



# India's Foreign Policy in the Modi Era: Strategic Vision, Regional Dynamics, and Global Engagement.

**Sudheshna Kumar Muvva**

Research Scholar

Department of Political Science and Public Administration  
S.V.UNIVERSITY, TIRUPATI

*Abstract:* This paper examines India's foreign policy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi from 2014 to 2025, focusing on the dimensions of continuity, change, and strategic transformation. The study analyzes India's relations with neighbouring countries, regional organizations such as SAARC and ASEAN, major global powers including the United States, Russia, and the European Union, and its growing engagement with international institutions and multilateral forums. The research seeks to assess how the Modi government has reshaped India's foreign policy to address emerging geopolitical, economic, and security challenges in an increasingly complex global environment. The study employs a qualitative and analytical methodology based on secondary sources, including government documents, policy reports, academic literature, and international publications. It evaluates key foreign policy initiatives such as the Neighbourhood First Policy, Act East Policy, Indo-Pacific strategy, economic diplomacy, and strategic partnerships. The findings indicate that while India has maintained core principles such as strategic autonomy and national interest, the Modi era has witnessed a more proactive, assertive, and globally engaged foreign policy approach. Enhanced regional outreach, strengthened relations with major powers, increased participation in global governance, and a greater emphasis on economic and security cooperation have emerged as defining features of this period. The paper concludes that India's foreign policy under Narendra Modi represents a significant strategic transformation that has strengthened the country's position as an influential regional and global actor, while also presenting new opportunities and challenges for future policymakers.

*Index Terms -.* Narendra Modi, Foreign Policy, SAARC, ASEAN, Global Power

## I. INTRODUCTION

The election of Prime Minister Narendra Modi in 2014 marked a significant turning point in the evolution of India's foreign policy. As the leader of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP)-led National Democratic Alliance (NDA), Modi inherited a rapidly changing international environment characterized by shifting geopolitical balances, emerging economic opportunities, growing security challenges, and increasing multipolarity. Recognizing the need for India to play a more active role in global affairs, the Modi government adopted a dynamic and proactive foreign policy approach aimed at enhancing India's regional influence, strengthening strategic partnerships, and advancing national interests on the global stage. Consequently, Indian foreign policy during this period witnessed notable changes in both style and substance, while continuing to uphold certain traditional principles such as strategic autonomy, sovereignty, and peaceful coexistence.

Under Narendra Modi's leadership, India sought to redefine its international engagement through a combination of diplomatic activism, economic diplomacy, strategic partnerships, and participation in multilateral institutions. The government introduced and strengthened several foreign policy initiatives, including the Neighbourhood First Policy, Act East Policy, Indo-Pacific Vision, SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region), and enhanced engagement with the Global South. These initiatives reflected India's ambition to emerge as a leading power capable of shaping regional and global developments. Modi's personal diplomacy, characterized by frequent international visits, high-level summits, and direct engagement with world leaders, further contributed to raising India's profile in international affairs.

India's relations with its neighbouring countries remained a central pillar of its foreign policy agenda. The Modi government prioritized regional cooperation and connectivity while addressing complex challenges related to security, border disputes, migration, and economic integration. Relations with countries such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives witnessed varying degrees of cooperation and challenges, while relations with Pakistan and China continued to be shaped by strategic competition and security concerns. The government's emphasis on regional stability and connectivity highlighted the importance of South Asia in India's broader strategic calculations.

At the regional and global levels, India significantly expanded its engagement with organizations and forums such as SAARC, ASEAN, BIMSTEC, the G20, BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and the Quad. The Act East Policy deepened India's economic and strategic engagement with Southeast Asia, while the Indo-Pacific framework reflected India's growing interest in maintaining a free, open, and inclusive regional order. Simultaneously, India strengthened its strategic

partnerships with major powers, including the United States, Russia, Japan, Australia, and key European countries. These relationships were driven by shared interests in trade, technology, defence cooperation, energy security, and regional stability.

The period from 2014 to 2025 also witnessed significant global developments that influenced India's foreign policy choices. The rise of China, evolving US-China rivalry, Russia-Ukraine conflict, global economic disruptions, climate change challenges, the COVID-19 pandemic, and the increasing importance of emerging technologies created new opportunities and challenges for policymakers. India's responses to these developments demonstrated a pragmatic and flexible foreign policy approach that sought to balance competing interests while safeguarding national security and economic growth.

This research paper examines the evolution of India's foreign policy under the Modi administration from 2014 to 2025, focusing on the themes of continuity, change, and strategic transformation. It seeks to address several key research questions: How has India's foreign policy evolved under the Modi government? What are the defining characteristics of India's relations with neighbouring countries, regional organizations, and major global powers? How has India's role in international organizations and multilateral forums changed during this period? What are the broader implications of these developments for India's position in the emerging global order?

The study adopts a mixed-methods approach, combining qualitative analysis of policy documents, diplomatic initiatives, official statements, and scholarly literature with quantitative assessment of trade flows, foreign investment, defence cooperation, and strategic partnerships. By integrating these perspectives, the paper aims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the objectives, achievements, challenges, and implications of India's foreign policy under Narendra Modi.

The study argues that while India's foreign policy under the Modi government reflects continuity with traditional principles such as strategic autonomy and national interest, it also demonstrates significant transformation in terms of diplomatic outreach, strategic engagement, economic partnerships, and global leadership aspirations. The findings contribute to a deeper understanding of India's evolving role in international politics and its emergence as an increasingly influential actor in the twenty-first-century global order. The subsequent sections provide a detailed examination of India's foreign policy across various regions, institutions, and strategic dimensions.

## II. METHODOLOGY

**Methodology:** This study adopts a mixed-methods research design to analyze India's foreign policy under the Narendra Modi administration from 2014 to 2025. It combines qualitative analysis of official policy documents, government reports, speeches, diplomatic initiatives, and scholarly literature with quantitative assessment of trade relations, foreign investment, defence cooperation, and strategic partnerships. A comparative approach is employed to examine the continuity and transformation of India's foreign policy in relation to previous governments. The study also incorporates selected case studies, including India's relations with the United States, China, and Bangladesh, as well as its role in the Quad and G20. The research is based primarily on secondary data collected from government publications, international organizations, academic sources, policy reports, and credible media outlets to provide a comprehensive understanding of the evolving dimensions of India's foreign policy during the Modi era.

