



Review Paper

## India's strategic and diplomatic priorities in the context of emerging multipolarity

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### Abstract

*The evolving transition from a unipolar to a multipolar international system has significantly reshaped global power dynamics and diplomatic engagement. In this changing environment, India has emerged as an important actor seeking to balance strategic autonomy with active global participation. This study examines India's strategic and diplomatic priorities in the context of emerging multipolarity, focusing on its evolving foreign policy framework, major power partnerships, regional diplomacy, and role in multilateral institutions. The paper analyses India's relations with key global actors such as the United States, Russia, the European Union, and China, alongside its engagement in the Indo-Pacific and its Neighbourhood First Policy. It also evaluates India's growing leadership within the Global South and its advocacy for reform in global governance structures. By adopting a multi-alignment approach, India aims to maximise strategic flexibility while safeguarding national interests in a competitive global environment. The study argues that India's diversified partnerships, development diplomacy, and active participation in international forums position it as an emerging system-shaping actor in the evolving multipolar world order.*

**Keywords:** Multipolar World Order; India's Foreign Policy; Strategic Autonomy; Multi-Alignment Strategy; Indo-Pacific Strategy; Neighbourhood First Policy; Global South Leadership; Multilateral Institutions; Global Governance Reform; Strategic Partnerships.

### Introduction

The global political order is currently experiencing a period of transition marked by the gradual redistribution of power among multiple influential actors. After the end of the Cold War, international politics was largely shaped by the dominance of a single superpower. Over time, however, economic growth in Asia, renewed strategic assertiveness by major states, technological competition, and shifting security dynamics have reduced the concentration of power in one centre. This evolving structure is commonly described as emerging multipolarity, where several states possess significant economic, military, and diplomatic influence, and global governance increasingly reflects negotiation rather than unilateral decision-making<sup>1</sup>. In such a changing environment, India's role has expanded considerably. As one of the world's largest democracies, a rapidly growing economy, and a country with substantial military capabilities, India occupies a strategic position in global affairs.

Its geographical location in the Indo-Pacific, demographic strength, technological advancement, and participation in major international institutions enhance its relevance in contemporary geopolitics. Unlike rigid alliance systems of the past, India today pursues a flexible foreign policy that enables engagement with multiple power centres while safeguarding national interests<sup>2</sup>.

A defining feature of India's external engagement is its commitment to strategic autonomy. While this principle has historical roots in the policy of non-alignment, it has evolved into a more pragmatic strategy often described as multi-alignment. India simultaneously deepens partnerships with Western democracies, maintains long-standing ties with Russia, engages constructively with regional neighbours, and advocates cooperation among developing nations.

This approach allows India to adapt to a competitive global landscape without being drawn into exclusive blocs<sup>3</sup>. India's strategic and diplomatic priorities are shaped by both opportunities and constraints. The rise of China, instability in neighbouring regions, economic interdependence, climate challenges, and reform of global governance institutions all influence India's policy choices. At the same time, multipolarity offers India greater space to exercise diplomatic leverage and assert leadership, particularly among countries of the Global South<sup>4</sup>.

This study seeks to analyse how India navigates this complex international environment. By examining its bilateral partnerships, regional strategies, and multilateral engagements, the research aims to understand how India positions itself as a significant factor in an emerging multipolar world order<sup>5</sup>.

## Evolution of India's foreign policy: from non-alignment to multi-alignment

India's foreign policy trajectory since independence reflects a gradual but significant transformation shaped by structural shifts in the global order and changing domestic priorities. Between 1947 and 1991, India's approach was guided by the doctrine of Non-Alignment. In the context of Cold War bipolarity, non-alignment was designed to protect India's sovereignty and decision-making autonomy by avoiding formal alignment with either the United States or the Soviet Union. It was rooted in anti-colonial solidarity, peaceful coexistence, and support for newly independent nations. The objective was not neutrality, but independent judgment in international affairs<sup>6</sup>. The end of the Cold War marked a decisive turning point. The collapse of the Soviet Union, India's 1991 economic liberalisation, and the expansion of global markets compelled policymakers to adopt a more pragmatic posture. During the period roughly between 1991 and 2014, the concept of "strategic autonomy" replaced strict non-alignment. India expanded relations with Western powers, especially the United States, while retaining defence cooperation with Russia. This phase reflected a transition from ideology-driven diplomacy to interest-based engagement, where economic growth, technology access, and security modernisation became central objectives<sup>7</sup>.

