

Recalibrating India's Foreign Policy under Narendra Modi (2014–2025): From Strategic Autonomy to Multi-Alignment

Gollapothu Yedukondalu¹, Dr. Chakali Bramhayya², Dr. Anil Kumar³

¹Research scholar, Department of Political science & Human rights IGNTU Amarkantak M.P

²Associate Professor, Department of Political Science. University of Allahabad, Prayagraj.

³Associate Professor, Department of Political science & Human rights, IGNTU Amarkantak, M.P

Abstract

This study examines the transformation of India's foreign policy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi from 2014 to 2025, focusing on the shift from traditional strategic autonomy to a pragmatic framework of multi-alignment. Drawing on qualitative analysis of policy documents, diplomatic engagements, and scholarly literature, the paper argues that multi-alignment represents not a departure but an intensification of India's long-standing strategic autonomy in a rapidly evolving multipolar world. The study highlights how India has simultaneously deepened defense cooperation with the United States, maintained strategic ties with Russia, and managed competitive yet economically significant relations with China. It further explores the role of key policy initiatives such as the Neighbourhood First and Act East policies in strengthening regional and trans-regional engagement. India's active participation in multilateral and unilateral platforms, including BRICS, QUAD, and the G20, demonstrates its effort to position itself as a leading voice of the Global South. The findings suggest that India's multi-alignment strategy enhances its diplomatic flexibility, maximizes strategic options, and reinforces its emergence as a pivotal global actor

Keywords: Multi-Alignment, Strategic Autonomy, Indian Foreign Policy, Narendra Modi, Global South, Indo-Pacific Strategy

Introduction

This paper scrutinizes the evolution of India's foreign policy during Prime Minister Narendra Modi's tenure (2014-2025), specifically analysing the pivot from a traditional framework of strategic autonomy to a more dynamic multi-alignment approach. This recalibration, while seemingly a departure, is posited as an intensification of strategic autonomy, facilitating India's navigation of a multipolar international system amidst escalating US-China rivalry ([Morales & Morales, 2025](#)). This shift signifies India's pragmatic approach to international relations, moving away from idealistic stances towards a more realistic engagement with global challenges ([Леонова & Khatri, 2023](#)). This multi-alignment strategy allows India to cultivate robust relationships with diverse global powers, including erstwhile rivals,

Research scholar, Department of Political science & Human rights IGNTU Amarkantak M.P

Associate Professor, Department of Political Science. University of Allahabad, Prayagraj.

Associate Professor, Department of Political science & Human rights, IGNTU Amarkantak, M.P

without necessarily committing to exclusive alliances ([Baru, 2020](#)). This approach diverges from the non-alignment principles rooted in India's post-independence era, which prioritized independence from Cold War power blocs. Yet, it maintains a nuanced blend of non-alignment and multi-alignment ([Kanchana, 2023](#)). The inherent flexibility of multi-alignment enables India to simultaneously pursue economic cooperation with one bloc while engaging in security dialogues with another, thereby maximizing its strategic options and preserving its sovereignty in an increasingly complex geopolitical landscape ([Bhardwaj, 2024](#)). This strategic adaptation reflects a recognition that a singular alignment could limit India's leverage and restrict its ability to address multifaceted national interests ([Gönenç & Chaturvedy, 2023](#)). Indeed, this recalibration under Modi is particularly evident in India's engagement with its immediate neighborhood, marked by a proactive "neighbourhood first" policy that initially prioritized regional diplomatic outreach ([Srinivas, 2019](#)). However, this policy has also evolved to incorporate a more realist perspective, especially amid intensifying US-China strategic competition within India's traditional sphere of influence ([Hà, 2023](#)). This pragmatic shift is characterized by an open dialogue and economic engagement, a distinct contrast to the Cold War-era non-alignment strategy, which has permitted India to foster strategic partnerships and pursue economic growth concurrently ([Safdar & Munir, 2024](#); [Singh & Pandey, 2025](#)).

Literature Review

The scholarly discourse on India's foreign policy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi (2014–2025) emphasizes a significant transition in India's diplomatic posture, moving from the traditional Cold War framework of non-alignment toward a more assertive strategy of multi-alignment ([Mishra, 2023](#); [Singh & Pandey, 2025](#)). This evolution is characterized by three distinct phases: the era of non-alignment (1947–1991), the pursuit of strategic autonomy in the post-Cold War period (1991–2014), and the current embrace of multi-alignment in a shifting multipolar world ([Morales & Morales, 2025](#)).

