

# India's Foreign Policy Evolution: A Study of Retrospect and Outlook

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## ABSTRACT

Climate change has profoundly influenced plant growth and reproductive development, particularly the regulation of flowering time, which is vital for crop yield and ecosystem stability. Fluctuating temperatures, altered photoperiods, drought, and elevated atmospheric CO<sub>2</sub> levels disrupt the environmental cues that synchronize flowering with favorable growth conditions. Plant hormones—such as gibberellins (GAs), abscisic acid (ABA), auxins, cytokinins, ethylene, jasmonic acid (JA), and salicylic acid (SA)—serve as central regulators in translating these environmental signals into adaptive physiological responses. Through intricate signaling networks and hormonal cross-talk, they modulate the timing and progression of flowering to ensure reproductive success under stress. Gibberellins generally promote floral initiation, while ABA often acts antagonistically under drought and heat stress, delaying flowering to conserve resources. Similarly, cytokinins, auxins, and ethylene coordinate floral meristem development and organ differentiation, maintaining reproductive balance. Climate-induced stress alters hormone biosynthesis, signaling, and degradation, leading to shifts in flowering phenology. Understanding these hormone-mediated adaptive mechanisms is crucial for breeding and engineering climate-resilient crops capable of sustaining yield under unpredictable environmental conditions. Moreover, integrating hormonal regulation insights into climate-smart agriculture—through genetic modification, marker-assisted

breeding, and exogenous hormone application—offers new pathways for sustainable crop management. Hence, elucidating the adaptive hormonal control of flowering time provides a foundation for enhancing agricultural resilience and food security in the face of accelerating climate change.

**Keywords:** India's foreign policy, strategic autonomy, geopolitical shifts, global governance, Indo-Pacific

## Introduction

### Historical Roots of India's Foreign Policy Before Independence

India's foreign policy does not emerge from a single moment but is rooted in a long civilizational past extending to ancient and medieval times, when India maintained peaceful and cultural exchanges with distant societies. However, the advent of British colonial rule altered these patterns. India's relations with neighboring regions such as Burma, Nepal, Afghanistan, and Tibet became dominated by colonial strategic interests. Nationalist leaders strongly criticized these imperial policies, urging instead an external approach built on sovereign equality and peaceful coexistence.

As early as 1855, the Indian National Congress condemned the British annexation of Burma. Bal Gangadhar Tilak, in a letter to the President of the 1919 Peace Conference, asserted that India had no imperial ambitions and wished only to protect the integrity of other nations. In 1921, the All-India Congress Committee passed its first broad foreign policy resolution, openly challenging the claim that the colonial government represented Indian interests. Another landmark statement came at the 1938 Haripura Session, emphasizing that India's global engagement was shaped by socio-political, economic, and cultural forces.

British rule also facilitated cultural and linguistic exchanges and fuelled exposure to Western political ideas. Even before 1857, emerging Indian elites began imagining the country as a modern nation-state. The 1857 uprising triggered deep changes in both colonial governance and Indian intellectual life, encouraging the growth of a Western-educated middle class. Over time, increasing numbers of Indians traveled abroad for higher education, returning with greater scientific and administrative knowledge (Bava, 2016). This period thus marked rising global awareness and the preliminary formation of India's external outlook.

After the First World War, India gained separate representation in international discussions, allowing its perspectives to be heard more clearly on the global stage and laying the groundwork for post-independence diplomatic orientation (Shrivastava, 2003). Indian leaders consistently emphasized peaceful coexistence, international friendship, and the rejection of imperialism and exploitation.

### **Nationalist Thought and the Independence Movement**

Mahatma Gandhi emerged as the most influential moral and political figure during the freedom struggle. The independence movement itself encompassed numerous ideological approaches—ranging from early moderate constitutionalists to more assertive nationalist leaders like Bal Gangadhar Tilak, Bipin Chandra Pal, and Aurobindo Ghosh (Van de Wetering, 2016). By the 1920s, the Indian National Congress adopted Gandhi's strategy of non-violence and civil disobedience as central methods of resistance (Chandra, 1989). These principles not only shaped domestic politics but also influenced the ethical foundations of India's later foreign policy (Ray, 2015).

### **Foreign Policy in Independent India**

#### **The Immediate Post-Independence Framework**

After independence, India needed to consolidate its territory while navigating a world polarized between two superpowers—the United States and the Soviet Union. India adopted non-alignment as a means of preserving strategic autonomy and avoiding entanglement in Cold War rivalries.

