

# A Review of V.P. Dutt's India's Foreign Policy Since Independence: Understanding the Evolution of India's Diplomatic Outlook

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## Abstract

The intent of this review is to present a detailed overview of the book *India's Foreign Policy Since Independence* by V.P. Dutt. The book provides a clear and comprehensive understanding of how Indian foreign policy evolved over time. It explains the foundational motivations, guiding ideas, and principles that have shaped India's foreign relations since independence. Additionally, the book discusses the major challenges faced during different phases of policy formulation. Spanning 247 pages and divided into five chapters, the book offers an insightful look into India's diplomatic history—from the Nehruvian era to the policies under Dr. Manmohan Singh. First published in 2007 and printed at Rakmo Press Pvt. Ltd., New Delhi, this book is an essential text for anyone interested in post-independence Indian diplomacy.

**Keywords:** Indian Foreign Policy, Non-Alignment Movement, Post-Independence Diplomacy, Gujral Doctrine, India-US Relations

## Introduction

India's vast history and unique geographical position have significantly influenced the principles guiding its foreign policy. As a newly independent nation emerging from centuries of colonial rule, India had the monumental task of carving out its place in a bipolar world dominated by the Cold War. V.P. Dutt's book explores how India began crafting its foreign policy, particularly through its central role in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM).

The book covers the span of India's foreign relations from the Nehru era to the period of globalization under Prime Minister Manmohan Singh. It is divided into five chapters, each corresponding to a key period and leadership phase:

1. The Nehru Era
2. Foreign Policy under Indira Gandhi
3. Rajiv Gandhi and Foreign Policy
4. From Narasimha Rao to I.K. Gujral to Atal Bihari Vajpayee
5. Foreign Policy under Manmohan Singh

This structure helps readers grasp both the continuities and shifts in India's foreign policy across decades.

## Summary of the Book

### 1. *The Nehru Era*

The first chapter, *The Nehru Era*, outlines the principles and vision that shaped India's foreign policy under Jawaharlal Nehru. As both Prime Minister and External Affairs Minister, Nehru played a central role in formulating India's diplomatic stance. His ideas were deeply influenced by India's ancient civilizational values, the freedom struggle, and Gandhian philosophy. Nehru emphasized peaceful coexistence, anti-colonialism, non-alignment, and the importance of maintaining strategic autonomy.

Nehru believed in distancing India from Cold War power blocs. India joined the Commonwealth, not as a colonial legacy, but as a platform to safeguard its security and global standing. It actively promoted Afro-Asian solidarity and took a leading role in NAM, standing against both the Western and Soviet blocs. However, Nehru's policies were also tested during the 1959 Tibetan crisis and more seriously during the 1962 war with China, which exposed the limitations of idealistic diplomacy in the face of geopolitical threats.

This era also marked India's early commitment to multilateralism, visible in its active role in the United Nations and its support for disarmament. Nehru's foreign policy gave India a voice in the international arena, but it also highlighted the dilemmas of a moralist approach in a realist world.

### 2. *Foreign Policy under Indira Gandhi*

The second chapter begins with a brief discussion of Lal Bahadur Shastri's short but impactful tenure, especially his handling of the 1965 Indo-Pak war and the signing of the Tashkent Agreement. After Shastri, Indira Gandhi emerged as a powerful leader who left a distinct mark on Indian foreign policy.

Her leadership is most remembered for the 1971 Indo-Pak war which led to the creation of Bangladesh. India's recognition of Bangladesh and the signing of the Indo-Soviet Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation in 1971 were turning points. These events brought India closer to the Soviet Union and distanced it from the USA, which had sided with Pakistan.

Indira Gandhi demonstrated a pragmatic blend of realism and resilience in her approach. Her foreign policy was strategic and calculated. While she maintained India's non-aligned status, she also ensured that India's regional interests were protected. Her agricultural policy—especially the Green Revolution—though domestic in nature, enhanced India's global image as a self-reliant nation. Overall, her foreign policy combined flexibility with firmness.