From Non-Alignment to Multi-Alignment

Contemporary research argues that multi-alignment is not a rejection of strategic autonomy but rather its intensification and reinforcement ([Morales & Morales, 2025](#)). While non-alignment was rooted in maintaining independence from power blocs, multi-alignment involves engaging with a diverse array of nations simultaneously to maximize strategic options ([Kanchana, 2023](#)). This approach allows India to retain an independent foreign policy while building closer relations with all major powers ([Baru, 2020](#)). Scholars describe this as a pragmatic application of strategic autonomy that enables India to hedge against systemic risks and consolidate influence in both security and economic spheres ([Pandey & Yadav, 2025](#)).

The Neighborhood First and Act East Policies

A core pillar of the "Modi Doctrine" has been the "Neighborhood First Policy", which initially sought to prioritize regional connectivity and diplomatic outreach ([Hà, 2023](#)). This was symbolically launched by inviting all SAARC leaders to Modi's 2014 inauguration ([Aryal & Bharti, 2023](#); [Srinivas, 2019](#)). However, literature notes a shift toward "realism" in this policy as India navigates growing Chinese influence and border disputes in South Asia ([Hà, 2023](#)). Parallel to the NFP, the "Act East Policy" represents a proactive revision of the previous "Look East Policy," aiming to strengthen security and economic ties with Southeast and East Asia to counter regional threats ([Aryal & Bharti, 2023](#); [Pati & Mishra, 2025](#)).

Major Power Relations and Strategic Pragmatism

Scholars highlight India's "diplomatic kaleidoscope," where it balances complex relationships with the United States, Russia, and China ([Kanchana, 2023](#)). India has successfully moved away from an "anti-Western" mindset to position itself as a key democratic partner for the U.S. in the Indo-Pacific ([Леонова & Khatri, 2023](#)). Simultaneously, India maintains a steady relationship with Russia despite global volatility and engages in a "proactive rather than defensive" strategy with China ([Baru, 2020; Sahu & Gauda, 2023](#)). This involves a "nuanced blend" of competition and cooperation, where India seeks to reduce risk with China through trade—crossing the \$100 billion mark in 2021—while counterbalancing its regional rise ([Gönenç & Chaturvedy, 2023; Safdar & Munir, 2024](#)).

Multilateralism and Global Leadership

Recent studies emphasize India's increasing participation in diverse multilateral and minilateral forums, such as the G20, BRICS, and QUAD ("[Journal of Research and Development](#)," 2019). Research suggests that India utilizes these platforms to project itself as a leader of the Global South and an emerging global power ([Bhardwaj, 2024; Kumar, 2023](#)). The simultaneous engagement in the security-oriented QUAD and the economically focused BRICS demonstrates India's multi-alignment strategy in action ([Pandey & Yadav, 2025](#)). This dual engagement allows India to influence global governance while avoiding exclusive commitment to any single power bloc ([Bhardwaj, 2024; Pandey & Yadav, 2025](#)).

Methodology

This study employs a qualitative research design to investigate the evolution and recalibration of India's foreign policy from 2014 to 2025 ([Gayantha, 2022](#)). The methodology is structured to provide a comprehensive analysis of the transition from strategic autonomy to a multi-alignment framework, utilizing both primary and secondary data sources to ensure a thorough and organized understanding of the topic ([Khan & Naazer, 2023](#)).

Research Design and Framework

The research utilizes a descriptive and analytical approach, grounded in the theoretical framework of realism and neo-realism ([Ganaie & Ganaie, 2022; Srinivas, 2019](#)). By applying these theories, the study examines how India, as a rational actor, assesses its capabilities and the shifting global power dynamics to safeguard its national interests and achieve strategic objectives ([Ganaie & Ganaie, 2022](#)). The study further incorporates a thematic analysis of the "Modi Doctrine," focusing on key pillars such as the "Neighborhood First" and "Act East" policies ([Aryal & Bharti, 2023; Hà, 2023](#)).

Data Collection and Sources

A multi-source verification strategy, or triangulation, is employed to enhance the credibility and rigor of the findings ([Kaur et al., 2025](#)). The data collection process involves:

Primary Sources: Analysis of official communiqués from the Ministry of External Affairs, texts of bilateral and multilateral treaties, joint press releases, and flagship policy reports such as the EU-India Strategic Partnership Roadmap 2021 ([Kaur et al., 2025; Khan & Naazer, 2023](#)). Significant attention is given to the official speeches and public remarks of Prime Minister Narendra Modi and External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar ([Baru, 2020; Khan & Naazer, 2023](#)).