India also sought cordial relations with China and Pakistan and endeavored to build solidarity among newly decolonized nations facing similar challenges (Shrivastava, 2003). India's early foreign policy rested on the principles of peaceful coexistence, mutual respect, and negotiation. Nehru—its principal architect—set the tone for decades. Each subsequent government largely upheld these core principles, demonstrating a remarkable consistency in India's diplomatic posture (Chronicle, 2009).

#### **Jawaharlal Nehru's Vision**

Nehru firmly believed that foreign policy was inseparable from a nation's internal development. India's growing international prestige in the early 1950s stemmed from its neutral posture in the Cold War and its leadership in non-alignment (Van de Wetering, 2016). India's constructive role in the Korean War negotiations and the Indo-China settlement of 1954 strengthened its diplomatic reputation. The Panchsheel Agreement of 1954, signed with China, became a symbol of peaceful coexistence. Despite early goodwill, Sino-Indian relations deteriorated after 1955 over Tibet and border issues, ultimately leading to the 1962 conflict. Meanwhile, both the U.S. and USSR remained suspicious of India's non-aligned approach. Three major international gatherings also shaped India's worldview: the 1947 Asian Relations Conference, the 1955 Bandung Conference, and the 1961 Belgrade Summit. These forums reinforced India's support for the UN, anti-colonialism, racial equality, and the global struggle against nuclear proliferation (Shrivastava, 1809).

#### **The Shastri Era**

Lal Bahadur Shastri's period in office marked a shift toward a more practical and security-oriented foreign policy. Taking charge in 1964 after Nehru's death, Shastri emphasized continuity in India's commitment to democracy, peaceful coexistence, and development, but he also recognized the need for a firmer strategic posture (Malone, 2015). His government faced a difficult geopolitical environment in which China continued to take an unfriendly approach after the 1962 conflict, and the United States strengthened its support to Pakistan. This situation was further

complicated by the emergence of a Pakistan–China–Indonesia alignment that appeared openly hostile to India. Shastri responded by strengthening India’s defense capabilities and placing greater focus on relations within South Asia, believing that stable ties with neighboring countries would contribute to regional peace and limit external interference (Jaipur, 1971). His leadership during the 1965 war with Pakistan reflected a balance of restraint and resolve, demonstrating India’s willingness to defend its interests while still valuing diplomatic solutions.

### **Indira Gandhi and a Pragmatic Foreign Policy**

Under Indira Gandhi, India’s foreign policy grew more assertive, though it continued to rest on the foundational principles established earlier. Indira Gandhi viewed regional stability as essential, especially given Pakistan’s security behavior and the involvement of major powers in South Asian affairs (Ray, 2015). She therefore worked to maintain cooperative relations with Nepal, Afghanistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and the Maldives, recognizing that a safe and stable neighborhood was the best safeguard against external pressures. Her approach was pragmatic, blending non-alignment with decisive action when required. The India–US relationship also experienced recalibration, particularly after 1977, when efforts were made to develop a more equal and mutually respectful partnership. During this era, ASEAN, which had been created in 1967 to enhance economic and cultural cooperation among Southeast Asian states, began engaging more with India and encouraged broader regional participation (Shrivastav, 2003).

### **Rajiv Gandhi’s Continuity Approach**

Rajiv Gandhi’s period did not introduce drastic changes but rather reaffirmed the long-standing principles of India’s external engagement. He continued to stress faith in the United Nations, support for the Non-Aligned Movement, opposition to colonialism, and the need to reduce global inequalities. Rajiv Gandhi aimed to maintain balanced relations with both the United States and the Soviet Union at a time when global politics was undergoing transition (Betz, 2016). His foreign policy also reflected a desire to avoid intervention in the domestic matters of other

countries, and he made efforts to strengthen ties with immediate neighbors. India’s involvement through SAARC became more pronounced during his tenure, as he believed regional cooperation was essential for advancing peace, development, and mutual understanding among South Asian countries (Shrivastav, 2003).

## **Principles Of Indian Foreign Policy**

### **1. Policy of non-alignment**

India’s approach to foreign policy was profoundly influenced by its aspiration to serve as a champion of global peace and justice. This vision led India to adopt the policy of non-alignment—an independent and positive stance taken during the Cold War to avoid joining any military alliance. By staying outside the rival power blocs, India retained the freedom to evaluate each international issue objectively and express its position without external pressure. This independence allowed India to openly condemn various global injustices, such as the Anglo–French attack on Egypt, Soviet suppression in Hungary, racial discrimination in South Africa, colonial exploitation in Angola, the U.N.’s role in Vietnam, and Israeli aggression against the U.A.R. Nehru clarified India’s understanding of non-alignment by asserting that the country would not remain neutral when freedom or justice was endangered (Palmer and Perkins, 2007). Thus, non-alignment was rooted in moral autonomy and responsible global citizenship rather than passive neutrality (Kumar, 2016).