## III. INDIA AND NEIGHBORING COUNTRIES

India's relations with its neighbouring countries have remained a cornerstone of its foreign policy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Recognizing that regional stability and cooperation are essential for national security and economic development, the Modi government adopted the Neighbourhood First Policy, which seeks to strengthen political, economic, cultural, and strategic ties with South Asian countries. This approach reflects India's commitment to fostering regional integration, enhancing connectivity, promoting economic cooperation, and addressing shared security challenges. However, India's relations with its neighbours have been shaped by diverse opportunities and complex geopolitical realities, resulting in varying degrees of success across the region.

### India-Pakistan Relations

Relations between India and Pakistan have remained one of the most challenging aspects of India's foreign policy. During the initial years of the Modi government, efforts were made to improve bilateral relations through diplomatic engagement and confidence-building measures. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's surprise visit to Lahore in December 2015 was viewed as a significant gesture aimed at reviving dialogue and promoting peace between the two countries. However, the relationship deteriorated following a series of terrorist attacks, including the Pathankot attack (2016), the Uri attack (2016), and the Pulwama attack (2019). These incidents significantly increased tensions between the two countries and led India to adopt a more assertive security-oriented approach. The Indian government emphasized cross-border terrorism as the primary obstacle to bilateral relations and undertook measures such as surgical strikes in 2016 and the Balakot airstrike in 2019. Diplomatic engagement between the two countries has remained limited, with India continuing to advocate a policy of zero tolerance toward terrorism while maintaining pressure on Pakistan through international diplomatic forums.

### India-China Relations

India's relationship with China has been characterized by both cooperation and competition. As two major Asian powers, India and China share significant economic ties, with trade and investment relations expanding considerably during the Modi era. High-level diplomatic interactions and participation in multilateral platforms such as BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation have provided opportunities for engagement and dialogue. Despite growing economic interdependence, bilateral relations have been strained by longstanding border disputes and strategic rivalry. Tensions escalated significantly following the Doklam standoff in 2017 and the Galwan Valley clash in 2020, which resulted in the most serious military confrontation between the two countries in decades. These developments prompted India to reassess its China policy and strengthen its military preparedness along the border. Simultaneously, India enhanced strategic cooperation with like-minded countries through initiatives such as the Quad and the Indo-Pacific framework while continuing diplomatic efforts to manage border disputes and maintain regional stability.

### **India–Bangladesh Relations**

India-Bangladesh relations have emerged as one of the most successful examples of regional cooperation under the Modi government. The relationship has witnessed substantial progress in political, economic, and security cooperation. A major milestone was the implementation of the Land Boundary Agreement, which resolved longstanding border issues and demonstrated the commitment of both countries to peaceful dispute resolution. Cooperation has expanded in areas such as trade, connectivity, energy sharing, infrastructure development, and counterterrorism. Several cross-border transportation projects, rail links, inland waterways, and energy cooperation initiatives have strengthened bilateral connectivity and economic integration. Bangladesh has become one of India's most important development and strategic partners in South Asia. Nevertheless, issues such as the sharing of Teesta River waters, border management, and migration continue to require careful diplomatic attention.

### **India–Nepal Relations**

India and Nepal share deep historical, cultural, religious, and economic ties. The Modi government initially prioritized strengthening relations with Nepal through high-level visits, development assistance, and support during the devastating 2015 earthquake. These efforts were widely appreciated and contributed to a positive atmosphere in bilateral relations. However, relations subsequently faced challenges due to political developments surrounding Nepal's new Constitution and the border blockade controversy of 2015. These events generated anti-India sentiments within sections of Nepalese society and strained bilateral ties. In recent years, both countries have worked to rebuild trust through enhanced economic cooperation, infrastructure development, energy partnerships, and high-level diplomatic engagement. Connectivity projects, cross-border transmission lines, and hydropower cooperation have become important pillars of the relationship.

### **India–Sri Lanka Relations**

Sri Lanka occupies a strategically important position in India's maritime neighbourhood. Under the Modi government, India has sought to strengthen bilateral relations through economic cooperation, development assistance, cultural exchanges, and maritime security collaboration. India's approach has been particularly influenced by concerns regarding China's growing strategic and economic presence in Sri Lanka. A significant demonstration of India's commitment to Sri Lanka occurred during the country's severe economic crisis in 2022, when India provided substantial financial assistance, fuel supplies, food aid, and credit facilities. This support enhanced India's image as a reliable regional partner. Cooperation in maritime security, fisheries management, renewable energy, and infrastructure development has further strengthened bilateral relations.

### **India–Bhutan Relations**

Bhutan remains one of India's closest and most trusted partners in South Asia. The special relationship between the two countries is based on mutual trust, economic cooperation, and strategic partnership. Bhutan was among the first countries visited by Prime Minister Modi after assuming office, highlighting its importance in India's neighbourhood policy. Hydropower cooperation continues to be the foundation of bilateral relations, with India serving as Bhutan's largest development partner and trading partner. India has supported Bhutan's socio-economic development through investments in infrastructure, education, healthcare, and digital connectivity. The relationship has also gained strategic significance in light of evolving regional security dynamics and border developments involving China.

### **India–Maldives Relations**

The Maldives holds strategic importance in India's Indian Ocean policy due to its geographical location along major maritime routes. Relations experienced challenges during the presidency of Abdulla Yameen, when concerns arose regarding increasing Chinese influence in the island nation. However, bilateral relations improved considerably following political changes in the Maldives. India has since expanded cooperation in areas such as defense, maritime security, infrastructure development, disaster management, healthcare, and connectivity. Through initiatives such as the Greater Male Connectivity Project and various development assistance programs, India has strengthened its role as a key partner in the Maldives. The relationship also reflects India's broader objective of ensuring security and stability in the Indian Ocean Region.

