

India's Foreign Policy: Navigating the International Community as a Rising Power

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Abstract

This research paper focuses on India's foreign policy and how India is shaping its role in the global order. India, a traditionally non-aligned country, is becoming a crucial player in the current great power rivalry between China and the US due to its strategic location, increased diplomatic efforts, and growing economic and military power. The research aims to answer the question of what characterizes India's foreign policy and the implications it has for India's place on the world stage. Previous research has highlighted India's strategic partnership with the US as a counterbalance to China's rise, but this paper goes further by examining India's diplomatic, military, and economic engagement with many countries as well as its national ambitions in a broader historical and geopolitical context. The evidence from scholarly work and government reports reveals that India's foreign policy involves a complex balancing act between the US and China using multi-alignment, while at the same time seeking to maintain its strategic autonomy. The findings of this research can provide a valuable case study for students, scholars, and policymakers seeking to understand the challenges and opportunities of great power competition in the 21st century and the evolving nature of India's foreign policy in an ever-changing global climate.

With a population surpassing China's by 2028, a member of the nuclear club, the world's third largest army, a growing economy, and with a strategic location in Asia, India seems to be ready to take its place among the world's leading nations. The question then arises: What characterizes India's foreign policy? This question is fascinating for several reasons. India's strategic location, growing economy, and military capabilities make it a crucial regional power with global influence and ability to balance its relations with multiple powers. The US-China rivalry has also intensified in recent years, and both powers have been actively courting India to gain strategic advantage. India's own ambitions for global leadership and its growing ties with other regional players add a layer of complexity and nuance to the great power dynamics. Considering all of these factors, my hypothesis is that India is seeking greater status in the global community, while balancing both China and the US, by engaging with the US through strategic autonomy and multilaterally with other strategic partners in the region and globally.

To answer this research question, I extensively examine India's foreign policy choices, focusing on key areas such as trade, security, and diplomacy, to understand how it has navigated its foreign policy. The research draws upon quotes from speeches made such as from the Minister of External Affairs of the Government of India Subrahmanyam Jaishankar. The paper also includes analysis of economic data from the IMF and OECD. Primarily, this paper relies on journals, books, news articles, scholarly articles, briefs, government statements, and analysis reports by thinktanks such as Center for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS). India's foreign policy is a complex mix of national interest, external factors, and continuous pragmatic assessments that make India open to employ many strategies.

The findings in this paper clarify India's role in the global balance of power. As India's economy and military capabilities grow, its strategic importance is increasing, and both China

and the US are actively courting India to gain strategic advantage. The research presented also extends to the broader issue of great power competition and its impact on the international system. The paper suggests that while great power competition is a critical factor in shaping international relations, it is not the only factor. The role of middle or rising powers such as India, and their ability to pursue their own interests and shape the international system, should not be underestimated. In this paper, I will first provide a short summary of India's current position in the global order and foreign policy, then I will explore the literature on India's foreign policy to identify the key factors that have shaped its foreign policy trajectory over the past few decades. I will then analyze how India's foreign policy is evolving with the international community with a focus on its relations with major powers such as the United States, China, and Russia. Finally, I will offer some insights and recommendations for how India can best navigate these challenges and advance its strategic interests in the years to come.

India's Engagement in the Global Order: A View from Above

India perceives itself as an actor aspiring to become a leading power while regarded as a "poor and middle power" (Ayres, 2018, p. 25). India does this by being a complicit actor in the liberal order and "while benefiting from the system, it has repeatedly underlined that the current structures of global governance are not representative enough of its concerns."¹ This is a behavior that "is typical of all rising powers"² because they find the current system "both enabling and constraining."³ Due to this duality of feelings, India's "principal strategy therefore has been to uphold certain venues of the current global order, while assailing others." Like the

¹ Harsh V Pant, *India and Global Governance*, 1st Edition (Taylor & Francis, 2022), 1–14, <https://www.taylorfrancis.com/books/edit/10.4324/9781003272540/india-global-governance-harsh-pant>.

² Pant, *India and Global Governance*.

³ Pant, *India and Global Governance*.

