



---

## India's Role in a Multi Polar World: Balancing Global Powers

**Jyoti Rabi Das**

South Malda College, Malda

---

### ARTICLE DETAILS

---

#### Research Paper

Accepted on: 21-03-2025

Published on: 15-04-2025

---

#### Keywords:

*Strategic Autonomy, US-China Rivalry, BRICS+, G20, Global South*

---

---

### ABSTRACT

In the evolving multipolar world, India is strategically positioning itself as a key global player while maintaining its strategic autonomy amidst the growing tensions between the United States and China. As a rising power, India navigates the complexities of geopolitics by balancing its security and economic interests, engaging with the QUAD for regional stability while managing its trade and border disputes with China. Simultaneously, India actively participates in multilateral platforms like BRICS+ and the G20, advocating for a reformed global governance system and economic inclusivity. Moreover, India emerges as a leading voice for the Global South, championing issues such as debt relief, climate change, and sustainable development. By leveraging its diplomatic, economic, and strategic strengths, India aspires to shape global order while securing its national interests. This article explores India's evolving foreign policy, challenges, and opportunities in a multipolar world.

---

**DOI : <https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.15222962>**

---

### INTRODUCTION

The 21st century is witnessing the emergence of a multipolar world, where global power is distributed among multiple influential nations rather than being dominated by one or two super powers. In contrast to the bipolar order of the Cold War, which was characterized by the rivalry between the United States and the Soviet Union, and the subsequent unipolar moment led by the United States after the Soviet collapse, the current era sees the rise of multiple actors, including China, Russia, the European Union, and India. This shift has significant implications for global governance, security, and economic stability.



India has historically adopted a non-aligned and strategic autonomy-based approach in global affairs. During the Cold War, India played a key role in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) to avoid direct alignment with either the US or the USSR, ensuring policy flexibility in its national interests. In the post-Cold War period, India transitioned from a non-aligned posture to multi-alignment, engaging with multiple power blocs while preserving its sovereignty. The rise of China and a more assertive US foreign policy have further shaped India's approach, leading to deeper security and economic partnerships while maintaining an independent foreign policy. The transition from bipolarity to multipolarity is largely driven by the relative decline of US hegemony, the resurgence of China and Russia, and the rise of middle powers like India and Brazil (Mearsheimer, 2019). India's growth in global platforms like BRICS, G20, and the Quad reflects its increasing influence in shaping the new world order. As a key player in the Indo-Pacific, India's diplomatic and strategic engagements are central to balancing global power dynamics while ensuring its own national security and economic growth.

## **INDIA'S STRATEGIC AUTONOMY AMID US-CHINA TENSIONS**

### **Concept of Strategic Autonomy: From Non-Alignment to Pragmatism**

Strategic autonomy has been a cornerstone of India's foreign policy, ensuring that it retains decision-making independence while engaging with global powers. During the Cold War, India adopted a Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) stance, resisting alignment with either the US or the Soviet Union (Muni, 2009). However, in the post-Cold War era, India transitioned to a pragmatic multi-alignment strategy, balancing security, economic, and geopolitical interests (Pant, 2020). Today, India's strategic autonomy involves engaging with major powers while safeguarding its sovereignty, as seen in its relations with both the US and China.

### **Navigating US-China Rivalry**

India has strategically deepened its engagement with the United States to counterbalance China's growing assertiveness while maintaining its strategic autonomy. Defense and security cooperation between India and the US have expanded through key agreements such as COMCASA (Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement), LEMOA (Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement), and BECA (Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement), enhancing military interoperability and intelligence sharing. The QUAD (Quadrilateral Security Dialogue) has emerged as a critical framework for ensuring a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific, with India collaborating with the US, Japan, and Australia to counter China's expanding influence in the region. Economic ties have



also strengthened, with bilateral trade surpassing \$190 billion in 2023, making the US India's largest trading partner and reinforcing economic cooperation in technology, defense, and supply chain resilience. However, India's relationship with China remains complex, marked by persistent border tensions, particularly after the Galwan Valley clashes in 2020, leading to heightened military presence along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). Despite these tensions, China continues to be India's largest trading partner in goods, although India has actively pursued policies to diversify its supply chains and reduce dependence on Chinese imports. To counter China's growing influence in South Asia and the Indian Ocean, India has invested in regional connectivity and strategic infrastructure projects, including the Chabahar port in Iran and the SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) initiative, strengthening its presence in the Indian Ocean and providing an alternative to China's Belt and Road Initiative.

### **Indo-Pacific Strategy: Role in QUAD and Act East Policy**

India's Indo-Pacific vision focuses on maintaining a free, open, and rules-based order. Through QUAD, India collaborates with the US, Japan, and Australia on maritime security, technology, and supply chain resilience. The Act East Policy strengthens India's strategic ties with ASEAN nations, countering China's influence while enhancing regional economic and defense cooperation.

