984). His era is believed to serve as the precursor of foreign policy transformations of the 1990s.

The Broader Context

Indira Gandhi's assassination garnered sympathy for Congress which resulted in Rajiv Gandhi's landslide victory in parliament and dominance in the party. Along with the internal environment, the external political arena was undergoing profound changes. The Soviet-China tensions and the

cold war relaxation presented both opportunities and challenges for India. In 1985 Mikhail Gorbachev assumed power in Russia, and showed the USSR's willingness to ease tensions with the USA. Rajiv and his administration understood its implications and considered recalibrating relations with the USA and China. It also implied that New Delhi's leverage owing to its non-aligned posture in the cold war would dwindle (Raghvan, 2015). Regionally Rajiv faced a turbulent situation with the civil war in Sri Lanka, crises in Maldives and Nepal, and Pakistan's growing influence during Afghan Jihad. Internally Rajiv's government faced rash crises in Punjab, Assam, Mizoram and Kashmir.

Rajiv's Diplomacy

Rajiv Gandhi embarked his tenure in a quite enthusiastic manner visiting every continent, meeting almost all the world leaders and addressing major international gatherings. His foreign policy approach of making strategic moves to protect India's interests, while exploring diplomatic options to resolve disputes bore resemblance with that of Nehru's (Raghvan, 2010). His approach although resembled his predecessors, however he exhibited a touch of personal diplomacy and a tendency to take bold initiatives (Tripathi, 1988). Rajiv Gandhi without any significant experience in foreign policy confronted a rather challenging scenario on regional and international fronts than his mother did when she assumed power. He thus realized the significance of diversifying and cultivating relationships with both the super powers. A western diplomat suggested that unlike his fellow Indians Mr. Gandhi has finally shed the reflexive anti-Americanism (Crossette, 1984), meanwhile India could also not underestimate the significance of Soviet ties.

After Gorbachev's indication of 'rapprochement with China' India also envisioned an improved relationship with China. The strategic burden of continued tensions, the widening economic gap, and the expensive militarized borders led India to seek proper rapprochement (Raghvan, 2015). The Sumdorong Chu incident highlighted the importance of stable borders, thus back channel communication with Beijing was initiated. In 1988 Mr. Gandhi made a historic and successful visit to China, in which he put forth proposals to establish three working groups focusing on economic relations, science and technology, and boundary issues. The Chinese president accepted the proposals, and the two leaders also established convergence of key international issues (Singh, 2009).

India's need to have a stable periphery to focus on modernization and development and the reduction of the burden of security preparedness shaped Rajiv's regional policies. India is believed to have used direct 'interventionist policies' in Sri Lanka and Maldives. Rajiv's policies towards Pakistan yielded mixed outcomes. Although he showed willingness to work with President Zia, however, Brasstacks, a massive military exercise in Rajasthan escalated the tensions leading to a potential crisis. The super powers urged both states to avoid the conflict. To diffuse the tensions 'Cricket Diplomacy' was employed, when Rajiv Gandhi invited President Zia to watch 'India-Pakistan' cricket match. The tense situation has deescalated. Zia-ul-Haq stated "My sole purpose was to come and watch a good cricket match and in the process meet with the Prime minister and see how we could solve our problems" (Tempest, 1987). His foreign policy thus depicted a mixture of realism and liberalism (Clement, 2018).

India for 21st Century

Rajiv Gandhi's foreign policy was geared towards making 'India strong, independent, self-reliant and in the front ranks of the world' (Laskar, 2014). One of the most fundamental foreign policy shifts introduced by Rajiv was his recognition that 'India's modernization and economic development required greater engagement with the world and foreign policy has to be geared towards securing these objectives' (Raghvan, At the Cusp of Transformation, 2015). Making a 'Minimal realistic and positive orientation move' India signed a MoU with the USA on technology transfer and wanted to import high tech supercomputers. The USA, however, doubted India's ambition of using these computers in the nuclear program but a deal was agreed and it was considered as an improvement of Indo-US relations.