Since 2014, India's foreign policy has increasingly been described as "multi-alignment." Unlike Cold War non-alignment, which focused on distancing from power blocs, multi-alignment involves actively cultivating parallel partnerships with multiple, and sometimes competing, global actors. India simultaneously strengthens strategic cooperation with the United States, maintains long-standing defence ties with Russia, engages in regional platforms such as the Quad, BRICS, SCO, and BIMSTEC, and expands outreach to the Global South. This approach is flexible, issue-based, and transactional rather than ideological<sup>8</sup>. Several factors have driven this shift. First, the decline of unipolarity and the emergence of a multipolar world require states to diversify partnerships rather than rely on a single power centre. Second, India's rising global ambitions—including its aspiration for great power status and leadership among developing nations—demand proactive engagement. Third, economic security considerations, such as access to energy, supply chains, technology, and trade markets, encourage diversified diplomatic networks<sup>9</sup>. The defining characteristics of multi-alignment include dynamic partnerships, regional activism, and selective cooperation based on specific interests such as maritime security, digital governance, climate action, and defence modernisation. Importantly, India continues to avoid permanent military alliances, thereby preserving strategic flexibility<sup>10</sup>. Thus, India's foreign policy evolution reflects continuity in its commitment to autonomy, but change in its methods. In the contemporary multipolar order, India pursues a confident, interest-driven diplomacy aimed at maximising influence while safeguarding sovereignty<sup>11</sup>.

## India and the indo-pacific: maritime strategy and strategic balancing

The Indo-Pacific has emerged as one of the most strategically significant regions in contemporary geopolitics. Stretching from the eastern coast of Africa to the western shores of the Americas, the region hosts some of the world's busiest sea lanes, critical energy routes, and rapidly growing economies. For India, the Indo-Pacific is not merely a geographic concept but a central pillar of its foreign and security policy in an emerging multipolar order<sup>12</sup>.

India's interest in the Indo-Pacific is deeply linked to its economic and strategic priorities. A substantial portion of India's trade and energy imports passes through the Indian Ocean and adjoining maritime corridors. Ensuring the security of Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) is therefore vital for economic stability. Additionally, the increasing presence of China in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), through infrastructure investments and naval deployments, has intensified India's focus on maritime preparedness and regional partnerships<sup>13</sup>.

India's Indo-Pacific vision is guided by the principles of openness, inclusivity, respect for sovereignty, and adherence to international law, particularly the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS). Unlike bloc-based security arrangements, India advocates a free and rules-based regional order that accommodates multiple stakeholders. This reflects India's broader commitment to strategic autonomy while engaging actively in regional balancing<sup>14</sup>.

A key feature of India's Indo-Pacific strategy is participation in flexible, issue-based coalitions. The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), involving India, the United States, Japan, and Australia, plays a significant role in promoting maritime security, supply chain resilience, disaster relief coordination, and technological cooperation. Importantly, the Quad is not a formal military alliance but a platform for strategic consultation, aligning with India's preference for non-alliance partnerships<sup>15</sup>.

Beyond the Quad, India strengthens bilateral and multilateral ties with ASEAN countries, island nations in the Indian Ocean, and partners such as France and Japan. Initiatives such as the Act East Policy and the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) demonstrate India's effort to enhance connectivity, maritime cooperation, and sustainable development in the region<sup>16</sup>.

Strategic balancing is a central element of India's Indo-Pacific engagement. While India seeks constructive relations with China, it also enhances naval capabilities, expands defence exercises, and deepens cooperation with like-minded partners to deter unilateral actions that threaten regional stability. This dual approach—engagement combined with preparedness—reflects India's pragmatic response to a competitive multipolar environment<sup>17</sup>.

In conclusion, the Indo-Pacific represents both an opportunity and a challenge for India. By promoting a stable, inclusive, and rules-based regional architecture, India aims to secure its economic interests, counterbalance emerging threats, and strengthen its position as a key actor in shaping the future of the multipolar world order<sup>18</sup>.