US's period of isolationism to becoming a superpower during the World Wars, India is changing from a period of "keeping a low profile in the international system"⁴ to "pro-actively shaping global outcomes."⁵ This shift in foreign policy and objectives, growth in India's economic and military profile in the wider Indo-Pacific,"⁶ as well as "the gradual shift in the balance of power from the West to the East" which "has introduced security competition among the major states," creates "a range of intrastate and interstate security challenges"⁷ for India to face.

How engagement with the US shapes India's foreign policy

We are in an era of polarity transformation from unipolar to another form of polarity and this puts the US in a dangerous position as the world hegemon. The narrative is that the US is approaching an age of decline as global hegemon and is therefore in need of another power to balance out China. India is the perfect option because China is a constraint on both US's and India's security and the furthering of their national interests. India in recent years has increased both its economic and diplomatic axis of power and is now considered a great ally of the US because of its increased engagement. This increased engagement has had a significant impact on its foreign policy. The relationship between the two countries has evolved from a traditionally lukewarm one to a strategic partnership, based on shared interests in security, trade, and democratic values. The US has become one of India's most important trading partners, and the two countries have collaborated on various security initiatives, including counterterrorism, defense, and intelligence sharing. India is also in a great geopolitical location for balancing out

⁴ Pant, *India and Global Governance*.

⁵ Pant, *India and Global Governance*.

⁶ Pant, *India and Global Governance*.

⁷ Pant, *India and Global Governance*.

China's sphere of influence by partnering with countries such as Japan and the US. As a result, India has increasingly aligned itself with the US on regional and global issues, such as the Indo-Pacific, the Quad, and climate change. India plays a unique position in securing both Asia's geopolitical and international balance through its diplomatic and economic efforts as well as its strategic geographical positioning in the Indo-Pacific region.

How engagement with China shapes India's foreign policy

India's engagement with China has also shaped its foreign policy because their relationships is a multifaceted and complicated one. India views China as an enormous security threat due to its military size and aggressive actions on the Tibetan border as well as its friendship with Pakistan. Apart from this continuous border disagreement, the relationship between the two countries has been characterized overall by a mix of cooperation and competition, with tensions over economic competition, and strategic influence. India has sought to balance its economic engagement with China because India and China are the two fastest growing economies in that region and they are competing for "markets, natural resources, commercial investment, and political influence in Asia and worldwide."⁸

The competition for economic influence and by proxy political influence, has created pressure for getting resources from Africa and controlling "Indian Ocean sea-lanes."⁹ This economic element is adding pressure to India which feels like a rising China is stifling the Indian economy and making "it harder for India to ascend - a zero-sum prospect."¹⁰ In recent years,

⁸ Simon Tay, "Interdependency Theory: China, India, and the West," ed. PRANAB BARDHAN and EDWARD S. STEINFELD, *Foreign Affairs* 89, no. 5 (2010): 138–43, <https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/20788651.pdf>.

⁹ Tay, "Interdependency Theory: China, India, and the West."

¹⁰ Wang, "'Chindia' or Rivalry?", 437–69.

China's economic dominance in India's economic spheres through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) makes it even more crucial for India to create new economic partners and expand its global supply chains. India has been expanding its economic sphere by pursuing strategic partnerships with other countries, such as the US and Japan. Overall, India and China have many points of tension that far outweigh the few moments they cooperate in. Despite both being the "big Asian giants" and wanting to thrust themselves at the top of the global chain, these ambitions put them at odds with each other. The differences "in terms of their political systems, economic models, and social structures,"¹¹ paired with their ambitions are irreconcilable in the status quo.

How engagement with other countries shapes India's foreign policy

India's engagement with other countries has also played a significant role in shaping its foreign policy. While historically India and Russia have had closer ties, Russia's recent actions of aligning with the Chinese sphere of influence, accommodating, and promoting "Chinese interests" in the world stage, and aggressively pushing for a multipolar revisionist approach to the world order has had some significant impact on the Russia-India front. As Russia is the junior to China, it seeks to build strong ties in order to provide more security for itself. Since Russia has been giving preference to China, India is left without much support and is put into an insecure position especially with regard to "freedom of sailing in South China Sea."¹² India now has to find a new balancer and is therefore seeking "closer ties with the US to mitigate its strategic vulnerabilities."¹³ India follows the ideology of survival and prosperity over being

¹¹ Wang, "'Chindia' or Rivalry?" *Asian Perspective* 35, no. 3 (2011): 437–69, <https://doi.org/10.1353/apr.2011.0006>.