### **India–Afghanistan Relations**

Afghanistan has long been an important component of India's regional strategy. Before 2021, India invested heavily in Afghanistan's reconstruction and development through infrastructure projects, educational programs, healthcare initiatives, and capacity-building efforts. Major projects such as the Afghan Parliament building and the Salma Dam symbolized India's developmental partnership with Afghanistan. The Taliban's return to power in 2021 created new challenges for Indian foreign policy. India was compelled to reassess its engagement strategy while protecting its security and strategic interests. Humanitarian assistance, diplomatic outreach, and regional consultations have remained central to India's approach. The evolving political situation in Afghanistan continues to influence India's regional security calculations, particularly concerning terrorism, regional stability, and connectivity initiatives.

The Modi government's policy toward neighbouring countries reflects a combination of continuity and innovation. Through the Neighbourhood First Policy, India has sought to enhance regional cooperation, strengthen economic integration, improve connectivity, and address common security challenges. While relations with countries such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives have generally strengthened, ties with Pakistan and China continue to be shaped by security concerns and strategic competition. Overall, India's engagement with its neighbours demonstrates its aspiration to emerge as a responsible regional leader while safeguarding national interests and promoting stability and development across South Asia.

## **IV. INDIA'S REGIONAL DIPLOMACY AND MULTILATERAL ENGAGEMENT**

Regional cooperation has been an important component of India's foreign policy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi. Recognizing the importance of regional integration, connectivity, economic development, and collective security, the Modi government has actively engaged with regional organizations and multilateral platforms. India's approach has reflected a pragmatic strategy that seeks to strengthen regional partnerships while promoting its broader geopolitical and economic interests.

### **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)**

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has traditionally served as the primary platform for regional cooperation in South Asia. At the beginning of his tenure in 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi signaled the importance of regional diplomacy by inviting the heads of government of all SAARC member states to his swearing-in ceremony. This initiative was widely viewed as a strong commitment to regional cooperation and the revitalization of SAARC.

However, the effectiveness of SAARC has been constrained by persistent political tensions between India and Pakistan. Cross-border terrorism, security concerns, and diplomatic disagreements have limited the organization's ability to function effectively. The cancellation of the 2016 SAARC Summit in Islamabad further highlighted the challenges facing regional cooperation within the SAARC framework.

In response to these limitations, India has increasingly shifted its focus toward alternative regional and sub-regional mechanisms that offer greater opportunities for practical cooperation and economic integration. While India continues to support the objectives of SAARC, its emphasis has gradually moved toward more functional and result-oriented platforms.

#### Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC)

BIMSTEC has emerged as a key pillar of India's regional strategy under the Modi government. The organization connects South Asia and Southeast Asia through member countries located around the Bay of Bengal, including Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Thailand.

India views BIMSTEC as an effective platform for promoting regional connectivity, economic cooperation, energy security, maritime collaboration, and counterterrorism initiatives. The organization aligns closely with India's Neighbourhood First and Act East policies, providing an institutional mechanism for enhancing regional integration.

The Modi government has actively supported BIMSTEC through high-level diplomatic engagement, infrastructure projects, transport connectivity initiatives, and security cooperation programs. BIMSTEC's growing significance reflects India's efforts to create a more dynamic regional architecture that is less affected by political disputes and more focused on development-oriented cooperation.

#### Association of Southeast Asian Nations (ASEAN)

ASEAN occupies a central position in India's Act East Policy. Since 2014, India has significantly expanded its engagement with Southeast Asian countries, recognizing the region's strategic importance in global trade, maritime security, and regional stability.

India's relationship with ASEAN has evolved into a Comprehensive Strategic Partnership, reflecting deepening cooperation across multiple sectors. Economic engagement has expanded through trade and investment flows, while connectivity initiatives have sought to improve physical and digital links between India and Southeast Asia. Projects such as the India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway illustrate India's commitment to enhancing regional connectivity.

Maritime security has become another important area of cooperation. As concerns regarding freedom of navigation and regional security have increased in the Indo-Pacific region, India and ASEAN have strengthened collaboration in naval exercises, maritime domain awareness, and disaster management. India's growing engagement with ASEAN demonstrates its commitment to maintaining a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based Indo-Pacific order.

#### Indian Ocean Regional Cooperation

The Modi government has also strengthened India's engagement with regional initiatives in the Indian Ocean Region. Through the SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) doctrine, India has sought to enhance maritime security, disaster response, economic cooperation, and sustainable development among Indian Ocean countries.

India has increased cooperation with island nations such as Sri Lanka, the Maldives, Mauritius, and Seychelles, while expanding its maritime partnerships with regional organizations. These efforts reflect India's ambition to emerge as a leading maritime power and a net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region.

#### Significance of Regional Engagement

India's growing engagement with regional organizations demonstrates its recognition that regional stability and prosperity are essential for national development and global influence. By strengthening institutions such as BIMSTEC and ASEAN while maintaining its commitment to SAARC, India has sought to create multiple avenues for regional cooperation. This multidimensional regional strategy has enhanced India's diplomatic influence and contributed to its broader vision of regional connectivity, economic integration, and collective security.

## V. INDIA AND MAJOR GLOBAL POWERS

One of the defining features of India's foreign policy under Narendra Modi has been the expansion and diversification of relations with major global powers. The Modi government has pursued a policy of strategic autonomy while simultaneously strengthening partnerships with multiple countries across different geopolitical blocs. This approach reflects India's aspiration to maximize its national interests in an increasingly multipolar world.

#### India–United States Relations

India–United States relations have experienced unprecedented growth during the Modi era. The bilateral relationship has evolved into a comprehensive global strategic partnership encompassing defense, security, technology, trade, education, healthcare, and people-to-people ties.

Defense cooperation has expanded significantly through agreements on logistics, communications, and military interoperability. Joint military exercises, intelligence sharing, and counterterrorism cooperation have strengthened security ties between the two countries. The emergence of the Quad, comprising India, the United States, Japan, and Australia, has further elevated strategic cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region.