### **India–China relations: Strategic competition, Security Dilemmas and Emerging Rivalry**

India–China relations are increasingly characterised by structural rivalry, persistent security concerns, and limited strategic trust. Although both countries are major Asian powers and members of multilateral platforms such as BRICS and the SCO, their bilateral relationship has been strained by an unresolved boundary dispute stretching approximately 3,488 kilometres along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). The absence of a mutually accepted boundary continues to generate friction, periodic confrontations, and long-term strategic uncertainty<sup>19</sup>.

Border tensions have intensified in recent years, particularly following the 2020 Galwan Valley clash, which marked a serious breakdown in confidence-building mechanisms. Subsequent incidents, including standoffs in eastern Ladakh and the Yangtse sector, have led to sustained militarisation on both sides. Infrastructure development, troop deployments, and forward positioning of military assets have transformed the LAC into a highly sensitive security frontier. Despite ongoing diplomatic and military-level talks, disengagement has been partial and slow, contributing to a persistent trust deficit<sup>20</sup>.

Beyond the border, geopolitical competition defines the broader relationship. China's expanding presence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region—through port development, connectivity corridors, and strategic infrastructure—has heightened India's security concerns. India perceives these initiatives as altering the regional balance of power. In response, India has strengthened ties with neighbouring states and enhanced participation in groupings such as the Quad. While India frames the Quad as a platform for ensuring a free and open Indo-Pacific, China often interprets it as part of a containment strategy<sup>21</sup>.

Economic ties add further complexity. China remains one of India's largest trading partners, yet the relationship is marked by a significant trade imbalance. India's growing trade deficit, which has crossed \$85 billion in recent assessments, has raised concerns about economic vulnerability. Consequently, India has adopted measures to reduce dependence, including tighter investment screening, restrictions on certain digital platforms, and promotion of domestic manufacturing under initiatives such as Atmanirbhar Bharat<sup>22</sup>.

Additional concerns extend to water security and technology. Chinese dam construction on the Brahmaputra River has created

apprehensions regarding ecological impact and downstream water availability. In the technological domain, India has excluded certain Chinese firms from critical telecom infrastructure and strengthened cyber security frameworks to mitigate risks of cyber intrusion<sup>23</sup>.

Looking ahead, India–China relations are likely to remain competitive and cautious. While both sides recognise the need to avoid escalation, deep structural mistrust and competing regional ambitions limit the scope for rapid normalisation. India's broader multipolar strategy—balancing deterrence, diversification of partnerships, and economic resilience—will continue to shape its management of this complex relationship<sup>24</sup>.

### **India–United States strategic partnership: deepening convergence in a competitive multipolar order**

By 2026, the India–United States strategic partnership has evolved into one of the most consequential bilateral relationships in the Indo-Pacific region. What was once a cautious engagement during the Cold War has now matured into a multidimensional partnership driven by strategic convergence, technological collaboration, defence co-production, and shared concerns about regional stability. However, despite this deepening alignment, the relationship remains shaped by India's enduring commitment to strategic autonomy and pragmatic balancing<sup>25</sup>.

A central pillar of the partnership is defence and security cooperation. The United States' designation of India as a Major Defense Partner marked a structural shift from a traditional buyer–seller relationship toward technology sharing and joint production. Recent developments reflect this transition. Agreements surrounding advanced platforms such as MQ-9B armed drones and collaboration on jet engine technology signal growing trust and operational integration. Moreover, defence exercises, interoperability frameworks, and secure communications agreements have strengthened military coordination. By 2025–2026, cooperation increasingly extends to emerging domains such as artificial intelligence, cyber defence, quantum computing, and semiconductor supply chains under frameworks like the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET) and related bilateral technology compacts<sup>26</sup>.

The Indo-Pacific remains the strategic core of India–US convergence. Both nations advocate a free, open, inclusive, and rules-based maritime order. Through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), alongside Japan and Australia, India and the United States coordinate on maritime domain awareness, infrastructure standards, supply chain resilience, and disaster relief mechanisms. While the Quad is not a military alliance, it serves as a platform to manage regional security challenges, particularly in light of China's assertive maritime posture<sup>27</sup>.