¹² Kaura, "Deepening Relationship between Russia and China."

¹³ Kaura, "Deepening Relationship between Russia and China."

bound by some moral constraints. It will do whatever benefits India and ensures its survival. While it is getting cheap oil from Russia, the bigger issue India needs to tackle is geopolitical security and counterbalancing their biggest enemy— China.

Apart from Russia, India has pursued a policy of strategic autonomy, seeking to maintain good relations with all major powers while avoiding alignment with any country or bloc. India has developed close partnerships with countries such as Australia, Japan, and Israel, and has played an active role in regional organizations such as the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC), the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), and the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA). India's engagement with other countries has helped it to diversify its foreign policy and expand its global influence. India's engagement with various countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin Americas has also influenced its foreign policy economically. By engaging with various countries in these diverse regions, India looks to continue expanding its trade and investment ties.

Literature Review

In order to assess India's approach to the US and China, it is important to review the work already accomplished in this area. India's role in the great power struggle between the United States and China has become increasingly important in recent years, becoming the subject of significant analysis and debate among scholars and policymakers. This literature review aims to provide an overview of the scholarly debate on India's foreign policy towards the US and China. Scholars and experts who study India's foreign policy and its behavior towards the US and China are using the following main lenses: strategic autonomy, alignment with the US, multi-alignment, and non-alignment.

Strategic Autonomy

Researchers including Smith (2020), Monsonis (2010), Basru (2017), and Percival (2013) argue that India wants to pursue a foreign policy that is not overly reliant on any alliance in order to maximize benefits, calling this stance strategic autonomy. Strategic autonomy is a “mutation of realism and India’s traditional non-aligned posture,”¹⁴ and it is said to help maximize relative gains, maintain its independence, and control “its strategic assets.”¹⁵ India, in short, seeks to maintain a high degree of independence and control over its own decision-making processes, without relying too heavily on any one major power. India's strategic autonomy is reflected in its diverse set of economic and diplomatic relationships with countries across the world. Much of the literature focusing on India’s foreign policy of strategic autonomy recognizes that India’s actions stem from security challenges as well as strategic ambitions within the global order.

Alignment with the US

While the case can be made that India is guided by its national interests and striving for a greater role in the international system, another prolific approach in the literature claims that if India pursues any type of alignment that will be with the United States. Yang (2021), Rajagopalan (2017), Gupta (2022) argue that India has much to gain from aligning with the US and its outlook is very much in tune with that of the US: “India’s norms, values and principles are largely consistent with the current US-led international order.”¹⁶ This is exemplified for

¹⁴ Guillem Monsonis, “India’s Strategic Autonomy and Rapprochement with the US,” *Strategic Analysis* 34, no. 4 (June 23, 2010): 611–24, <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161003802802>.

¹⁵ Jeff M. Smith, “Strategic Autonomy and U.S.-Indian Relations,” The Heritage Foundation, November 9, 2020, <https://www.heritage.org/asia/commentary/strategic-autonomy-and-us-indian-relations>.

¹⁶ Vikash Chandra, “India’s Accommodation in the Emerging International Order: Challenges and Prospects,” *India Quarterly* 74, no. 4 (2018): 420–37, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/48505582.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A00901685c63ea9754139073c5b87737a&ab_segments&origin.

example by India's decision to join IPEF which is "a US-led framework for economic cooperation in the Indo Pacific."¹⁷ Furthermore, the US provides security and balance in the region by acting as an external balancing strategy for India. Regional partnerships, while still advantageous, are "by themselves insufficient, because China is already wealthier and stronger than India or any combination of other Asian powers."¹⁸ That is why the US, a willing partner, is the ideal candidate, because only the US holds enough power to constrain China. Both of these countries have vested incentive to contain China's rise in the world which makes them good partners.