Tabular Summary

Aspect	Description
Tenure	1984-1989

EAM	• Narasimah Rao (1984-85, 1987-88): Handled initial foreign policy shifts under Rajiv Gandhi including recalibration with the USA and USSR; Played pivotal role in Rajiv's historic visit to China • Bali Ram Bhagat (1985-86): Continued efforts to stabilize regional relations, particularly focusing on SAARC initiatives • N.D Tiwari (1986-87): Emphasized Economic diplomacy • K. Natwar Singh (1988-89): focused on strengthening ties bilateral ties with neighboring states and resolving regional conflicts
Diplomatic Approach	• Enthusiastic global engagements • Personal diplomacy • Diversified ties with the USA and USSR • Cricket Diplomacy • Promoted Modernization and economic development
International relations	• Reduced anti-American sentiments and recalibrated Indo-US relations • Aimed for rapprochement with China, visited China in 1988 and established working groups on economic relations, science, technology and boundary issues • Interventionist approach in Sri Lanka and Maldives • Used Cricket diplomacy to de-escalate tensions with Pakistan
Challenges	Internal crisis in Punjab, Assam, Mizoram, and Kashmir; Civil war in Sri Lanka; Crises in Maldives and Nepal
Legacy	Precursor to 1990s foreign policy transformations, set the stage for India's emerging global role in 21st century

Post-Cold War Period

The end of the cold war ushered a new era in Indian foreign policy, as the global realities were changed now. Non-alignment was now perceived as redundant, also the disintegration of the USSR created a vacuum, which made India rethink its strategy and India started to overcome its hesitation towards the west. An era of pragmatism started with the advent of the new decade, and 'India no longer was as convinced of its moral uniqueness, and viewed itself as a nation in the quest of greater power. This led to the normalization of antagonistic relations, positive approach to the superpower, and greater focus on national defense including nuclear sphere' (Malone, 2014). Srinath Raghvan, however, argues that the orientation of foreign policy has begun to change earlier, the key changes of post 1991 were prefigured during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure, and the events of 1990s served as catalysts rather than the triggers of transformation (Raghvan, 2015). The quarter century of gradual and incremental changes yielded an unmistakable transformation in Indian foreign policy.

Naraismha Rao Era

Narasimha Rao, the first Congress prime minister outside of the Nehru-Gandhi dynasty to complete 5 years in office, was elected to office following the assassination of Rajiv Gandhi. Although he was experienced in handling foreign policy, having served as foreign minister during the tenures of Indira and Rajiv Gandhi, he faced the arduous task of redefining the course of Indian foreign policy. He was awarded 'Bharat Ratna' award in Feb 2024 by PM Modi for his contributions. Rao is credited for reorienting Indian foreign policy from Nehruvian Idealism to pragmatism and embedding economic diplomacy into the practice of Indian diplomacy (Roche, 2024). He stands out for skillfully navigating India's foreign policy through the post Cold-war landscape, adapting to the new realities and forging new paths such as establishing diplomatic relations with Israel (David M.Malone, 2015).

Redefining India's Relations

During the 1980s India was shunning the reluctances towards the West, the end of cold war collapsed India's familiar international environment, thus repairing relations with the West was among Delhi's top priorities. The economic crisis of 1991 led towards the liberalization of the Indian economy, which in turn globalized it, thus 'relations with the west moved in an upward

trajectory' (Vaishnav, 2023). This also increased India's leverage globally, and it started being considered as the most important 'swing state' by the CIA. Along with emerging opportunities and challenges also spurred, the absence of a great challenger to USA's hegemony has dimmed the geopolitical rationale of warming up ties with India (Mohan C. , 2015).

Rao adopted a 'new look' policy approach which acknowledge need to develop positive equations with new power centers, expending economical, technological, and defense relations with US to the possible extent, identifying areas of mutual agreements on contradictory issues, as well as remaining firm on vital interests of India (Shukla, 1999). Despite India's growing western tilt, it continued to hold onto Indo-Russia ties. Delhi negotiated a new friendship treaty, offered favorable financial terms, and sustained defense cooperation amidst the economic turmoil and Soviet Union's dissolution (Pant H. V., 2013).

The end of the cold war as well as the economic globalization also made India rethink its regional relations. Towards regional neighbors a more conciliatory approach was adopted. The signing of Mahakali Treaty with Nepal, the decision to remain distant from the Tamil problem in Sri Lanka, and the Tin Bigha accord with Bangladesh were some examples of this reconciliatory approach. India seeks to expand its diplomatic horizons, PM Rao articulated 'Look East' policy, as a part of changing the direction of foreign policy to attract trade and investment from East Asian States to accelerate India's economic growth (Hall, 2022), which later proved to be one of the most successful diplomatic initiatives. After the Soviet Union's breakup India approached and diplomatic relations were established with the newly formed republics of Central Asia.

India also approached West Asian states to counter Pakistan at the time when the Kashmir issue was simmering (Roche, 2024). Full diplomatic relations with Israel were established. Rao's tenure also witnessed the formation of the 'Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation'. The foreign policy recast of Rao's period set India on the trajectory of "multi-alignment", as he began to forge closer ties with multiple states and organizations (Roche, 2024). Although India was not strong enough to be considered as an independent pole, its presence in any international coalition would strengthen that grouping significantly (Ashely J. Tellis, 2022).