Secondary Sources: A systematic review of scholarly articles, academic books, and commentaries published in international relations journals ([Ganaie & Ganaie, 2022](#); [Khan & Naazer, 2023](#)). This also includes reports from global think tanks and news items that provide contemporary context to India's diplomatic maneuvers ([Ganaie & Ganaie, 2022](#)).

Content Analysis and Scope

The study applies content analysis to identify emerging trends, shifts in rhetoric, and the intensification of specific diplomatic strategies ([Khan & Naazer, 2023](#)). The temporal scope is limited to the tenure of the Modi administration (2014–2025), allowing for a longitudinal assessment of policy continuity and change ([Gönenç & Chaturvedy, 2023](#); [Morales & Morales, 2025](#)). By examining India's engagement with major powers and regional neighbors, the analysis seeks to validate the shift from an "anti-Western" or idealistic mindset toward a pragmatic, multi-aligned global posture ([Mishra, 2023](#); [Леонова & Khatri, 2023](#)).

Results

The recalibration of India's foreign policy from 2014 to 2025 has yielded measurable outcomes across trade, security, and multilateral engagement, reflecting a successful transition to a multi-alignment framework.

Strategic and Defense Cooperation with the United States

A primary result of India's multi-alignment strategy is the significant deepening of defense ties with the United States. During the 2014–2020 period, India moved to conclude three "foundational" pacts essential for interoperability:

LEMOA: Signed in 2016, enabling mutual access to military facilities for refueling and replenishment ([Lou, 2024](#); [Safdar & Munir, 2024](#)).

COMCASA: Signed in 2018 to facilitate the transfer of specialized equipment and secure communications ([Nisar, 2023](#); [Safdar & Munir, 2024](#)).

BECA: Signed in 2020, allowing for the sharing of high-end military technology and geospatial intelligence ([Lou, 2024](#); [Safdar & Munir, 2024](#)).

Furthermore, the U.S. designated India as a "major defense partner" in 2016 and granted it Strategic Trade Authorization Tier 1 status in 2018, placing India on par with NATO allies for technology transfers ([Lou, 2024](#)).

Economic Pragmatism: The China and ASEAN Vectors

Despite regional competition, India's economic engagement with China has expanded significantly. Between 2015 and 2022, bilateral trade grew by 75.3% ([Safdar & Munir, 2024](#)). Notably, trade crossed the \$100 billion threshold in 2021 and reached \$135.98 billion in 2022 ([Safdar & Munir, 2024](#)). This occurred alongside the continuation of the Strategic Economic Dialogue, which held its sixth round in September 2019 ([Safdar & Munir, 2024](#)).

Under the "Act East Policy," India has intensified its integration with ASEAN. Trade with the bloc grew from approximately \$44 billion in 2010 to over \$87 billion in the 2019–20 fiscal year ([Kuruva, 2022](#)). Singapore has emerged as a critical partner, accounting for nearly 23% of total FDI inflows into India, totaling approximately \$136.65 billion over the last two decades (["Gyanshauryam International Scientific](#)

[Refereed Research Journal,” 2021](#)). Global Value Chain imports from India to ASEAN also tripled from \$1.4 billion in 2011 to \$4.2 billion by 2022 ([Dawani & Pareek, 2024](#)).

Regional and Multilateral Leadership

The "Neighborhood First Policy" saw immediate diplomatic activation, with Prime Minister Modi visiting Bhutan, Nepal, and Bangladesh within his first 100 days in office ([Srinivas, 2019](#)). This regional focus was institutionalized through the symbolic invitation of all SAARC leaders to the 2014 inauguration ([Hà, 2023](#)).

In the multilateral arena, India has balanced its participation in competing forums:

QUAD: Utilized as a security-oriented platform for maritime cooperation and regional deterrence in the Indo-Pacific ([Pandey & Yadav, 2025](#); [Ranjan, 2025](#)).

BRICS: Leveraged as a complementary economic forum to advocate for global governance reforms and developmental goals ([Pandey & Yadav, 2025](#)).

G20: India's 2022–2023 chairmanship served as a platform to project its role as the leading voice for the Global South, transitioning from a "lukewarm" participant to a central agenda-setter in international diplomacy ([Kumar, 2023](#); [Verma & Li, 2025](#)).