Multi-Alignment

While some scholars view India's foreign policy as levitating towards the United States, others note that it prefers multi-alignment as a way to thrust the current transitional world order into one of a multi-polar order. Scholars such as P.S. Raghavan (2017), Vikash Chandra (2018), Ian Hall (2016), Ashley J. Tellis (2021) assert that India's foreign policy has evolved from its historic non-alignment policy to a more adaptable approach that seeks to balance India's strategic interests with its relationships with other countries. Unlike the authors from the previous section arguing on alignment with the US, the literature about multi-alignment seems to suggest that India is strengthening its strategic alliances with all countries such as China, the US, Japan, Russia, and many others on the basis of national interests. Not long-ago India's foreign minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, highlighting Modi's foreign policy, stated "this is a time for us to engage America, manage China, cultivate Europe, reassure Russia, bring Japan into play, draw neighbors in, extend the neighborhood, and expand traditional constituencies of support."

¹⁷ Surupa Gupta, "India and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework," apb-618_pdf.pdf (jstor.org).

¹⁸ Rajesh Rajagopalan, "India's Strategic Choices China and the Balance of Power in Asia," September 2017, https://carnegieendowment.org/files/CP_312_Rajesh_Strategic_Choices_FNL.pdf.

Non-Alignment

The argument for non-alignment is different compared to the others because there is no debate surrounding it. All of the scholars who have written about it recently have stated that India has in some way, shape, or form shifted away from non-alignment and embraced a different foreign policy. Despite the Revival of Non-Alignment with the document of Non-Alignment 2.0, Modi has not uttered non-alignment once in his years as Prime Minister. Many scholars such as Devdutt (1962), Smith (2020), Malik (2016), Rajagopalan (2017), and Pant (2022) agree that India has a long history of non-alignment that was central to Indian foreign policy especially during the Cold War Era. Specifically, Malik states that the way that India is abandoning non-alignment is by “weaving a web of strategic relationships to signal Beijing that India can become part of an anti-Chinese coalition should China threaten its security.”¹⁹ Rajagopalan in *India’s Strategic Choices China and the Balance of Power in Asia* in particular, adds that “nonalignment is not a feasible option for countries that face significant security threats that cannot be countered by internal balancing alone.”²⁰

The review of the scholarly work on India’s foreign policy highlights several limitations and weaknesses. With respect to the concept of strategic autonomy it can be argued that the lack of a clear definition and the proliferation of various interpretations makes the framework difficult to apply. Furthermore, India’s behavior in seeking to maintain its independence and freedom of action in the international arena suggests that India does not want to align itself too closely with any one major power, including the US. Also, the argument that India's foreign policy is based

¹⁹ Mohan Malik, “Balancing Act: The China-India-U.S. Triangle,” *World Affairs* 179, no. 1 (2016): 46–57, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/26369496.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A65627a5c3e3985197a7b09437dfff7b6&ab_segments&origin.

²⁰ Rajagopalan, “India’s Strategic Choices.”

on non-alignment is weak because even though it remains an important part of India's foreign policy legacy, there is clear evidence of a shift towards more proactive policies on the world stage. Lastly, the framework of multi-alignment does not adequately explain all facets of India's foreign policy. I argue that India's foreign policy is more nuanced and cannot be confined to a single approach or framework. India's foreign policy is dynamic and makes use of several tools that derive from the different perspectives explored above. Ultimately, I argue that India is using both multi-alignment and strategic autonomy in its foreign policy and most importantly in balancing China and the United States. A combination of the above-mentioned approaches marries two essential considerations: strategic autonomy is the manifestation of India's ambition and allows India to have a greater say in the international liberal order, and multi-alignment allows for India to try to create multiple poles that it can use for its benefit.