Tabular Summary

Aspect	Description
Tenure	Served as Prime Minister from 1991-1996
EAM	• Dinesh Singh (1991-92) • Madhavsinh Solanki (1991-93) • Narasimha Rao himself (1993-96)
Key Contributions	• Reorientation of Foreign policy in the post-cold war period shifting from Nehruvian idealism to pragmatism • Embedded economic diplomacy and foreign policy • Introduced Look East Policy • Initiated economic liberalization and privatization reforms
International engagements	• Focused on repairing ties with new power centers in the post-cold war scenario • Maintained Indo-Russian ties and negotiated a new friendship treaty • Established diplomatic ties with Israel • Adopted a conciliatory approach towards neighbors, signing treaties with Nepal and Bangladesh

Gujral Doctrine

Inder Kumar Gujral, known as 'engaged foreign minister', became prime minister in 1996 for one year. His contribution to India foreign policy was articulation of a new framework for India's

regional policy. While the seed of this approach can be traced in Naraismha Rao's approach towards Pakistan, Bangladesh, and other neighbors, Gujral was the one to enthusiastically pursue this idea as the 'Gujral Doctrine' He introduced Gujral Doctrine, 'a set of five guiding principles to the conduct of foreign relations with India's immediate neighbors' (Murthy, 1999). It is considered to have made a significant shift in India's conduct of bilateral relations with immediate neighbors. Gujral Doctrine among other factors was influenced by his belief that India's global stature is closely linked with quality of its relations with its neighborhood, also being the largest power in the region India has to take greater responsibility for promoting peace in the region. This doctrine discarded the old emphasis on 'bilateralism and reciprocity', underlining India's willingness to go an extra mile to resolve disputes with its neighbors (Mohan C. , 2015).

Following are the five guiding principles of Gujral Doctrine:

- No-reciprocity- With neighborhoods such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, Maldives, Sri Lanka, and Nepal, India does not ask for reciprocity rather provide and accommodate what it can in good faith and trust
- No South Asian state should allow its territory to be used against the interest of any other regional state
- Non-interference- No State should interfere in the internal affairs of another state
- Mutual respect for territory and Sovereignty- All South Asian States must respect one another's territorial integrity and sovereignty
- Peaceful settlement of disputes- All disputes should be solved through bilateral negotiations (Gujral, 1998)

Significance and Implications

Mr. Gujral stated the significance of this doctrine as "A peaceful, stable, and constructive environment in our neighborhood is vital for us as we pursue the goals of accelerated development for ourselves and the region. We need neighbors who are developing at least as fast as we to avoid imbalance which feeds dissatisfaction and political problems" (Gujral, 1997). The success of this doctrine was partly because of the ground work done by previous governments, including Gujral's own tenure as EAM from 1989-1990.

Gujral believed his five principles if diligently followed, would reshape South Asia's regional relationships including Indo-Pak ties, and create a cooperative regional environment where India's size and influence would be considered assets. This doctrine not only reflected India's vision towards its neighbors rather it was a whole package in which India also stated its expectations from the neighborhood. This also implied that these principles could be successful only in certain environments where 'neighbors too perceive it as beneficial to their country and the region' (Murthy, 1999).

The Gujral Doctrine received much approbation internationally, but it was criticized in India's right wing who perceived it as appeasement of difficult neighbors, rather than a visionary approach (Mohan C. , 2015). When BJP's coalition government came into power in 1998 there were doubts whether these principles will be followed or discarded. However, Vajpayee showed no issue with the doctrine, his foreign ministers 'Jaswant Singh, Yashwat Singh and Brajesh Mishra also understood the importance of peaceful neighbors to achieve India's greater global role' (Mohan C. , 2015). Vajpayee consolidated the progress made under the 'Gujral Doctrine' by fostering ties with the smaller states, nevertheless through his 'bus diplomacy' he went beyond it and this also marked a significant shift in Indo-Pak relations (Murthy, 1999).

Tabular Summary

Aspect	Description
Gujral Doctrine	A regional framework for India's foreign policy introduced in 1996 by Inder Kumar Gujral
Guiding Principles	● No reciprocity expected from smaller states ● No South Asian State should allow its territory to be used against other state ● Non-interference in internal affairs of other states ● Mutual respect for one another's territory and sovereignty ● Peaceful settlement of disputes

Significance and Implications	• Emphasized the importance of peaceful neighborhood for India's development and regional stability • Aimed to reshape South Asia's regional relationships and create a cooperative regional atmosphere • Received international recognition but faced criticism at home for perceived appeasement
Continuation	Proceeding governments consolidated these principles in their regional diplomacy

Vajpayee Era

Atal Bihari Vajpayee retained the Prime Minister office for three terms, a brief 13 days period in 1996, a 13 month period from Mar 1998-1999, and a five years term from 1999-2004. During his tenure, he revolutionized India's foreign and security policy, navigating the country through various domestic and external challenges. Strengthening and institutionalizing India's national security, pursuing dialogues with Pakistan, resolving disputes with China, and rebuilding Indo-US relations marked Vajpayeee's four pillars foreign policy (Gujar, 2018).