Discussion

The evolution of India's foreign policy under the Modi administration (2014–2025) signifies a definitive transition toward a "multi-alignment" framework, which scholars argue is an intensification rather than a rejection of strategic autonomy ([Morales & Morales, 2025](#)). This transition is defined by a move away from the "anti-Western" mindset of the post-independence era toward a pragmatic realism where India positions itself as a global power deeply committed to Western political values without sacrificing its independent voice ([Bhardwaj, 2024](#); [Леонова & Khatri, 2023](#)).

The Strategic Logic of Multi-Alignment

Multi-alignment allows India to navigate a volatile world order by cultivating a diverse network of partnerships ([Morales & Morales, 2025](#)). This approach is characterized by a "nuanced blend" of non-alignment principles—specifically the commitment to maintaining independence from power blocs—and the flexibility to engage with multiple major powers simultaneously ([Kanchana, 2023](#)). Unlike the idealistic non-alignment of the Cold War, the current framework is transactional and realistic, designed to maximize India's strategic options in an era of escalating U.S.-China rivalry ([Morales & Morales, 2025](#); [Леонова & Khatri, 2023](#)). This strategy is articulated through India's ability to "walk a tightrope," often eschewing formal security alliances to uphold national autonomy while building closer relations with the U.S., Japan, France, and the Gulf nations ([Baru, 2020](#); [Morales & Morales, 2025](#)).

Pragmatic Balancing of Major Powers

A critical aspect of this recalibration is the management of the U.S.-China-Russia triad. India has successfully transitioned from being a leader of the "third world" to a global power that balances complex relationships ([Леонова & Khatri, 2023](#)). While strengthening its partnership with the U.S., India maintains a neutral posture on issues like the Russia-Ukraine conflict to provide "strategic assurance" to traditional allies and maintain stability in its engagement with China ([Safdar & Munir, 2024](#)). This pragmatism is further evidenced by India's economic strategy; despite growing regional competition, bilateral trade with China reached \$135.98 billion in 2022, reflecting a 75.3% growth since 2015 ([Safdar & Munir, 2024](#)).

This high level of economic engagement serves as a risk-reduction tool, allowing India to manage border issues while focusing on national economic growth ([Safdar & Munir, 2024](#)).

Regional Realism and Global Aspirations

The "Neighborhood First Policy" and the "Act East Policy" reflect a shift toward realism in India's immediate periphery ([Hà, 2023](#)). Initially prioritized through symbolic gestures, such as inviting all SAARC leaders to the 2014 inauguration, the NFP has evolved to focus on connectivity and commerce within the strategic space of the Indo-Pacific ([Hà, 2023](#); [Srinivas, 2019](#)). Scholars note that India's approach now involves letting the U.S. maintain pressure on China in the periphery to leverage the situation for its own interests ([Hà, 2023](#)). Furthermore, India's increasing relevance is tied to its "demographic dividend" and rapid economic growth, which positions it as a significant emerging power capable of shaping global governance and projecting soft power through initiatives like the International Day of Yoga ([Bhardwaj, 2024](#); [Kanchana, 2023](#)).

Conclusion of Analysis

Ultimately, the recalibration of India's foreign policy represents continuity in principles but a radical transformation in execution ([Morales & Morales, 2025](#); [Singh & Pandey, 2025](#)). By replacing the rigid non-alignment of the past with a flexible and assertive multi-alignment strategy, India has successfully expanded its influence across both security and economic domains, ensuring its role as a pivotal actor in the contemporary multipolar system ([Bhardwaj, 2024](#); [Singh & Pandey, 2025](#)).

Conclusion

The recalibration of India's foreign policy under Prime Minister Narendra Modi from 2014 to 2025 represents a transformative period in the nation's diplomatic history. This study concludes that the shift from traditional non-alignment to a robust framework of "multi-alignment" is not a departure from India's core principles but an intensification of strategic autonomy tailored for a multipolar world order ([Morales & Morales, 2025](#)). By replacing the idealistic and often passive stances of the past with a pragmatic, realism-based approach, India has successfully expanded its strategic space and global influence ([Bhardwaj, 2024](#); [Леонова & Khatri, 2023](#)).