Theory

I employ several IR theories in supporting my hypothesis and answer the question posed in this paper. In the context of India's role in the great power struggle between China and the US, realist theory would suggest that India is likely to act in its own self-interest, seeking to maximize its power and security. Realists would argue that India's growing economic and military power could make it a valuable ally for either China or the US, depending on the balance of power in the region. Realism and balance of power work hand in hand in explaining India's actions. Balance of power theory suggests that states will seek to maintain a balance of power in the international system, in order to prevent any one state from becoming too dominant. In the context of India's role in the great power struggle between China and the US, this theory would suggest that India could potentially act as a balancer, by aligning with the weaker of the

two powers in order to maintain a stable balance of power in the region, or/and aligning with other regional powers, or/and continuing to maintain good relations with both US and China.

Both these theories support my argument that India is aligning strategically with the US and engaging with other actors multilaterally to balance both US and China and assert a greater role within the global community. Apart from realism and balance of power theory, constructivism, realism, and soft power can be applied to different aspects of India's foreign policy. India is a rising power that is working with two sets of very different countries—the western block and the revisionists. Since these two blocs have different ideals, India employs some constructivist actions with the western block and revisionist actions with the revisionists. In the context of India's role in the great power struggle between China and the US, constructivist theory would suggest that India's identity and values could play an important role in determining its behavior. India's commitment to democratic values for example, could make it more likely to strategically align with the US, rather than China, which has been criticized for its human rights record.

While India benefits from many of the current systems in place, it also challenges them which creates the sense of revision in some of India's ambitions. In the context of India's role in the great power struggle between China and the US, revisionist theory would suggest that India could potentially challenge the existing balance of power in the region, by seeking to assert its own interests and influence. Revisionism in India could be best represented by its engagement in BRICS who have expressed opinions of changing the international economic system and displacing the US dollar as the Reserve Currency.

India wields significant soft power, through its cultural and historical influence, as well as its economic and diplomatic outreach. India's soft power could potentially help to shape the

perceptions and preferences of other countries in the region, and thereby influence the balance of power. India's use of strategic diplomacy and establishment of connections with many is an advantage that will help thrust India higher up in this "global ladder." In conclusion, by utilizing a variety of IR theories such as realism, balance of power, constructivism, revisionism, and soft power, I argue that India is strategically aligning with the US and engaging with other regional and global powers to balance both the US and China and assert a greater role within the global community. India's actions are driven by its own self-interest, as well as its identity, values, and ambitions, which make it a valuable player.

Research Analysis

India does not take a secondary role in human affairs, nor does it play the top role; it is only content playing a unique role. India plays a unique role not only with its actions but also with its ambitions. With its dual foreign policy approach as well as a dual ambition for its place on the international world stage, India is at the epicenter of the great power struggle between the US and China. In this qualitative analysis through evidence from scholarly articles, journals, and books, I argue that India is using a two-level approach of multi-alignment and strategic autonomy to promote a multi-polar world and advance its role in the world stage. India in recent years has increased both its economic and diplomatic axis of power and is now considered a great ally of the US. It is also in a great geopolitical location for balancing out China's sphere of influence by partnering with countries such as Japan and the US. The US then needs India to help maintain its dominance on the world stage and contain China. This "turbulent, nationalistic, and individualistic"²¹ world that Jaishankar observes has "potential threats, but also opportunities

²¹ Ian Hall, "India's Frustrated Search for a Multipolar Order," *Pluralism and World Order*, January 1, 2023, 111–31, https://doi.org/10.1007/978-981-19-9872-0_7.

to expand India's strategic autonomy."²²

According to the OECD, "India's GDP is expected to pass that of the United States over the long term" and "combined, the two Asian giants will soon surpass the collective economy of the G7 nations."²³ Since these two Asian giants will be collectively stronger than the top nations in the status quo, it is beneficial for the US to align and support India in order to maintain at least a modicum of its past influence. India is a great partner for the US because it "is in a strong position to work across global cleavages,"²⁴ and is one of "the world's fastest-growing economies."²⁵ India has also "been the darling of the Davos crowd, sought after by investors because of its growing market, digital economy and digitization of payments, favorable demographics and a government determined to bring in foreign direct investment and move up the value chain manufacturing iPhones and semiconductors."²⁶

²² Hall, "India's Frustrated Search for a Multipolar Order."