### 3. *Rajiv Gandhi and Foreign Policy*

The third chapter explores how Rajiv Gandhi, as India's youngest Prime Minister, continued many of the ideological threads of Nehruvian foreign policy while introducing a more modern and development-oriented perspective. He emphasized technology, peace, and regional diplomacy.

His 1985 visit to the USA marked a renewed attempt at strengthening ties with the West. Rajiv was deeply committed to peace and nuclear disarmament. His foreign policy placed emphasis on South-South cooperation and building ties with neighbouring countries. A notable example is the peace agreement with Pakistan under Zia-ul-Haq, which served as a confidence-building measure.

However, some of his decisions, like sending the Indian Peacekeeping Force (IPKF) to Sri Lanka during the civil war, sparked debate within India. Despite the criticism, Rajiv's commitment to non-alignment and global nuclear disarmament remained consistent. His tenure can be seen as a transitional phase where India tried to modernize its diplomatic image without losing sight of its founding principles.

### 4. *From Narasimha Rao to I.K. Gujral to Atal Bihari Vajpayee*

Chapter four presents a dynamic shift in India's foreign policy. Under P.V. Narasimha Rao, India under-

took economic liberalization, which brought a new dimension to diplomacy. Now, foreign policy began to prioritize economic interests, trade relations, and strategic partnerships.

I.K. Gujral's "Gujral Doctrine" was a significant moment in regional diplomacy. It advocated for unilateral goodwill measures towards smaller neighbours without expecting reciprocity, showing India's maturity and responsibility in South Asia.

Atal Bihari Vajpayee's government introduced major strategic changes, especially with India conducting nuclear tests in 1998 and declaring a "no first use" nuclear doctrine. These moves were controversial internationally but domestically were seen as assertions of sovereignty and strength. Despite the nuclear posture, Vajpayee also pursued peace talks with Pakistan, including his historic Lahore visit in 1999. His approach blended realism with a willingness to engage diplomatically with adversaries.

### **5. Foreign Policy under Manmohan Singh**

The final chapter deals with foreign policy under Dr. Manmohan Singh. During the UPA period, India's foreign policy became more strategic, economically driven, and globally integrated. Singh focused on building stronger ties with the United States, culminating in the Indo-US Civil Nuclear Agreement. This marked a significant departure from traditional non-alignment and opened new doors for energy and defense cooperation.

India also worked to maintain stable relations with China and Pakistan, despite ongoing tensions. Dr. Singh's policies reflected the reality of global interdependence, where diplomacy involved political, economic, and strategic elements all at once. India's engagement in forums like BRICS, G20, and ASEAN indicated its growing presence in multilateral diplomacy.

Globalization had significantly changed the nature of foreign policy, and Singh's tenure reflected the need for India to adapt while staying true to its core values.

### **Evaluation**

The book offers a clear, chronological analysis of India's foreign policy from independence till the early 2000s. Written in a lucid style, it is suitable not only for students of political science and international relations but also for general readers interested in India's global journey. V.P. Dutt manages to combine narrative history with critical analysis, offering insights into both the personalities and the policy choices of various Indian leaders.

However, one shortcoming is that the book stops at 2007 and thus misses out on covering the significant developments under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's government, especially in terms of strategic realignment, digital diplomacy, and neighborhood-first policy. Furthermore, a thematic division—such as foreign economic policy, defence policy, and diaspora engagement—would have added analytical depth to the leadership-focused chapters.

Nonetheless, for understanding the foundational trajectory and evolution of India's foreign policy, Dutt's book is an important resource.

### **Conclusion**

V.P. Dutt's *India's Foreign Policy Since Independence* helps readers gain a well-rounded understanding of the evolution of Indian diplomacy over six decades. From Nehru's idealistic approach to Singh's strategic pragmatism, the book provides a clear picture of the transitions, continuities, and challenges that have shaped India's position in the world.

It is a recommended read for students of international relations, political science, and contemporary history, and also serves as a valuable reference for aspiring diplomats and policy practitioners. By

documenting how Indian foreign policy responded to changing global and domestic realities, the book successfully captures India's journey from a newly decolonized nation to an emerging global power.