Technology and innovation have become important pillars of the relationship. Collaboration in critical and emerging technologies, semiconductors, artificial intelligence, space exploration, and clean energy has enhanced the strategic significance of bilateral ties. Frequent high-level interactions between leaders have further strengthened mutual trust and cooperation.

#### India–Russia Relations

Despite changing global geopolitical dynamics, Russia continues to be one of India's most important strategic partners. The India–Russia relationship is rooted in decades of cooperation in defense, energy, science, and technology.

Russia remains a major supplier of defense equipment to India, and military cooperation continues to play a central role in bilateral relations. The two countries have also expanded cooperation in energy, particularly in the fields of oil, natural gas, and nuclear energy.

The Russia–Ukraine conflict created new diplomatic challenges for India. However, the Modi government adopted a balanced approach, emphasizing dialogue, diplomacy, and strategic autonomy while maintaining strong relations with both Russia and

Western countries. India's position demonstrated its commitment to pursuing an independent foreign policy based on national interests.

### **India and the European Union**

The European Union has emerged as an increasingly important partner for India in trade, investment, technology, and sustainable development. The Modi government has worked to deepen cooperation with the EU through strategic dialogues and efforts to revive negotiations on a comprehensive trade agreement.

Climate change, renewable energy, digital transformation, and supply chain resilience have become key areas of collaboration. The partnership has gained additional significance as both India and the EU seek to strengthen economic cooperation and diversify strategic partnerships in an evolving global environment.

#### **India–France Relations**

France has become one of India's closest strategic partners in Europe. Bilateral cooperation spans defense, maritime security, space technology, civil nuclear energy, and climate action. France has supported India's strategic interests in the Indo-Pacific region and has emerged as a reliable defense partner.

The two countries share common interests in promoting regional stability, combating terrorism, and strengthening multilateral cooperation. Joint military exercises and defense acquisitions have further deepened the strategic partnership.

#### **India–Germany Relations**

Germany remains one of India's leading economic partners in Europe. Cooperation has expanded in areas such as trade, manufacturing, renewable energy, climate change mitigation, vocational education, and technological innovation.

The India-Germany Intergovernmental Consultations have provided an important framework for policy coordination and economic cooperation. Both countries share a commitment to sustainable development, green technologies, and rules-based international order.

#### **India–United Kingdom Relations**

India and the United Kingdom have strengthened their partnership through enhanced cooperation in trade, education, defense, healthcare, and innovation. Negotiations for a comprehensive free trade agreement have reflected the growing importance of economic relations between the two countries.

The large Indian diaspora in the United Kingdom continues to serve as a vital bridge that strengthens cultural, educational, and economic connections.

#### **India–Japan Relations**

India–Japan relations have reached unprecedented levels under the Modi government. The partnership has been elevated to a Special Strategic and Global Partnership, reflecting deep cooperation across economic, strategic, and technological domains.

Japan has played a major role in financing infrastructure projects in India, including metro systems, industrial corridors, and the Mumbai–Ahmedabad High-Speed Rail Project. Both countries cooperate closely on maritime security, connectivity initiatives, and Indo-Pacific strategy.

Shared democratic values, economic complementarities, and concerns regarding regional stability have made Japan one of India's most trusted strategic partners.

#### **Significance of Relations with Major Powers**

The Modi government's engagement with major global powers reflects a strategy of multi-alignment rather than traditional alliance politics. By maintaining strong relations with the United States, Russia, Europe, Japan, and other key partners, India has enhanced its diplomatic flexibility and strategic influence. This balanced approach has strengthened India's position as an emerging global power capable of engaging constructively with diverse international actors.

## **VI. INDIA AND INTERNATIONAL ORGANIZATIONS AND FORUMS**

India's engagement with international organizations and multilateral forums has expanded significantly under the Modi administration. The government has actively utilized these platforms to advance national interests, strengthen global partnerships, and promote reforms in international governance structures.

### **United Nations**

India has consistently advocated comprehensive reforms of the United Nations, particularly the expansion of the United Nations Security Council to reflect contemporary geopolitical realities. The Modi government has intensified diplomatic efforts to secure India's permanent membership in the Security Council.

India has also played an active role in UN peacekeeping operations, sustainable development initiatives, climate negotiations, and humanitarian efforts. The country's leadership in establishing the International Solar Alliance has demonstrated its commitment to addressing global environmental challenges through multilateral cooperation.

### **G20**

India's participation in the G20 has become increasingly prominent during the Modi era. The country's presidency of the G20 in 2023 represented a major diplomatic achievement and provided an opportunity to showcase India's growing global influence.

Through the G20 platform, India promoted priorities such as inclusive growth, digital public infrastructure, climate resilience, sustainable development, food security, and the interests of developing countries. The successful organization of the summit strengthened India's image as a bridge between developed and developing nations.

### **BRICS**

India remains an active member of BRICS, comprising Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. The organization serves as an important platform for promoting economic cooperation, development financing, and reform of global governance institutions.

India has used BRICS to advocate for a more equitable international economic order while simultaneously maintaining constructive relations with both Western and non-Western countries. Cooperation within BRICS has focused on trade, investment, innovation, health, and counterterrorism.

### **Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO)**

India became a full member of the SCO in 2017, marking an important step in its engagement with Eurasian regional affairs. Through the SCO, India has participated in discussions related to regional security, counterterrorism, connectivity, and economic cooperation.

Membership in the SCO reflects India's broader strategy of engaging with multiple regional institutions while maintaining strategic autonomy. The platform also provides opportunities for dialogue with Central Asian countries and other regional stakeholders.

### **World Trade Organization (WTO)**

India has adopted an assertive and proactive position within the WTO under the Modi government. The country has strongly defended the interests of developing nations, particularly regarding agricultural subsidies, food security programs, and special and differential treatment provisions.

India has also actively participated in negotiations concerning digital trade, e-commerce regulations, intellectual property rights, and global trade governance. The government's WTO strategy reflects its objective of balancing domestic developmental priorities with integration into the global economy.