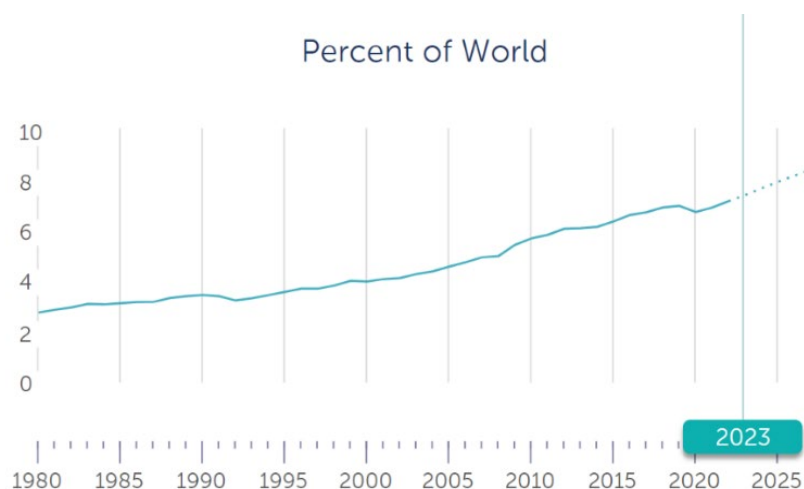
²³ "Balance of Economic Power Will Shift Dramatically over the next 50 Years, Says OECD - OECD," Oecd.org, 2012,

<https://www.oecd.org/economy/balanceofeconomicpowerwillshiftdramaticallyoverthenext50yearssaysoced.htm>.

²⁴ Sameer P. Lalwani et al., "What to Watch in 2023: India's Pivotal Year on the Global Stage," United States Institute of Peace, February 8, 2023, <https://www.usip.org/publications/2023/02/what-watch-2023-indias-pivotal-year-global-stage?> .

²⁵ Lalwani et al., "What to Watch in 2023: India's Pivotal Year on the Global Stage."

²⁶ Lalwani et al., "What to Watch in 2023: India's Pivotal Year on the Global Stage."

Figure 1: GDP based on PPP, share of world²⁷

The economic data gathered from IMF and the OEC also support the idea that India is on an economic trajectory that can allow it to take away some of the Chinese markets. This economic momentum chart shows a bullish moment for India. India was one of the high growth economies of 2022 and will likely continue this trend into 2023 and 2024. Given that China’s population is declining, and India’s is growing, it will also contribute to India’s growth in GDP which not only benefits India but the US as well. These economic gains that India has made and will continue to make will help gravitate influence and power on the world stage.

These potential threats make it “imperative that India reaches out in as many directions as possible and maximize its gains without binding itself too closely to anyone else.”²⁸ While “Brazil is taking a leading role in promoting South-South coordination,”²⁹ for example, and “China is bringing African countries into common dialogues,”³⁰ India is “less willing than Brazil

²⁷ International Monetary Fund, “India and the IMF,” IMF, 2022, <https://www.imf.org/en/Countries/IND>.

²⁸ Hall, “India’s Frustrated Search for a Multipolar Order.”

²⁹ Robert H. Wade, “Emerging World Order? From Multipolarity to Multilateralism in the G20, the World Bank, and the IMF,” *Politics & Society* 39, no. 3 (August 31, 2011): 347–78, <https://doi.org/10.1177/0032329211415503>.

³⁰ Wade, “Emerging World Order?”, 347–78.

and China to court U.S. disapproval.”³¹ Even though it is not as aggressive in courting U.S. disapproval, India nevertheless will not fully align with the US. Instead, it will continue reaping the benefits from engaging with its “multiple partners”³² and inadvertently thrust the world stage into an order that is beneficial to them-- a multipolar world order in which India “has a fair say and a fair stake in global governance,”³³ instead of the unipolar one the US seeks to maintain.