Realistic Pluralism

Vajpayee is believed to be a grand strategist who introduced realistic thinking in statecraft, by acknowledging the role of power in shaping international relations. N.P Verma termed his realism as 'realistic pluralism', which consisted of three factors, hard power, soft power, and multi-aligned and not alliance formation (Sahoo, 2024). During the Vajpayee period Indian foreign policy "crossed the Rubicon", and shifted focus from idealism to pragmatism (Mohan R. , 2003). It also marked a deviation from Morgenthau's concept of political reality as it also combined normative power (Kumar, 2008). While flexing India's hard power through nuclear tests, measures were also introduced to normalize relations with China and Pakistan, thus maintaining a delicate balance between 'prudence and restraint' (Sahoo, 2024).

Nuclearized India

India, for a long time has been trying to acquire nuclear weapons, nonetheless, the financial, strategic as well as moral constraints (Chiriyankandath, 2004) have impeded the way. India considered NPT and CTBT discriminatory and rejected both of them and the newly formed government went for the hard choice. The BJP led national alliance abandoned the long held promise of 'peaceful nuclear programme' and directed the testing of nuclear missiles at Pokhran in 1998. The acquisition of nuclear weapons was a realization of 'assertive military nationalism' of Hindutva and BJP projected it as 'Hindu National Power' and a symbol of greatness and glory (Sahoo, 2024). BJP leaders such as M.S Golwakar described 'the manufacturing of nuclear bombs as an imperative' (Golwalkar, 1980).

India made the decision to conduct nuclear test at the critical period when her valuable friend, USSR, 'who might provide a strategic nuclear security umbrella' was disintegrated, Pakistan's military alliance with China presented security challenges, relations with US were uneasy, and China's economic and military prowess was flourishing (Sahoo, 2024). Vajpayee's choice of conducting nuclear explosions led India to redraw the geo-political map of post-cold war Asia and gave assertiveness to Indian foreign policy (Malik, 1998). While India claimed to restore 'strategic balance' in Asia and corrected power asymmetry with China, and made India an independent power with technological sophistication, however, this decision was costly.

Multi-alignment

By the advent of the new century, India was subsiding the shackles of non-alignment and diplomatic hesitations. India was also emerging with bulging confidence, and greater enthusiasm to share global responsibilities. Indian foreign policy in the 2000s reflected its aspirations for greater global influence, economic prosperity, and strategic security, while navigating the regional and international complexities. In the post-cold war world, multiple poles of power emerged, but none of them was strong enough to challenge the US's hegemony. In this situation, India established relations with multiple states and at multiple levels to pursue common interests (Raghvan, 2017). This multi-aligned strategy helped India prioritize its interests by improving relations with different states and multiple regional groupings such as EU, IBSA, ASEAN, and others (Sahoo, 2024).

Relations with the USA and other States

India's nuclear tests and following sanctions dimmed the hopes of improving Indo-US relations, nevertheless, it appealed to the US that India is now muscular, willing to defend its security interests and no longer non-aligned (Raghvan, 2017). Stephen Cohen and C. Raja Mohan believed that 'it was a gamble that paid off', which forced the US to take India seriously and engage with India in a more sustainable manner, which had not happened earlier (Chiriyankandath, 2004). Vajpayee characterized India and the US as 'natural allies', and credit for improving relations went to the intensive dialogue between the then EAM Jaswant Singh and US Deputy Secretary of State Strobe Talbot. Later in 2000-2001 heads of the both States exchanged visits and various agreements such as 'India's Relations: A Vision for Twenty First Century' were signed. Increased commerce, defense and technology cooperation during the Vajpayee era led to the foundation for further bilateral agreements such as the 2005 Indo-US Civil Nuclear Deal (Gujar, 2018).

China's military and economic growth posed a strategic threat to India, so India made efforts to reconcile Indo-China relations. In 2003, Vajpayee paid a historical visit to China and the 'Declaration on Principles for Relations and Comprehensive Cooperation' was signed. Also, Special Representatives were appointed to resolve border disputes. With Russia, the Moscow Declaration was signed by Putin and Vajpayee, which marked the beginning of closer security and trade relations (Gidadubhli, 2001). With Pakistan Lahore declaration was made, and Composite dialogues were initiated to repair deteriorating relationships. India extended traditional friendship cooperation to Bhutan, Nepal, and Afghanistan (Raghvan, 2017). The 'Look East' policy was reinvigorated and the definition of East was extended to include other states other than ASEAN like Australia, Japan, and South Korea. India also joined (Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Scientific, Technological, and Economic Cooperation) BIMSTEC and the (Mekong-Ganga Cooperation) MGC.