India's active participation in international organizations and multilateral forums under Narendra Modi demonstrates its growing confidence and ambition in global affairs. Through engagement with the United Nations, G20, BRICS, SCO, WTO, and other institutions, India has sought to shape international agendas, promote reform of global governance structures, and strengthen its role as a responsible and influential global actor. These efforts have significantly contributed to India's emergence as a leading voice of the Global South and an increasingly important stakeholder in the evolving international order.

## **VII. THEMES IN MODI'S FOREIGN POLICY**

India's foreign policy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has been characterized by a combination of continuity with traditional diplomatic principles and innovation in response to emerging global challenges. The Modi government has adopted a more proactive, dynamic, and multidimensional approach to foreign affairs, seeking to enhance India's regional influence, strengthen global partnerships, and promote national development objectives. Several key themes have emerged as defining features of India's foreign policy during the period from 2014 to 2025.

### **Neighbourhood First Policy**

The Neighbourhood First Policy has served as one of the most important pillars of India's foreign policy under the Modi administration. Recognizing that regional stability and prosperity are essential for India's growth and security, the government has prioritized engagement with neighbouring countries in South Asia and the Indian Ocean region.

The policy aims to strengthen political cooperation, economic integration, infrastructure connectivity, people-to-people exchanges, and security collaboration. India has invested significantly in regional development projects, cross-border transportation networks, energy connectivity, and capacity-building initiatives. Development assistance, humanitarian aid, and disaster relief operations have further reinforced India's role as a responsible regional partner.

The Neighbourhood First Policy also reflects India's efforts to counter emerging geopolitical challenges and maintain regional stability amidst increasing competition from external powers. Through enhanced diplomatic outreach and development partnerships, India has sought to build stronger relationships with countries such as Bangladesh, Bhutan, Nepal, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and Myanmar.

### **Act East Policy**

The Act East Policy represents the evolution of India's earlier Look East Policy and reflects a more action-oriented approach toward Southeast Asia and the broader Indo-Pacific region. Under Modi's leadership, India has intensified its engagement with ASEAN member states and East Asian countries through expanded economic cooperation, strategic partnerships, and cultural exchanges.

A major objective of the Act East Policy is to strengthen connectivity between India and Southeast Asia through transportation corridors, digital infrastructure, maritime networks, and trade facilitation. Projects such as the India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway and regional connectivity initiatives demonstrate India's commitment to enhancing economic integration with the region.

The policy also has a strong strategic dimension. As geopolitical competition in the Indo-Pacific region has intensified, India has increased cooperation with countries such as Japan, Australia, Vietnam, Singapore, and Indonesia. Maritime security, freedom of navigation, and regional stability have become central components of India's engagement with East and Southeast Asia.

### **Strategic Autonomy and Multi-Alignment**

One of the most distinctive features of Modi's foreign policy has been the continuation and modernization of India's long-standing principle of strategic autonomy. Rather than aligning exclusively with any major power bloc, India has pursued a policy of multi-alignment, maintaining productive relations with diverse countries and institutions while preserving independent decision-making.

This approach is evident in India's simultaneous engagement with the United States, Russia, the European Union, Japan, the Gulf countries, and emerging powers. India has strengthened defense cooperation with Western countries while maintaining strong strategic and energy partnerships with Russia. Similarly, India has expanded its role in organizations such as the Quad, BRICS, SCO, G20, and the United Nations.

Strategic autonomy has allowed India to pursue its national interests flexibly, particularly during periods of geopolitical tension and global uncertainty. India's responses to issues such as the Russia–Ukraine conflict, Indo-Pacific security challenges, and global trade negotiations illustrate its commitment to maintaining an independent foreign policy.

### **Economic Diplomacy**

Economic diplomacy has become a central feature of India's foreign policy under the Modi government. Recognizing the close relationship between economic strength and international influence, the administration has integrated economic objectives into diplomatic initiatives and international partnerships.

The government has actively promoted foreign direct investment, trade expansion, technology transfers, manufacturing cooperation, and infrastructure development. Initiatives such as Make in India, Digital India, Startup India, and Atmanirbhar Bharat have been supported through international economic partnerships and investment promotion efforts.

India has also pursued trade and investment agreements with key partners while strengthening economic engagement with emerging markets. Bilateral and multilateral economic cooperation has been utilized not only to promote growth but also to enhance strategic influence and diversify supply chains in an increasingly interconnected global economy.

### **Indo-Pacific Vision**

The emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a major geopolitical and economic region has significantly influenced India's foreign policy under Modi. India has articulated a vision of a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based Indo-Pacific that promotes peace, stability, freedom of navigation, and respect for international law.

The Indo-Pacific framework has enabled India to expand strategic partnerships with countries such as the United States, Japan, Australia, France, and ASEAN members. The Quad has become an important mechanism for cooperation in areas such as maritime security, disaster relief, infrastructure development, cybersecurity, and emerging technologies.

India's Indo-Pacific strategy reflects both economic and security considerations, emphasizing connectivity, sustainable development, and regional cooperation while safeguarding national interests in the Indian Ocean and surrounding regions.

#### **Security and Counterterrorism**

National security has remained a major priority of Modi's foreign policy. The government has adopted a more assertive approach toward counterterrorism and national defense, particularly in response to cross-border terrorism and evolving security threats.

India has strengthened intelligence-sharing arrangements, defense partnerships, and military cooperation with numerous countries. The modernization of defense capabilities, expansion of strategic partnerships, and enhancement of maritime security have become important components of national security policy.

Counterterrorism cooperation has also been integrated into India's bilateral and multilateral engagements. India has consistently advocated stronger international action against terrorism and has sought greater cooperation through organizations such as the United Nations, G20, BRICS, and SCO.

#### **Diaspora Diplomacy and Soft Power**

The Modi government has placed unprecedented emphasis on engaging the Indian diaspora as a strategic asset in foreign policy. With millions of people of Indian origin residing across the world, the diaspora has become an important source of economic influence, cultural outreach, investment, and political goodwill.