While the US is thinking that India will help its unipolarity, it won’t necessarily. India will help the US stay above China as a leader of the liberal international order, simultaneously catapulting itself and creating another pole in Asia. Thus, India will create a multipolar world because it benefits its interests and position in the international community. Many countries are catering to India especially since it is in a position of power from its “presidencies of both the G-20 and the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO).”³⁴ Since India is multi-polarizing and balancing at different levels as well as wanting to increase its role in that system, the foreign policy that it uses is “best characterized as a ‘mixed system.’”³⁵ This “mixed system” is where “traditional realpolitik coexists with the necessity of cooperation as interdependence grows.”³⁶ The blending of traditional realpolitik with the necessity of cooperation can only be explained by the married approach of multi-alignment and strategic autonomy.

Unlike in the past where India “sought autonomy to minimize the costs and risks associated with being a weak power,”³⁷ strategic autonomy in the status quo is seen as India’s

³¹ Wade, “Emerging World Order?”, 347–78.

³² Kaura, “Deepening Relationship between Russia and China.”

³³ Hall, “India’s Frustrated Search for a Multipolar Order.”

³⁴ Lalwani et al., “What to Watch in 2023: India’s Pivotal Year on the Global Stage.”

³⁵ Rajesh Basrur, “Modi’s Foreign Policy Fundamentals: A Trajectory Unchanged,” *International Affairs* 93, no. 1 (January 1, 2017): 7–26, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiv006>.

³⁶ Basrur, “Modi’s Foreign Policy Fundamentals.”

³⁷ Basrur, “Modi’s Foreign Policy Fundamentals.”

“undergirding its quest for security and status as an emerging major power.”³⁸ Strategic autonomy is therefore “best achieved through a set of deep strategic partnerships among friends and allies”³⁹ while at the same time not having formal alliances with all of the countries it engages with. This is unlike alignment with the US which would require a formal alliance on paper. Strategic autonomy is not constrained by the bounds of formal alliances and is therefore free to play a balancing act. India’s pursuit of strategic autonomy therefore is rooted in its history of non-alignment and its desire to maintain its independence and sovereignty in the international system.

As a result of this desire to maintain autonomy, India is pursuing a foreign policy that is not aligned with any particular power bloc or country, and that allows it to pursue its own interests in the global arena. Whereas multi-alignment is engaging with many actors on the world stage, strategic autonomy is engaging with a few select important actors. In this specific case, India uses strategic autonomy with the US and China through Logistics-Exchange Memorandum of Pact (LEMOA) and Asian infrastructure Investment Bank (AIIB). LEMOA and AIIB exemplify what India wants from these two countries. From the US, it wants security; from China, it wants money for its expansionary purposes.

LEMOA was an agreement made in 2016 by the US and India “that promotes and improves military cooperation between India and the United States.” One vital and symbolic benefit of LEMOA is that it strengthens the US presence in the region via India and “extends India’s reach into locations that were previously out of reach.”⁴⁰ By having this agreement, the

³⁸ Basrur, “Modi’s Foreign Policy Fundamentals.”

³⁹ Smith, “Strategic Autonomy and U.S.-Indian Relations.”

⁴⁰ “What Is Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA)?,” Testbook, April 12, 2023, <https://testbook.com/ias-preparation/lemoa-agreement#:~:text=One%20of%20the%20most%20significant%20benefits%20is%20that.>

US and India present a united front military wise against China and therefore puts the US “much more at ease with India” with regards to Chinese hostility. Whereas India and the US might present a united military front, India, through AIIB, shows the US that it will continue to benefit from economic opportunities no matter where they come from.

The AIIB is the Chinese led alternative to the US run economic systems of “the so-called “Bretton Woods twins”— the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund, or IMF.”⁴¹ Even though India is reluctant to join any Chinese backed initiatives such as the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), India joined AIIB because “China sought New Delhi’s input in creating the multilateral bank, which made Indian officials feel involved in its development rather than pressured to acknowledge its looming existence.”⁴² According to Jaishankar, “by giving India input into the creation of AIIB, Beijing seemed at the time to validate India’s desire to signal regional leadership,”⁴³ which was a different approach from the BRI. The AIIB also aligns “closely with the Indian government’s development objectives,”⁴⁴ “regional security goals,”⁴⁵ “as well as its aspiration to play a leading role in regional connectivity initiatives.”⁴⁶ By “participating in AIIB,”⁴⁷ India demonstrates that it is not willing to side “wholly with the United States in the geo-economic sphere, and supports its leadership ambitions in regional institutions devoted to the development of the South Asian subcontinent.”⁴⁸