Ian Hall summarizes Indian foreign policy expedients from 1990-2000s 'partial reformation and opening of economy to encourage trade and foreign investment, introduction of 'Look East' policy to find partners who can provide finance, boost trade, and have know-how (Acharya, 2015), testing nuclear missiles which despite being condemned opened way for sustained dialogue and pursuing entente with the USA' (Hall, 2016).

Tabular Summary

Aspect	Description
Tenure	PM for three terms: 13 days in 1996, 13 months in 1998-1999, and 5 years from 1999-2004
EAM	Jaswant Singh (1998-2002): Engaged in extensive dialogues with the US authorities following India's nuclear tests, managed international fallouts and tensions after nuclear tests, participated in Lahore Summit, and facilitated Indo-China relations Yashwant Sinha (2002-2004): Focused on economic diplomacy, enhancing regional engagements, represented India at various international forums
Key foreign policies	Strengthened National security, expanded 'Look East' policy to Australia, Japan, South Korea, rebuilt Indo-US relations through extensive dialogues, strengthened relations with Russia through Moscow Declaration, initiated Lahore declaration, and composite dialogues with Pakistan
Realistic Pluralism	Combined hard power, soft power and non-alliance; pursued pragmatism
Nuclear Policy	Conducted 1998 nuclear test at Pokhran, projecting national power, and realigning political stance
Multi-alignment	Engaged with multiple states, regional and international groupings to pursue common interests, joined BIMSTEC and MGC

Manmohan Singh Era

Manmohan Singh, a respected economist and former finance minister became prime minister in 2004 in an unexpected turn of events, thus being called as 'The accidental Prime Minister' (Baru,

2014). Indian National Congress under the leadership of Sonia Gandhi won elections of 2004, however, over the concerns of her foreigner nationality, she gave up the position and Singh was thus considered the best choice. Sonia Gandhi felt safe with her choice as 'Singh with no mass base posed no political threat to her power and authority' (Profile: Manmohan Singh , 2004). Singh led United Progressive Alliance (UPA) from 2004-14, and Indian foreign policy achieved various milestones during this period.

UPA's Foreign Policy

UPA's ten years tenure has been a crucial period in Indian foreign policy, as it experienced significant transformations in India's dealings with the world. The foreign policy of UPA was focused on 'establishing strategic partnerships, managing key security challenges, influencing global governance, and fostering economic development and socio-political stability' (Laskar R. K., 2022). However, Dipanjan Roy Chaudhury believes that Singh's policy made no shake ups in Indian foreign policy as he chose not to deviate from Vajpayee's policy of greater engagements. He actually expanded the scope of relations' (Chaudhary D. R., 2014).

Singh's Foreign policy Doctrine

During the first two years of UPA, Singh articulated a foreign policy doctrine consisting of following six parts (Baru, 2014):

- India's foreign policy would be shaped by its own developmental priorities
- India needed greater integration into global economy
- Indian foreign policy should priorities economic factors as these shape its relations with greater powers
- South Asia needed deeper integration
- Progress of India's democratic model has lessons for others
- India had responsibility to help transition to open economic policies and democratic politics

Regionally, Singh envisioned a 'seamless and spatial interaction' which would allow one to have "breakfast in Amritsar, lunch in Lahore, and dinner in Kabul" (Mohan C. R., 2007). Also, he introduced the realm of trade to the 'Gujral Doctrine'. He offered unilateral reduction of tariff for SAARC members and highlighted the importance of connectivity and promoted trade facilitation (Mohan C. , 2015). His emphasis on India's economic interests and its economic relations with other Asian states led to the motive of 'Manmohan Singh Doctrine'. Parag Khana and Raja Mohan regarded Singh's approach as 'forward foreign policy' and summarized it as 'neo-Curzonian foreign policy… premised on the logic of Indian geographical centrality permitting multi-alignment with all major powers and seeking access and leverage from East Africa to Pacific Asia. (Khana, 2006).