### **2. Panchsheel and the Principle of Peaceful Co-Existence**

Peaceful coexistence forms another essential pillar of India’s foreign policy. The idea rests on the belief that nations with diverse cultural traditions, religions, and political systems can live harmoniously if they respect each other’s core values and sovereignty. This philosophy was formally recognized in 1954 when India and China announced the Five Principles of Panchsheel as the foundation of their bilateral relationship (Malone, 2015). These principles include:

- (a) mutual respect for territorial integrity and sovereignty,
- (b) mutual non-aggression,

- (c) non-interference in internal affairs,
- (d) equality and mutual benefit, and
- (e) peaceful coexistence.

Panchsheel not only reflected India's civilizational ideals but also provided a practical framework for stable international relations in a world divided by ideological rivalry.

### **3. Commitment to Anti-Colonialism and Anti-Imperialism**

Having endured centuries of exploitation under British rule, India remained firmly opposed to colonialism in all its forms after independence. India championed the global struggle against economic and political domination and supported efforts to dismantle colonial structures across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. India extended moral and diplomatic backing to liberation movements in places like Indonesia and Libya and consistently opposed neo-colonial tendencies that sought to maintain indirect control over developing nations. India also advocated for a new and more equitable international economic order where developing countries would have fair opportunities for progress. This commitment led India to promote South-South cooperation, encouraging developing nations to rely on one another economically and politically, thereby reducing dependency on major powers (Betz, 2016 and Bava, 2016).

### **4. Opposition to Racial Discrimination**

India has long argued for the creation of a just global society free from racial, ethnic, or social discrimination. Believing that racialism is a major source of international conflict and a barrier to peace, India took strong positions against apartheid and racial segregation throughout the 20th century. It actively supported U.N. initiatives aimed at strengthening human rights protections and ensuring the fundamental freedoms of all people, contributing to global movements against racial inequality (Palmer and Perkins, 2007).

### **5. Promotion of World Peace**

India's foreign policy is deeply anchored in its belief in peaceful conflict resolution. India holds that negotiations, dialogue, and non-violent methods are the most effective ways to address international disputes. Guided by these ideals, India played constructive roles in several major

global crises, including the Korean War (1950), the Indo-China conflict (1954), the Suez Crisis (1956), and the Congo situation (1960). India also contributed troops and resources to numerous U.N. peacekeeping missions in regions such as Congo, Angola, Gaza, and Cyprus (Palmer and Perkins, 2007). Through these efforts, India established itself as a responsible actor committed to global peace and stability.

### **6. Faith in the United Nations**

India has always viewed the United Nations as a crucial institution for maintaining international peace and promoting cooperation. Since independence, India has consistently advocated that global disputes should be resolved peacefully through U.N. mechanisms. India's active participation in U.N. debates, peacekeeping missions, and committees reflects its belief in multilateralism and collective security as essential components of a stable international order (Van de Wetering, 2016).

### **7. Emphasis on Ethical and Pious Means**

A distinctive feature of India's foreign policy is its insistence on the use of moral, ethical, and transparent means to achieve diplomatic objectives. Rooted in India's philosophical and Gandhian traditions, this principle asserts that both goals and methods should reflect honesty, fairness, and respect for human dignity. India has consistently opposed deceitful or coercive strategies in international relations, arguing that genuine peace can only be achieved through upright conduct (Chaudhary, 2007).

### **Conclusion**

India's foreign policy has evolved through a dynamic blend of continuity and change, shaped by shifting global power structures, domestic priorities, and regional aspirations. From its early commitment to non-alignment and peaceful coexistence to its current pursuit of strategic autonomy, India has consistently adapted its diplomatic posture to safeguard national interests while promoting global cooperation. The rise of multilateral engagements, stronger economic diplomacy, and proactive participation in global

governance highlight India's transformation into a confident global player. Simultaneously, its focus on regional stability, energy security, technological partnerships, and diaspora diplomacy reflects a forward-looking approach suited to emerging geopolitical realities. As India navigates an increasingly complex world, its foreign policy will continue to balance moral principles with pragmatic strategies. This evolving trajectory positions India to contribute meaningfully to global peace, development, and a more equitable international order.

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