Economic engagement has also gained renewed momentum. Bilateral trade has expanded significantly, and recent arrangements aim to reduce tariff barriers and increase market access. Cooperation in supply chain diversification—particularly in semiconductors and critical minerals—has become central to reducing overdependence on single-country manufacturing hubs<sup>28</sup>. Space and scientific cooperation represent another emerging frontier. NASA-ISRO collaboration, including joint missions and satellite-based initiatives, reflects growing trust in high-technology domains. Cooperation in clean energy, climate resilience, and digital infrastructure aligns with India's development priorities while strengthening broader global governance frameworks<sup>29</sup>.

Despite these areas of deepening synergy, strategic limits remain evident. India continues to emphasise strategic autonomy as the guiding principle of its foreign policy. It avoids formal military alliances and refrains from adopting positions that may constrain independent decision-making. This has been visible in India's calibrated stance on global conflicts, including its continued engagement with Russia in defence and energy sectors despite Western pressure<sup>30</sup>.

Economic frictions also persist. Differences over tariff structures, intellectual property protection, digital trade regulations, and market access occasionally generate tension. While both governments demonstrate political will to manage disputes, structural divergences in trade philosophy and domestic economic priorities remain<sup>31</sup>.

Regional perspectives can also differ. Although both countries share concerns about China's rise, India's approach often emphasises managing competition and preventing escalation rather than outright containment<sup>32</sup>. By 2026, the India-US relationship is unlikely to evolve into a formal alliance structure. Instead, it functions as a pragmatic, interest-driven "quasi-alignment" characterised by strategic synergy without treaty obligations<sup>33</sup>.

In conclusion, the India-United States strategic partnership reflects the logic of contemporary multipolarity: states collaborate deeply where interests align but retain flexibility where differences persist. For India, the partnership enhances technological capability, defence preparedness, and global influence, while strategic autonomy ensures that engagement remains balanced and sovereign<sup>34</sup>.

### **India-Russia and India-European union relations: strategic diversification in a multipolar world**

In the emerging multipolar international system, India has adopted a calibrated strategy of diversified engagement. Rather than aligning exclusively with any single major power, India simultaneously sustains its long-standing "special and

privileged" strategic partnership with Russia while significantly expanding economic, technological, and security cooperation with the European Union (EU). This dual engagement reflects India's commitment to strategic autonomy and its pragmatic effort to balance security imperatives with economic modernisation.

**India-Russia Relations: Strategic Continuity and Security Imperatives:** India-Russia relations are anchored in decades of defence cooperation, political trust, and diplomatic coordination. Since the Cold War era, Moscow has served as a reliable defence partner, and even today a substantial portion of India's military inventory originates from Russian platforms. High-profile defence acquisitions, including advanced air defence systems and joint ventures such as the BrahMos missile project, demonstrate the continuing strategic depth of the relationship<sup>35</sup>.

Energy security has become another central pillar of cooperation, especially after global energy disruptions post-2022. Russia has emerged as one of India's major crude oil suppliers, providing discounted energy resources that help stabilise domestic markets. For India, this partnership is driven by national economic considerations rather than ideological alignment<sup>36</sup>. Maintaining diversified energy sources reduces vulnerability in a volatile global environment.

At the geopolitical level, both India and Russia share rhetorical support for a multipolar world order. They cooperate through multilateral platforms such as BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), and the G20, where they advocate greater representation for emerging economies and reforms in global governance institutions. However, the relationship has required careful recalibration. Russia's growing strategic closeness with China and the broader Russia-West confrontation creates structural complexities. Despite external pressure—particularly regarding the Ukraine conflict—India has chosen to preserve engagement with Moscow, emphasising dialogue and long-term strategic interests<sup>37</sup>.

Importantly, India has gradually diversified its defence procurement to avoid overdependence, increasing purchases from Western and indigenous sources. Thus, while the India-Russia bond remains significant, it is now embedded within a broader, more diversified foreign policy framework<sup>38</sup>.

**India-European Union Relations: Economic and Strategic Expansion:** Parallel to its engagement with Russia, India has significantly strengthened ties with the European Union (EU). The EU stands among India's largest trading partners, with bilateral trade in goods reaching approximately \$136 billion in 2024–25. This economic interdependence underlines the importance of Europe in India's growth strategy<sup>39</sup>.