The highs of UPA's foreign policy includes Manmohan Singh's 'efforts for better relations with Pakistan and China, furthering ties with the USA, consolidating Indo-Russia relations, elevating ties with Japan to the level of strategic partnerships, expanding contours of 'Look East' policy, initiated look Middle East policy, expanding ties with Africa and Latin America and strived to be an Asia-Pacific power' (Chaudhary D. R., 2014). Dr. Baru credited Singh for constructing an intellectual framework within which foreign policy is executed. He believes some of Singh's major foreign policy contributions include 'Civil-Nuclear deal with the USA, India-ASEAN free trade, border talks with China, and negotiations with Parvez Musharaf on Kashmir issue' (The Manmohan Doctrine and Narendra Modi's Foreign Policy, 2014).

Indo-US relations

Bill Clinton's visit to India in 2000 started the process of US-India alignment, however, the landmark achievement on India's part was signing of the Civil Nuclear deal of 2008. This significant move also changed India's foreign policy orientation. In a bold initiative in 2005 India separated civilian and nuclear programs in return for which Bush carved out nuclear exceptions for India. 'Bush was also willing to locate India in the great power framework, and emphasized its potential contributions in the Asian balance of power, amidst the rise of China' (Mohan C. , 2015). Nonetheless, by the end of 2011 the US-India alignment was not progressing as it was expected. As concerns were growing about India's strategic autonomy constraints implicit in formal alliance with the USA, it was concluded that both can be 'better served by being friends rather than alliances' (Sunil Khilnani, 2012).

Fledgling Multi-alignment

Under the UPA policy of Manmohan Singh, new grounds for multi-alignments were being established to accelerate India's economic and strategic objectives, and enhance its accessibility to regional and global forums (Hall, 2016). Given the fact that the US failed to sustain uni-polarity throughout the time, India's approach of cooperating with several powers was appreciated. For India this period was a moment of opportunity and India wanted to cash it. 'India was gaining traits of a balancing power, while strengthening relations with Russia and discovered new areas of agreements with China' (Chaudhary, 2023).

Criticism

India, under Singh, failed to provide leadership in the regional and the global grouping that it joined (Acharaya, 2011). It failed to drive full advantage from some of its partnerships, also it failed to take stand on normative issues when it could and should have done (Dormendy, 2011). UPA's foreign policy remained 'stuck to the status quo ante', and it was reluctant to spell out a coherent set of priorities, and inept in establishing geopolitical norms in the regional subsystem (Jacob, 2009).

Aspect	Description
Tenure	Led UPA from 2004-2014
EAM	● Natwar Singh (2004-05): Focused on strengthening ties with neighboring states ● Parnab Mukherjee (2006-09): Key figure in Indo-US Civil Nuclear deal ● S.M Krishna (2009-12): Promoted Economic diplomacy, expanded India's engagement with Southeast Asia and Africa ● Salman Kurshid (2012-14): Advocated Regional stability , worked on India's Look East policy
Foreign Policy Goals	● Establishing strategic partnerships

	• Managing key security challenges • Fostering economic development • Promoting deeper integration in South Asia
Highs of UPA Foreign policy	• Strengthened Indo-US relations through strategic agreements such as Civil-nuclear deal of 2008 • Expanded contours of Look East policy by including trade • Initiated Look Middle East Policy
Criticism	• Failed to provide leadership to regional and global groupings • Too cautious and lacked bold initiatives • Reluctant in spelling out coherent set of priorities

Modi Era

The post 2014 era of Indian foreign policy seems to be experiencing a more confident, dynamic, and assertive thrust. While evaluating the trajectory of Indian foreign policy under Modi, an important aspect is the infusion of an ideological contour in the foreign policy. After Nehru, Modi is considered a prime minister so ambitious about foreign policy and with a clear ideological leaning, Hindutva. By blending the traditional Hindu concepts such as presenting India's global role as a 'Vishwaguru (world guru)', the Modi government has significantly changed the language of Indian foreign policy. 'The present Indian Foreign policy approach appears to be based on Aristotle's Enlightened Self-Interest and Kautilya's Arthashastra. The principles of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumba and Sbka Sath, Sbka Vishwas, Sbka Vikas' serve as the foundation of India's international affairs' (Chaudhary, 2023).

Modi Doctrine?

A debate, however, continues whether he has actually transformed Indian foreign policy and how far his policy has been successful so far, or is it just rebranding. C. Raja Mohan thinks 'Modi has many more structural opportunities to engineer the structural transformation in India's international relations, and this transformation is already underway (Mohan C. R., 2015). The protagonists of this approach asserts that 'He embraced pragmatism, and made use of the incremental change rather than breaks and turns, also India has emerged as a under him India has emerged as a rule maker rather than rule taker' (Gupta, 2019). Others are of the view that because of the material constraints and challenging structural environment India's choices are constrained (Harsh V.Pant, 2018). Despite Modi's energetic personal diplomacy with the neighboring states and rebranding of 'Look East' policy to 'Act East' policy, he has not altered the basic tenets of India's security and foreign policy (Basrur, 2017).