Prime Minister Modi's large-scale interactions with overseas Indian communities have strengthened emotional and cultural connections between India and its diaspora. These engagements have enhanced India's soft power and contributed to strengthening bilateral relations with host countries.

In addition to diaspora diplomacy, India has utilized cultural diplomacy, yoga, Ayurveda, traditional knowledge systems, cinema, education, and democratic values to project a positive global image. The International Day of Yoga, recognized by the United Nations, has emerged as a notable example of India's successful soft power diplomacy.

#### **Climate Diplomacy and Sustainable Development**

Climate change and sustainable development have become increasingly important components of India's foreign policy under Modi. While emphasizing the developmental needs of emerging economies, India has also demonstrated leadership in promoting renewable energy and environmental sustainability.

A landmark initiative in this regard has been the International Solar Alliance (ISA), which seeks to promote solar energy adoption and cooperation among countries located in the tropical region. India has also committed to ambitious renewable energy targets and actively participated in international climate negotiations.

The government's climate diplomacy aims to balance economic growth with environmental responsibility. India has advocated climate justice, sustainable lifestyles, green technologies, and equitable burden-sharing in global climate governance. Through these efforts, India has positioned itself as a leading voice among developing countries on environmental issues.

#### **Technology and Digital Diplomacy**

In recent years, technology has emerged as a new frontier of India's foreign policy. The Modi government has emphasized cooperation in areas such as artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, digital infrastructure, semiconductors, telecommunications, space technology, and innovation.

India's success in developing digital public infrastructure has attracted international attention, and the government has promoted digital cooperation through bilateral partnerships and multilateral forums. Technology diplomacy has become an increasingly important tool for enhancing economic competitiveness, national security, and global influence.

The key themes of Modi's foreign policy reveal a comprehensive and multidimensional strategy aimed at enhancing India's role in regional and global affairs. Through the Neighbourhood First Policy, Act East Policy, strategic autonomy, economic diplomacy, Indo-Pacific engagement, diaspora outreach, climate leadership, and technological cooperation, India has sought to strengthen its position as an emerging global power. These themes collectively demonstrate a foreign policy that combines traditional principles with innovative approaches to address the opportunities and challenges of the twenty-first century international system.

## **VIII. CHALLENGES AND CRITICISMS OF MODI'S FOREIGN POLICY**

Despite several notable achievements, India's foreign policy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi has faced a number of challenges, constraints, and criticisms. These issues have emerged from regional security concerns, geopolitical competition, economic considerations, and the complexities of balancing national interests in an increasingly multipolar world.

### **Major Challenges and Criticisms**

#### **1. Managing Relations with China**

One of the most significant challenges has been balancing economic cooperation with strategic competition.

Persistent border disputes, particularly along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), have strained bilateral relations.

Incidents such as the Doklam standoff (2017) and the Galwan Valley clash (2020) exposed the limitations of diplomatic engagement.

Growing Chinese influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region continues to challenge India's regional leadership aspirations.

## 2. Stalled India–Pakistan Dialogue

Diplomatic engagement between India and Pakistan has remained limited due to concerns regarding cross-border terrorism.

The absence of sustained bilateral dialogue has reduced opportunities for conflict resolution and confidence-building measures.

Critics argue that prolonged diplomatic disengagement may hinder regional cooperation and stability in South Asia.

Frequent border tensions continue to affect broader regional integration efforts.

## 3. Balancing Strategic Autonomy and Multi-Alignment

India's commitment to strategic autonomy requires maintaining relations with competing global powers.

Simultaneously strengthening ties with the United States, Russia, Europe, Japan, and other partners often creates diplomatic complexities.

Global geopolitical conflicts, particularly the Russia–Ukraine war, have tested India's ability to maintain a balanced position.

Managing diverse partnerships without compromising national interests remains a continuing challenge.

## 4. Regional Influence and External Competition

Increasing involvement of external powers, particularly China, in South Asia has intensified strategic competition.

Infrastructure investments and economic initiatives by competing powers have challenged India's traditional influence in neighbouring countries.

Political changes within neighbouring states occasionally affect India's bilateral relations and regional objectives.

Maintaining leadership in South Asia requires sustained diplomatic and economic engagement.

## 5. Limited Effectiveness of SAARC

The South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) has remained largely inactive due to political tensions among member states.

India has increasingly relied on alternative regional platforms such as BIMSTEC.

The inability to fully utilize SAARC as an effective regional institution has limited prospects for broader South Asian integration.

## 6. Challenges in the Indo-Pacific Region

The evolving Indo-Pacific strategic environment has increased security and diplomatic responsibilities for India.

Balancing relations with ASEAN countries, Quad partners, and regional stakeholders requires careful diplomacy.

Rising geopolitical rivalry between major powers has complicated India's regional strategy.

Ensuring maritime security and freedom of navigation remains an ongoing concern.

## 7. Economic Diplomacy Constraints

While India has actively promoted economic diplomacy, several challenges remain.

Trade deficits with certain countries continue to raise concerns.

India's decision not to join the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) generated debate regarding its long-term trade strategy.

Critics argue that greater participation in regional trade arrangements could enhance India's economic integration and export competitiveness.

## 8. Energy Security Challenges

India's growing energy requirements necessitate diversified and secure energy partnerships.

Global energy market volatility and geopolitical conflicts have affected energy procurement strategies.

Balancing energy security objectives with climate commitments remains a significant policy challenge.

## 9. Global Governance Reform Obstacles

India has consistently advocated reforms in international institutions such as the United Nations Security Council.

Despite widespread support from several countries, progress toward permanent membership in the Security Council remains slow.

Resistance from existing power structures continues to limit reform efforts.

Achieving greater representation in global governance institutions remains a long-term diplomatic challenge.

## 10. Concerns Regarding Democratic and Human Rights Issues

Some international observers and organizations have raised concerns about the impact of certain domestic policies on India's global image.