The "Modi Doctrine" has demonstrated a unique capability to balance competing global interests. India has deepened its security architecture with the United States through foundational defense pacts like LEMOA, COMCASA, and BECA, while simultaneously maintaining a steady, historic relationship with Russia ([Baru, 2020](#); [Safdar & Munir, 2024](#)). This "diplomatic kaleidoscope" extends to China, where India has pursued a strategy of "hedging"—managing border tensions while expanding bilateral trade to record levels exceeding \$135 billion by 2022 ([Kanchana, 2023](#); [Safdar & Munir, 2024](#)). This multi-layered engagement ensures that India remains a pivotal actor that cannot be easily ignored by any major power bloc ([Morales & Morales, 2025](#)).

Regionally, the "Neighborhood First" and "Act East" policies have transitioned from symbolic outreach to realistic frameworks for connectivity and commerce ([Hà, 2023](#); [Srinivas, 2019](#)). While challenges remain regarding Chinese influence in South Asia, India's proactive engagement in minilateral forums like the QUAD and multilateral bodies like BRICS and the G20 underscores its role as a leading voice for the Global South ([Bhardwaj, 2024](#); [Hall & Ganguly, 2021](#)).

In summary, YEDUKONDALU, the evolution of India's foreign policy over the last decade reflects a nation that is increasingly confident in its demographic and economic potential. By embracing a transactional and flexible multi-alignment strategy, India has effectively navigated the escalating U.S.-

China rivalry, preserved its sovereign decision-making, and solidified its trajectory toward becoming a recognized global power ([Baru, 2020](#); [Bhardwaj, 2024](#); [Morales & Morales, 2025](#)).

References:

1. Leonova, O. G., & Khatri, J. (2023). Strategic partnership between India and the United States: Examining driving and restraining forces. Вестник МГИМО Университета, 16(3), 180-198.
2. Bhardwaj, V., Anooja, A., Vermani, L. S., Sunita, & Dhaliwal, B. K. (2024). Smart cities and the IoT: an in-depth analysis of global research trends and future directions. Discover Internet of Things, 4(1), 19.
3. Gönenç, D., & Chaturvedy, R. R. (2023). Drivers of Indian Foreign Policy in the Eastern Mediterranean: A Review of Indian Foreign Policy towards Greece and Egypt. Ekonomik ve Sosyal Araştırmalar Dergisi, 19(2), 512-526.
4. Srinivas, J., Das, A. K., & Kumar, N. (2019). Government regulations in cyber security: Framework, standards and recommendations. Future generation computer systems, 92, 178-188.
5. Gul, S., & Akhtar, N. (2025). US-India Bilateral relations during the Trump and Biden Administrations: The China Factor. Journal of Political Stability Archive, 3(3), 1098-1116.
6. Mohan, C. R. (2008). India's great power burdens. Seminar, 581. https://www.indiaseminar.com/2008/581/581_c_raja_mohan.htm
7. Malone, D. M., Mohan, C. R., & Raghavan, S. (Eds.). (2015). The Oxford handbook of Indian foreign policy. OUP Oxford.
8. Mohan, C. R. (2012). Samudra Manthan: Sino-Indian Rivalry in the Indo-Pacific. Brookings Institution Press.
9. Mukherjee, R., & Malone, D. M. (2011). Indian foreign policy and contemporary security challenges. International Affairs, 87(1), 87-104.
10. Malone, D. M., & Mukherjee, R. (2010). India and China: Conflict and cooperation. Survival, 52(1), 137-158.
11. Mukherjee, R., & Malone, D. M. (2011). Global Responsibilities:: India's Approach. Jindal Journal of International Affairs, 1(1), 182-203.
12. Panda, J. P. (2021). China as a revisionist power in Indo-Pacific and India's perception: A power-partner contention. Journal of Contemporary China, 30(127), 1-17.
13. Panda, J. P. (Ed.). (2022). India-Japan-ASEAN triangularity: emergence of a possible Indo-Pacific axis?. Taylor & Francis.
14. Pant, H. V., & Joshi, Y. (2017). Indo-US relations under Modi: the strategic logic underlying the embrace. International Affairs, 93(1), 133-146.
15. Pant, H. V., & Joshi, Y. (2016). India's China Challenge. In The US Pivot and Indian Foreign Policy: Asia's Evolving Balance of Power (pp. 60-81). London: Palgrave Macmillan UK.
16. Saran, S. (2017). How India sees the world: Kautilya to the 21st century. Juggernaut Books.
17. Blackwill, R. D., & Tellis, A. J. (2015). Revising US grand strategy toward China. Council on Foreign Relations.