Following are some majors changes introduced during first tenure of Modi:

- A more pragmatic, assertive, and realist foreign policy approach.
- Reinvigorating 'Look East' Policy into 'Act East' policy to deepen engagements with South-East Asia, also added Act Far East and Act West Asia policies.
- Pragmatic Integration of foreign policy with domestic interests. For example, focusing on 'Economic diplomacy' seeking foreign investments and promoting initiatives like 'Make in India' to boost domestic industry and attract foreign investments.
- Provocative activism demonstrated through foreign trips and enthusiastic engagements to bolster national interests, while reviving, and energizing ties with multiple powers and poles such as Japan, Australia, Canada, Israel, and the Middle east.
- Active participation at multilateral forums such as UGNA, BRICS, QUAD, and G-20, etc with a revised aim of shaping norms and institutions.
- Expanding bilateral partnerships with the United States, making it strongest than any time in history

- Prioritizing maritime security by introducing SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Regions), to promote India's peace, stability, and economic as well as strategic interests in the Indian Ocean Region
- Systematically grooming Indian diaspora to promote India's rise, and to increase Foreign direct investments, and remittances.

Modi 2.0

Narendra Modi's second win in 2019 elections represented a fresh mandate for him to 'reinvent India as a more secure, confident and competitive country, it will also help cement India's multi-aligned foreign policy' (Chellany, 2019). Modi kick started his second term with the appointment of S. Jaishankar, a rather prudent, polished and experienced diplomat, as minister for External Affairs. As the saga of evolution continues, the international order in which India has been striving to find its place is transforming profoundly. As Jaishankar delivered in his lecture, "American nationalism, the rise of China, and the rebalancing of the global economy are examples of change. What defines power, and national standing is not also the same. In a more constrained and independent world, competition has to be pursued more intelligently. In short, change is upon us as never before" (Jaishankar, 2019).

The Changing Calculus

The structural environment is again at the helm of another bi-polar rivalry for global hegemony, however, this time with multiple battlegrounds, and multiple power-poles in various contexts. The exacerbating global frictions for hegemony are creating spaces for middle powers to rise, and India definitely wants to leverage this opportunity. 'The shifting balance of power, West's disillusionment with China, India as an attractive alternative for China, and its position in the strategic geography of Indo-Pacific' have contributed to make India's moment (V.Pant, 2024). Nonetheless, along-with opportunities come the constraints and for India the biggest constraint is China. To address these changes the contour as well as the conduct of Indian foreign policy is also changing. The Modi government has been committed to reorienting foreign policy based on the principles aligned with India's traditions. It also aims to enhance India's global stature, ensuring that its status and interests are acknowledged by all, including major powers such as the United

States, and China (Ganguly I. H., 2022). Thus, India tends to be more assertive, focused on strategic autonomy as well as multi-alignment, and a staunch realist.

Foreign Policy Goals

During the second term India's foreign policy strategy is aimed at bolstering India's global standing through provocative engagements, and strategic partnerships. India embraced a more global role by sharing global responsibilities. From inviting the BIMSTEC states at the swearing-in ceremony to choosing Maldives for the first visit after winning, underscored a foreign policy tilt towards eastward connectivity, economic integration and Indian Ocean. Although the 'Neighborhood first' policy remains continuous, for Ankit Pandy the Indian Ocean, the Himalayas, and Southeast Asia will be the priorities (Pandy, 2019). India aims at forging ties with multiple states and at multiple forums, however, making alliance is still not in the cards, and India's grand strategy according to Jaishankar is 'Non-allied forever' (Tellis, 2021). Indian diplomacy under Modi is geared towards harnessing domestic development, which has infused pragmatism in foreign policy, however, the contour of engagements is determined by 'needs not ideologies' (V.Pant, 2024). In 2023 the hosting of G-20 showcased India's muscles to the world, and depicted India's readiness to share global responsibilities.

Challenges

While Modi aspires to attain a greater role for India in the evolving geopolitical landscape certain domestic as well as international constraints hobble India's way. Indian foreign policy has evolved in significant ways over the years, it has been "Modi-fied" (V.Pant, 2024), however, serious internal as well as external constraints are likely to limit India's power and influence. Following are some of those challenges

COVID-19

The major challenge for the Modi government in 2020 was COVD-19, which according to Jaishankar imperiled the foreign policy goals i.e security, welfare, and prestige. The year 2021 was the year of 'Vaccine diplomacy', as India under the rubric of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' and 'Neighborhood First' policy provided a substantial number of Covishield vaccines to neighboring

states excluding Pakistan. This initiative does enhance India's soft power in the region, however, the onset of the second COVID wave questioned India's domestic credibility.