Issues relating to democratic governance, civil liberties, and social cohesion have occasionally attracted international attention.

Such concerns sometimes influence diplomatic discussions and perceptions of India's soft power.

The government maintains that domestic policy decisions are sovereign matters and should not affect international cooperation.

## 11. Climate Change and Sustainable Development Pressures

India faces the dual challenge of sustaining economic growth while fulfilling international climate commitments.

Balancing developmental priorities with environmental sustainability requires substantial investments and policy innovation.

As a major developing economy, India must address increasing expectations regarding climate leadership and carbon reduction.

## 12. Technology and Cybersecurity Risks

Rapid technological advancements have introduced new foreign policy challenges.

Cybersecurity threats, digital governance issues, and technological competition have become increasingly significant.

Dependence on foreign technology and supply chains creates strategic vulnerabilities.

Ensuring technological self-reliance while maintaining global partnerships remains an important policy objective.

Although India's foreign policy under Narendra Modi has significantly enhanced the country's global visibility, strategic partnerships, and diplomatic influence, it continues to face numerous challenges. Managing relations with China and Pakistan, maintaining strategic autonomy, strengthening regional leadership, promoting economic integration, achieving global governance reforms, and addressing emerging technological and environmental issues remain critical priorities. Successfully navigating these challenges will be essential for sustaining India's rise as a major regional and global power in the coming decades.

## **IX. INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY IN THE EMERGING GLOBAL ORDER**

The trajectory of India's foreign policy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi suggests that the country is poised to play an increasingly influential role in shaping the emerging global order. As the international system undergoes significant transformations characterized by geopolitical competition, technological advancements, economic realignments, and climate-related challenges, India is expected to emerge as a key stakeholder in global governance and international decision-making processes.

### **India's Expanding Role in Global Governance**

India's growing economic strength, demographic advantage, technological capabilities, and strategic location are likely to enhance its influence in international affairs. In the coming years, India is expected to intensify its efforts to reform global governance institutions, particularly the United Nations Security Council, international financial institutions, and multilateral organizations. As a leading voice of the Global South, India is likely to advocate for a more equitable and representative international order that better reflects contemporary geopolitical realities.

India's successful leadership during its G20 Presidency demonstrated its capacity to build consensus among diverse countries and bridge the interests of developed and developing nations. This role is expected to expand further as India seeks greater participation in shaping global agendas related to sustainable development, climate action, digital governance, public health, and economic cooperation.

### **Strengthening Strategic Partnerships**

India's strategic partnerships with major powers are expected to deepen in both scope and significance. Relations with the United States, Japan, Australia, France, and key European countries are likely to expand through increased cooperation in defense, technology, cybersecurity, critical minerals, artificial intelligence, clean energy, and supply chain resilience.

The Quad is expected to remain an important platform for promoting regional stability, maritime security, disaster management, and technological cooperation in the Indo-Pacific region. At the same time, India is likely to continue maintaining productive relations with Russia, reflecting its commitment to strategic autonomy and diversified partnerships.

This balanced approach will enable India to maximize strategic opportunities while preserving policy independence in an increasingly competitive international environment.

### **Leadership in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region**

India is expected to further strengthen its leadership role in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region through enhanced connectivity, infrastructure development, economic cooperation, and security partnerships. The Neighbourhood First Policy and SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) doctrine are likely to remain central pillars of India's regional strategy.

As geopolitical competition intensifies, particularly with China's growing regional presence, India will seek to reinforce its influence through development assistance, humanitarian support, maritime cooperation, and regional integration initiatives. Strengthening relationships with neighbouring countries will remain essential for ensuring regional stability, economic prosperity, and national security.

### **Economic Diplomacy and Development Partnerships**

Economic diplomacy is expected to continue as a key instrument of India's foreign policy. The government is likely to focus on attracting foreign direct investment, expanding export markets, promoting technological innovation, and strengthening global supply chain integration.

India's aspirations to become a major manufacturing and innovation hub will require deeper engagement with international economic institutions, regional trade networks, and investment partners. Strategic economic partnerships will increasingly serve as tools for advancing both developmental and geopolitical objectives.

Energy security, digital infrastructure, critical technologies, and sustainable development are expected to become major priorities within India's external economic strategy.

### **Technology, Innovation, and Digital Diplomacy**

The future of India's foreign policy will be significantly influenced by technological developments. India is likely to expand international cooperation in artificial intelligence, semiconductors, cybersecurity, quantum computing, telecommunications, and space technology.

India's experience in developing digital public infrastructure has already attracted global recognition, creating opportunities for technological partnerships with both developed and developing countries. Digital diplomacy will become an increasingly important component of India's international engagement as technology assumes a central role in economic competitiveness and national security.

### **Climate Leadership and Sustainable Development**

Climate diplomacy is expected to remain a critical aspect of India's foreign policy. As one of the world's largest economies and a major developing country, India will continue advocating climate justice, sustainable development, and equitable burden-sharing in global climate negotiations.

Initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance and green energy partnerships are likely to expand, reinforcing India's position as a leader in renewable energy and sustainable development. India's ability to balance economic growth with environmental responsibility will significantly influence its global standing and international partnerships.

### **Emerging Challenges**

Despite its growing influence, India will face several challenges in the coming years. Managing strategic competition with China, addressing regional security concerns, responding to evolving geopolitical conflicts, ensuring energy security, and adapting to technological disruptions will require careful policy coordination.

Furthermore, India's ability to maintain strategic autonomy while deepening partnerships with multiple global actors will remain a complex diplomatic task. Successfully navigating these challenges will be crucial to sustaining India's rise as a major global power.

### Implications for India's Global Position

The future trajectory of India's foreign policy suggests a transition from a regional power to a leading global actor. India's growing diplomatic reach, economic capabilities, technological advancements, and active participation in multilateral institutions are likely to strengthen its influence across international political, economic, and security domains.

The success of India's future foreign policy will depend on its ability to balance national interests with global responsibilities, strengthen regional partnerships, promote sustainable development, and contribute constructively to international peace and stability.