India-EU relations have evolved beyond traditional trade discussions into a broader strategic partnership encompassing

technology, connectivity, climate action, and maritime security. Negotiations toward a comprehensive Free Trade Agreement have gained renewed momentum, reflecting shared interest in enhancing market access and regulatory cooperation. Cooperation in areas such as digital governance, green energy transition, data protection frameworks, and supply chain resilience indicates growing depth in technological and normative engagement<sup>4 0</sup>.

The EU's increasing interest in the Indo-Pacific aligns with India's regional priorities. Maritime cooperation, infrastructure standards, and sustainable connectivity initiatives demonstrate convergence beyond economics. Additionally, both India and the EU publicly affirm commitment to democracy, multilateralism, and a rules-based international order—though practical cooperation remains grounded in mutual benefit rather than ideological rhetoric alone. Unlike India–Russia relations, which are primarily security-centric, India–EU engagement is heavily driven by trade, technology, investment, and climate collaboration. Europe represents a source of advanced technology, capital inflows, and regulatory partnership that supports India's domestic modernisation goals<sup>4 1</sup>.

**Diversified Engagement and Strategic Autonomy** India's simultaneous strengthening of ties with Russia and the EU reflects neither contradiction nor inconsistency; rather, it embodies multi-alignment in practice. Russia contributes to India's defence preparedness and energy stability, while the EU supports economic expansion, technological advancement, and global governance cooperation. This balanced approach enhances India's bargaining power and reduces strategic vulnerability. By engaging across geopolitical divides, India avoids binary choices in a fragmented international environment. It leverages each partnership according to sectoral priorities—security with Russia, economic-technological advancement with the EU—while maintaining diplomatic flexibility.

### **India's neighbourhood first policy: pragmatic regionalism in a competitive multipolar order**

India's Neighbourhood First Policy (NFP) has entered a more pragmatic and outcome-oriented phase by 2026. While the policy initially emphasised goodwill, development assistance, and political engagement, recent shifts indicate a transition toward measurable strategic outcomes, deeper economic integration, digital connectivity, and enhanced maritime security. In an increasingly competitive multipolar environment—particularly with China's expanding regional footprint—India is recalibrating its regional diplomacy to ensure stability, connectivity, and strategic influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean Region<sup>4 2</sup>.

**From Outlay to Outcome: Budgetary Recalibration:** A key development in 2025–2026 has been the shift in India's regional

funding strategy. Instead of allocating broad, long-term assistance packages, the new approach links financial commitments to specific security and developmental objectives. This “outlay to outcome” transition reflects a more results-driven foreign policy, where development partnerships are assessed based on tangible impact—such as infrastructure completion, connectivity expansion, and economic interdependence<sup>4 3</sup>.

**Neighbourhood First 2.0: From Elite Diplomacy to People Diplomacy:** Political changes in countries like Bangladesh and Nepal have highlighted the need for a broader diplomatic approach. India is gradually shifting from traditional “Palace Diplomacy,” focused mainly on ruling elites, toward “People Diplomacy,” which engages civil society, youth groups, and opposition actors. This recalibration acknowledges the growing influence of democratic movements and social forces in neighbouring countries<sup>4 4</sup>.

**Connectivity and Digital Integration:** Connectivity remains central to India's regional vision. Infrastructure projects such as the Kaladan Multimodal Transit Transport Project and the operationalisation of the Chabahar Port strengthen India's access to Southeast Asia and Central Asia while reducing dependency on narrow transit corridors. The BBIN initiative further enhances cross-border trade, energy cooperation, and transport linkages<sup>4 5</sup>.

Digital integration has emerged as a new frontier of diplomacy. India is expanding its Digital Public Infrastructure model—often referred to as India Stack—into neighbouring countries. Linking digital payment systems such as UPI with partner economies promotes financial inclusion and economic interdependence. Such initiatives enhance India's soft power while embedding technological connectivity across borders<sup>4 6</sup>.

**Maritime Security and MAHASAGAR:** The launch of the MAHASAGAR (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions) initiative in 2025 reflects India's recognition of the Indian Ocean's growing strategic importance. This maritime framework strengthens coastal surveillance, disaster response, hydrographic cooperation, and naval coordination with regional partners<sup>4 7</sup>.

**Managing Strategic Competition:** China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) continues to shape regional geopolitics, especially in Sri Lanka, Bangladesh, and the Maldives. India's approach is not confrontational but competitive and capacity-building in nature. By accelerating its own infrastructure projects, offering transparent financing models, and deepening defence cooperation with island nations, India seeks to counterbalance external influence while avoiding direct rivalry narratives<sup>4 8</sup>.