Tricky International landscapes

During the outbreak of the Russia-Ukraine war in 2022, India's stance remained cautious. Some scholars consider that this conflict showed India's unpreparedness to tackle an international crisis of a large scale, however, for others it justified India's staunch realism. While the rest of the world was isolating Russia, Indo-Russian trade spiked and the EAM made clear to the world that the west should stop dragging the rest of the world to its conflicts. India has been skillfully playing this delicate balancing game, as its ties with the United States are also booming. 'India has thus managed to insulate its global engagement from growing turbulence' (V.Pant, 2024).

Domestic concerns

Scarce financial resources, intensifying security concerns, and domestic policy some of which generate international concerns are constraining Modi's freedom of action as well as international influence. These constraints hold the potential of frustrating India's vision of becoming 'Vishwa guru'. (Hall, 2022). India's international profile has also been tarnished by its oppression of minorities, crackdown on opposition, censoring the media, and allegations of sponsoring extra territorial killings, etc.

Tabular Summary

Aspect	Description
Tenure	First term 2014-19, Second term 2019-24
EAM	● Sushma Swaraj (2014-19): Actively use social Media to facilitate Indian diaspora, Effectively navigated the sensitive situations such as Doklam Standoff with China, Kulbhushan Yadav case, etc, set grounds for India's multi-alignment stance ● S. Jaishankar (2019-24): Advocated assertive stance in Indian foreign policy, skillfully defended India's position on key international issues, emphasized strategic autonomy and multi-alignment

Ideological Contour	Infusion of traditional Hindu concepts in Indian foreign policy such as projecting India's role as 'Vishwaguru'
Major Changes during 1st term	• Pragmatic, assertive, and realist foreign policy approach • Reinvigoration of 'Look East' policy to 'Act East' policy • Pragmatic integration of foreign policy with domestic interests • Expansions of bilateral partnerships particularly with the USA • Prioritization of maritime security through SAGAR initiative
Major changes during 2nd term	• Emphasis on Strategic autonomy and multi-alignment • Expansion of global role and strategic partnerships • Provocative engagements to enhance India's global standing • Vaccine diplomacy during COVID-19
Challenges	• COVI-19 • Managing Tricky international landscapes • Domestic Concerns

Modi 3.0?

With the largest and longest elections of the world going on in India, BJP and Modi plan to win a 'super majority'. Reuters has identified three key tactics employed by BJP to secure their target of 400 seats. These tactics include 'enlisting celebrity candidates to unseat veteran opposition lawmakers: assaulting opposition's southern strongholds by appealing to minorities and exploiting redrawn political boundaries that bolster Hindu electorate' (Agarawal, 2024). "Modi talks about the story of economic growth, and India rising. But people are not feeling that success story on the ground and in some places that has led to anger with the government", said Hannah in the Guardian newsletter.

‘New Welfarism’, a term articulated by economist Arvind Subramanian, has been an effective strategy of Modi’s popularity. Modi claims his government has spent 400 billion dollars on welfare programs in the past decade, delivering direct cash benefits to low income families and reaching over 900 million people. Similarly, a year handout of 6000 rupees to 110 million farmers constitutes one of the world’s largest cash transfers (Biswas, 2024). Hannah, however, criticizes and says “The BJP manifesto is titled ‘Modi’s Guarantee’. His picture is on the bags of food that people are given, and almost everything that people get from the state. But the spending on things that would have a long-term impact like health care and schools is not there” (Bland, 2024).

However, the victories in Indian elections are not determined by a single factor, also the impact of welfare initiatives on electoral outcomes is mixed. A study recently revealed that ‘ideology and identity politics are more important factors explaining BJP’s rising popularity’ (Pushkar Maitra, 2024). “Against a cult of personality, a messy coalition just is not enough. In the end, even if they are disenchanted many will still vote for Modi” (Bland, 2024).

Conclusion

While analyzing the evolution of Indian foreign policy, some baseline trends seem continuous. For example, India’s core ambition since independence has been to be ‘normative power’, which Ian Hall defines as a power which has authority and influence to define and shape norms and behaviours of international affairs (Hall, 2017). Stephan Cohen states “Whether a realist or an idealist, almost every member of the strategic community thinks that India’s inherent greatness as a power is itself a diplomatic asset. India’s ambassadors are expected to persuade foreign officials of the wisdom and moral correctness of the Indian position, say, by stating the Indian case and supplementing political arguments with information about India’s great civilization, its cultural and economic accomplishment and its democratic orientation.” Nevertheless, despite India’s ambition to lead the international order, ‘it has not been able to shoulder the required responsibilities or pay the cost of being a leader’ (Yogesh Joshi, 2020).

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