## X. CONCLUSION

The period from 2014 to 2025 represents a transformative phase in the evolution of India's foreign policy under the leadership of Prime Minister Narendra Modi. During this period, India adopted a more proactive, confident, and multidimensional approach to international relations, reflecting its growing aspirations as an emerging global power. The Modi government's foreign policy has been characterized by dynamic diplomacy, strategic autonomy, enhanced regional engagement, expanded global partnerships, and a strong emphasis on economic development and national security.

A defining feature of this era has been the successful integration of traditional foreign policy principles with innovative diplomatic initiatives. While India continued to uphold core values such as sovereignty, strategic independence, peaceful coexistence, and non-alignment in decision-making, it simultaneously embraced a more active international role through initiatives such as the Neighbourhood First Policy, Act East Policy, SAGAR doctrine, Indo-Pacific engagement, and enhanced participation in global governance institutions.

At the regional level, India sought to strengthen its relationships with neighbouring countries through connectivity projects, development partnerships, humanitarian assistance, and security cooperation. Although challenges persisted in relations with Pakistan and China, significant progress was achieved in strengthening ties with Bangladesh, Bhutan, Sri Lanka, the Maldives, and other regional partners. These efforts reinforced India's position as a central actor in South Asian and Indian Ocean affairs.

India's engagement with major global powers expanded considerably during the Modi era. Strategic partnerships with the United States, Japan, Australia, France, Russia, and the European Union became increasingly important in advancing India's security, economic, and technological objectives. Through a policy of multi-alignment, India successfully maintained productive relations with diverse international actors while preserving its strategic autonomy and decision-making independence.

The Modi government's emphasis on economic diplomacy significantly enhanced India's global economic engagement. Foreign investment promotion, trade expansion, infrastructure development, technology partnerships, and energy security emerged as central components of foreign policy. Simultaneously, India's growing role in multilateral institutions such as the United Nations, G20, BRICS, SCO, and WTO demonstrated its commitment to shaping international norms and promoting reforms in global governance.

The administration also effectively leveraged India's soft power resources, including its diaspora, cultural heritage, democratic values, yoga, education, and developmental partnerships. Initiatives such as the International Solar Alliance highlighted India's willingness to contribute to global public goods and address shared challenges such as climate change and sustainable development.

Nevertheless, India's foreign policy continues to face significant challenges. Strategic competition with China, regional security concerns, evolving geopolitical rivalries, economic uncertainties, energy requirements, and technological disruptions present complex policy dilemmas. Managing these challenges while maintaining strategic autonomy and sustaining economic growth will remain critical to India's future success.

Overall, India's foreign policy under Narendra Modi reflects a significant shift from a relatively cautious international posture to one of active global engagement and strategic ambition. The period has witnessed the emergence of India as a more influential voice in global affairs, capable of shaping regional dynamics and contributing to international governance. By combining hard power capabilities with soft power resources, economic diplomacy, and multilateral engagement, India has strengthened its position as a leading power in the twenty-first century international system.

As global politics continue to evolve, the foundations established during the Modi era are likely to play a crucial role in determining India's future trajectory. The country's ability to translate its growing capabilities into sustained international influence will shape not only its own development but also the broader contours of regional and global politics in the decades ahead.

## REFERENCES

- Basrur, R. M. (2019). India's Pakistan policy under Modi: Paradoxical and pragmatic. *International Affairs*, 95(4), 801–817.
- Basrur, R. M., & Narang, V. (2017). Modi's foreign policy fundamentals: A trajectory unchanged. *International Affairs*, 93(1), 7–26.
- Bajpai, C. (2019). Revitalizing India's "Act East" policy. Observer Research Foundation.
- Chaisse, J., & Chakraborty, D. (2019). India in the global trading system. In D. M. Malone, C. R. Mohan, & S. Raghavan (Eds.), *The Oxford handbook of Indian foreign policy*. Oxford University Press.
- Chakma, B. (2019). Bangladesh–India relations: Sheikh Hasina's India-positive policy approach. Institute of South Asian Studies.
- Chaudhury, D. R. (2022). India–ASEAN ties: From Look East to Act East. *The Economic Times*.

- Dubash, N. K. (2019). *India's climate change policy: Towards a better future*. Oxford University Press.
- Hall, I. (2016). Multialignment and Indian foreign policy under Narendra Modi. *The Round Table*, 105(3), 271–286.
- Hall, I. (2019). *Modi and the reinvention of Indian foreign policy*. Bristol University Press.
- Horimoto, T. (2020). Indo-Japanese strategic partnership: A new era in Japan–India relations. *Asia-Pacific Review*, 27(1), 95–115.
- Jaishankar, S. (2020). *The India way: Strategies for an uncertain world*. HarperCollins India.
- Jaishankar, S. (2024). *Why Bharat matters*. Rupa Publications.
- Jha, H. B. (2020). *India–Nepal relations: Continuity and change under Modi*. Institute of South Asian Studies.
- Kapoor, N. (2022). *India–Russia relations in a changing world order*. Observer Research Foundation.
- Kapur, D. (2020). *Diaspora, development, and democracy: The domestic impact of international migration from India*. Princeton University Press.
- Kumar, A. (2021). *India and the United Nations: Challenges and opportunities*. Routledge.
- Madan, T. (2020). *Fateful triangle: How China shaped U.S.–India relations during the Cold War*. Brookings Institution Press.
- Malone, D. M. (2014). *Does the elephant dance? Contemporary Indian foreign policy*. Oxford University Press.
- Ministry of External Affairs. (2014–2025). *Annual reports*. Government of India.
- Mohan, C. R. (2015). *Modi's world: Expanding India's sphere of influence*. HarperCollins India.
- Paliwal, A. (2022). India's Afghan dilemma: Strategic interests, regional concerns. *Survival*, 64(1), 67–78.
- Pant, H. V. (Ed.). (2022). *India's foreign policy and security strategy under Modi*. Routledge.
- Saran, S. (2017). *How India sees the world: Kautilya to the 21st century*. Juggernaut Books.