### **INDIA'S ENGAGEMENT WITH BRICS+ AND G20**

India's active participation in BRICS+ and the G20 reflects its growing role in shaping global governance and economic frameworks. As a leading voice of the Global South, India leverages these platforms to advance its economic and strategic interests while promoting a more inclusive and multipolar world order. The expansion of BRICS+ has enhanced India's influence in global economic cooperation. BRICS, originally formed by Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa, has expanded its scope with new members and partnerships, reinforcing its status as a counterweight to Western-led financial institutions. India has actively engaged in economic cooperation and trade, advocating for initiatives like the New Development Bank (NDB) to reduce dependence on traditional financial institutions such as the IMF and World Bank. India's push for a multipolar financial order is evident in its emphasis on trade in national currencies, reducing reliance on the US dollar. Despite tensions with China, India plays a balancing role within BRICS by fostering cooperation with Russia and Brazil while ensuring its interests are safeguarded. India's role in the G20 has been instrumental in shaping global economic policies. As the G20 President in 2023, India prioritized issues such as inclusive development,



digital transformation, and climate resilience. The Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) model, spearheaded by India, was presented as a blueprint for global digital transformation, emphasizing financial inclusion and technology-driven growth. Additionally, India championed debt relief measures for developing nations and advocated for a reformed global financial system to address disparities in economic growth. Through its Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam (OneEarth, One Family, One Future) vision, India sought to unify global efforts in sustainable development and equitable growth. By actively engaging in BRICS+ and G20, India has reinforced its position as a bridge between developed and developing nations, advocating for economic reforms while maintaining strategic autonomy. These engagements underscore India's vision for a fairer and more representative global order in the 21st century.

## CHAMPIONING THE GLOBAL SOUTH

India has positioned itself as a key advocate for the Global South, championing the concerns of developing nations in international forums. As a country with historical ties to post-colonial struggles and non-aligned policies, India

has consistently called for a more equitable global order that addresses economic disparities, climate challenges, and trade imbalances. Through its leadership in multilateral institutions and initiatives, India has emerged as a bridge between the Global North and South, advocating for debt relief, climate justice, and fair trade policies that protect the interests of emerging economies. The call for climate finance and technology transfers has been a key aspect of India's stance in climate negotiations, emphasizing the principle of Common but Differentiated Responsibilities (CBDR) in forums like the UNFCCC. Similarly, India has pushed for fairer trade terms in the WTO, countering protectionist policies that disproportionately affect developing nations. India's commitment to South-South cooperation is reflected in its development assistance programs and diplomatic initiatives. The India-Africa Forum Summit has strengthened ties with African nations through investments in infrastructure, healthcare, and education. In Latin America and Southeast Asia, India has expanded trade relations and technology-sharing agreements, promoting self-reliance and sustainable development. The International Solar Alliance (ISA), co-founded by India, exemplifies its efforts to address climate challenges by fostering renewable energy collaborations among Global South nations. Beyond bilateral initiatives, India has played a key role in advocating for reforms in global financial institutions such as the United Nations (UN), World Trade Organization (WTO), and International Monetary Fund (IMF). India has



consistently argued for the expansion of the UN Security Council (UNSC) to include permanent representation for developing nations, addressing structural imbalances in global governance. Similarly, India has emphasized the need for a more inclusive IMF quota system to better reflect the economic realities of the 21st century. Through these efforts, India has reinforced its commitment to a fairer and more representative global order, ensuring that the voices of the Global South are heard and acted upon.

## **CHALLENGES AND OPPORTUNITIES IN A MULTI POLAR WORLD**

India's role in a multipolar world comes with a mix of geopolitical challenges and strategic opportunities. As the global order transitions away from unipolar dominance, India must navigate regional conflicts, power rivalries, and economic re-alignments while capitalizing on its growing influence in global governance, trade, and innovation. One of the foremost geopolitical challenges India faces is border security and regional conflicts. Tensions with China, particularly along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), continue to pose security threats, with military standoffs like the Galwan Valley clash in 2020 underscoring persistent friction. Similarly, managing relations with Pakistan amid cross-border terrorism concerns remains a critical issue. In the broader Asian and African regions, India also encounters competition with China, which has expanded its influence through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) and infrastructure investments. India counters this through initiatives like the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) and defense partnerships with ASEAN nations, but challenges remain in maintaining regional stability. Despite these challenges, India has significant opportunities to assert leadership in global affairs. Strengthening strategic economic ties with major partners like the United States, European Union, and Southeast Asia enhances India's trade and investment prospects. The Make in India initiative and supply chain diversification efforts offer economic leverage, especially as countries seek alternatives to China for manufacturing. Innovation in technology, space, and renewable energy is another key area where India can lead. The success of ISRO's Chandrayaan-3 and Aditya-L1 missions positions India as a space power, capable of shaping global space governance. India's leadership in renewable energy is also growing, with its commitment to achieving net-zero emissions by 2070 and the expansion of the International Solar Alliance (ISA). Additionally, India has been advocating for global governance reforms, particularly in institutions like the United Nations Security Council (UNSC), World Trade Organization (WTO), and International Monetary Fund (IMF). India's push for a more inclusive and representative global order aligns with its broader foreign policy vision of strategic autonomy and multipolarity (Singh, 2022). These efforts reflect India's long-term goal of shaping global institutions to better reflect the interests of emerging



economies.