At the same time, regional instability presents ongoing challenges. Myanmar's internal conflict complicates

connectivity plans. Political shifts in Bangladesh require diplomatic recalibration. In Nepal and Bhutan, hydropower cooperation remains both an opportunity and a negotiation-sensitive issue<sup>4 9</sup>.

**The Gujral Doctrine Revisited:** India's approach retains elements of the Gujral Doctrine—offering non-reciprocal concessions to smaller neighbours to build trust. As the region's largest economy, India recognises that asymmetric generosity can foster goodwill and long-term interdependence. This approach reinforces India's identity as a responsible regional leader rather than a hegemonic power<sup>5 0</sup>.

### India in multilateral institutions and global governance reform

In the evolving multipolar international system, multilateral institutions remain central platforms for shaping global governance. By 2026, India has strengthened its role within these institutions, positioning itself as both a reform advocate and a bridge between developed and developing countries. India consistently argues that global governance structures—particularly those created after 1945—no longer reflect contemporary geopolitical and economic realities<sup>5 1</sup>.

A major pillar of India's multilateral diplomacy is reform of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC). India maintains that the Council's current composition does not adequately represent emerging powers or developing regions, especially Africa. Having served as a non-permanent member during 2021–22 and being one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping operations, India continues to press for permanent membership. Along with Germany, Japan, and Brazil (the G4), India advocates expansion in both permanent and non-permanent categories to ensure equitable representation<sup>5 2</sup>.

India's engagement in the G20 has significantly enhanced its global profile. Following its presidency in 2023, India has continued to shape discussions on debt relief, climate finance, food security, and digital public infrastructure. India actively promotes the concerns of the Global South, emphasising inclusive growth and sustainable development. Its efforts to amplify developing-country voices have strengthened its identity as a representative of emerging economies<sup>5 3</sup>.

India is also an active member of BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO). The expansion of BRICS in recent years has reinforced its relevance as a platform for emerging powers seeking alternatives in global financial governance. Within the SCO, India engages on regional security, counterterrorism, and connectivity issues across Eurasia. Participation in both Western-led forums and non-Western groupings reflects India's policy of multi-alignment<sup>5 4</sup>.

Climate diplomacy and digital governance have emerged as additional areas of multilateral engagement. India advocates climate justice, highlighting the principle of common but differentiated responsibilities while expanding renewable energy initiatives. It also promotes digital public infrastructure models internationally, positioning itself as a technological partner for developing nations<sup>5 5</sup>. By 2026, India's multilateral approach combines reformist ambition with pragmatic participation. Through consistent engagement, coalition-building, and advocacy for institutional change, India reinforces its position as an independent and influential actor in the emerging multipolar order<sup>5 6</sup>.

### India and the global south: from balancing power to system-shaping leadership

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## Conclusion

India's strategic and diplomatic priorities in the context of emerging multipolarity reflect a carefully calibrated and adaptive foreign policy. From the evolution of non-alignment to contemporary multi-alignment, India has preserved its core principle of strategic autonomy while adjusting its methods to suit a changing global order. The Indo-Pacific has emerged as a central arena of engagement, where maritime security and strategic balancing shape India's regional role. At the same time, managing competition with China remains one of the most significant security challenges. India's deepening partnership with the United States demonstrates technological and defence convergence, while continued engagement with Russia and the European Union highlights diversified great-power diplomacy. Regionally, the Neighbourhood First Policy underscores the importance of stability, connectivity, and maritime security in sustaining India's rise. In multilateral forums such as the UN, G20, BRICS, and SCO, India seeks institutional reform and greater representation for developing nations.

A defining feature of India's 2026 foreign policy posture is its leadership within the Global South. Through development diplomacy, digital public infrastructure, climate initiatives, and inclusive governance advocacy, India increasingly acts as a bridge-builder in a fragmented international system. Overall, India is transitioning from a balancing power to a system-shaping actor. While challenges persist—particularly great-power rivalry, regional instability, and domestic constraints—India's multi-aligned, interest-driven strategy positions it as an

independent and influential force in the evolving multipolar world order.

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