## CONCLUSION

India's role in the evolving multipolar world reflects its growing influence as a key player in shaping global politics, economics, and security frameworks. As power shifts from a unipolar to a more diversified global order, India has positioned itself as a bridge between developed and developing nations, advocating for inclusive growth, regional stability, and institutional reforms. With its strategic autonomy, India navigates complex international relationships while safeguarding its national interests. Balancing strategic partnerships and autonomy remains a crucial challenge for India. The deepening ties with the United States and the West, particularly in defense, trade, and technology, provide significant opportunities. However, India has resisted being drawn into formal alliances, preferring issue

based alignments that allow it to engage with multiple global powers without compromising its independence. Simultaneously, India manages its delicate relationship with China, balancing economic interdependence with regional security concerns, especially in the Indo-Pacific and along the Line of Actual Control (LAC). India's active participation in BRICS+, G20, QUAD, and the Global South reflects its commitment to multilateralism and economic diplomacy. It has played a leading role in pushing for global financial reforms, debt relief for developing nations, and equitable climate policies. Its Indo-Pacific strategy, through the Act East Policy and partnerships with ASEAN and Japan, strengthens its regional presence. In Africa, Latin America, and the Indian Ocean, India's development partnerships highlight its soft power and diplomatic outreach. Looking ahead, India's future road map in a multipolar world will focus on technological innovation, sustainable development, and global governance reforms. Advancements in space exploration, artificial intelligence, and renewable energy will bolster India's global standing. At the same time, its push for United Nations Security Council (UNSC) reform and greater influence in global institutions like the IMF and WTO will shape its diplomatic ambitions. As India moves forward, its ability to adapt to geopolitical shifts, strengthen economic resilience, and lead in global governance will define its success. With a pragmatic foreign policy and strategic foresight, India is poised to play a defining role in shaping the 21st-century multipolar world order.

## References:

1. Ganguly, S. (2019). *India's Foreign Policy: Retrospect and Prospect*. Oxford University Press.



2. Ikenberry, G. J. (2018). *The End of Liberal International Order?* *International Affairs*, 94(1), 7–23.
3. Mearsheimer, J. J. (2019). *The Great Delusion: Liberal Dreams and International Realities*. Yale University Press.
4. Joshi, M. (2021). *Understanding India-China Border Disputes: Historical and Contemporary Perspectives*. Routledge.
5. Mohan, C. R. (2021). *Quad 2.0: The Emerging Indo-Pacific Order*. Carnegie India.
6. Muni, S. D. (2009). *India's Foreign Policy: The Democracy Dimension*. Cambridge University Press.
7. Pant, H. V. (2020). *India's National Security: A Theoretical Perspective*. Oxford University Press.
8. Saran, S. (2023). *India's Global Strategy in a Multipolar World*. HarperCollins.
9. Singh, A. (2022). *India-China Trade and Strategic Challenges*. Observer Research Foundation.
10. Tellis, A. (2021). *Striking Asymmetries: US-India Relations in the New Geopolitical Order*. Carnegie Endowment.
11. Menon, S. (2023). *India and the G20: Shaping the Global Agenda*. Brookings Institution.
12. Pant, H. V. (2022). *India in a Multipolar World: Strategic Realignments and Global Challenges*. Routledge.
13. Saran, S. (2023). *India's Digital Diplomacy and Economic Leadership in G20*. HarperCollins.
14. Stuenkel, O. (2020). *BRICS and the Future of Global Order*. Lexington Books.
15. Bhattacharya, S. (2020). *India's Climate Leadership: The Role of the International Solar Alliance*. Oxford University Press.
16. Dubash, N. (2021). *India in the Global Climate Order: Politics and Policy*. Cambridge University Press.
17. Saran, S. (2023). *India's Role in Global Trade and Economic Diplomacy*. HarperCollins.
18. Singh, A. (2022). *Global Governance and India's Push for Institutional Reforms*. Brookings Institution.
19. Bhattacharya, S. (2021). *India's Energy Transition and Global Climate Leadership*. Oxford University Press.
20. Pant, H. V. (2022). *India's Strategic Challenges in a Changing World*. Routledge.
21. Rajagopalan, R. (2023). *India's Response to China's Belt and Road Initiative: Strategic Countermeasures*. Carnegie India.
22. Saran, S. (2023). *India's Role in the Global Economy: Trade, Supply Chains, and Innovation*. HarperCollins.
23. Singh, A. (2022). *Global Governance and India's Push for Institutional Reforms*. Brookings Institution.