⁴¹ China's Offering a World Bank Alternative — and U.S. Allies Are Signing Up - FPIF

⁴² Zoe Jordan and Sonali Deliwala, “Why Washington Should Care about India’s Support for the AIIB,” Council on Foreign Relations, March 4, 2022, <https://www.cfr.org/blog/why-washington-should-care-about-indias-support-aiib>.

⁴³ Jordan and Deliwala, “Why Washington Should Care about India’s Support for the AIIB.”

⁴⁴ Jordan and Deliwala, “Why Washington Should Care about India’s Support for the AIIB.”

⁴⁵ Jordan and Deliwala, “Why Washington Should Care about India’s Support for the AIIB.”

⁴⁶ Jordan and Deliwala, “Why Washington Should Care about India’s Support for the AIIB.”

⁴⁷ Jordan and Deliwala, “Why Washington Should Care about India’s Support for the AIIB.”

⁴⁸ Jordan and Deliwala, “Why Washington Should Care about India’s Support for the AIIB.”

The reasons why the two foreign policies of multi-alignment and strategic autonomy are most probable is because New Delhi prefers “to avoid any formal alignment with Washington”⁴⁹ in fear that it will exacerbate India’s security dilemma.”⁵⁰ The country seems to pursue a foreign policy approach that balances its strategic autonomy with its desire to engage with multiple countries and forge partnerships that advance its interests in the international system. India has also pursued multi-alignment by forging partnerships with multiple major and minor powers, “most notably with the United States, Russia and Japan.”⁵¹ and various countries in Southeast Asia and the Middle East. By “pursuing multi-alignment through multilateral settings,” India works to strengthen its “security architecture, to help garner critical votes at the UNSC table, enable India to identify areas of collaboration with different countries, and raise the country’s global stature during the COVID-19 pandemic.”⁵²

Through diplomacy, trade, and pragmatism, India essentially establishes itself as a partner to everyone. This partnership building is useful in large forums such as G20 where it can facilitate important discussions and contribute to global issues. This is especially important considering India is the president of the G20 this year. The G20 presidency then “marks a significant step towards undertaking a leadership role on the global stage as the global economy sails through the storm of a unique set of economic challenges.”⁵³ With this degree of leadership and power given to India, it can better “establish its global leadership bonafides”⁵⁴ and “its

⁴⁹ Malik, “Balancing Act,” 46–57.

⁵⁰ Malik, “Balancing Act,” 46–57.

⁵¹ Basrur, “Modi’s Foreign Policy Fundamentals.”

⁵² C. G, “BRICS, Quad, and India’s Multi-Alignment Strategy • Stimson Center,” Stimson Center, July 12, 2022, <https://www.stimson.org/2022/brics-quad-and-indias-multi-alignment-strategy/>.

⁵³ “Economic Development Monthly Report: Analysis of Indian Economy | IBEF | IBEF,” www.ibef.org, January 2023, <https://www.ibef.org/economy/monthly-economic-report>.

⁵⁴ Lalwani et al., “What to Watch in 2023: India’s Pivotal Year on the Global Stage.”

growing projection as the leader of the Global South.”⁵⁵ What the G20 presidency gives to India are the tools to “making the G-20 ‘a catalyst for global change’ ”⁵⁶ and unshackling itself “from its long-standing image as an emerging middle power with untapped potential”⁵⁷ to “achieving its great power ambitions.”⁵⁸

Whereas AIIB and LEMOA allow India to equally balance the US and China, there are two organizations and groupings that India is multi-aligning in that put pressure on the US and the western world. This pressure then allows for India to have a larger voice in bargaining with the US and demanding more from it. Given that the US needs India to balance China but India is putting pressure on the US, India directs itself on a path to self-interest maximization. Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS allow for India to put pressures on the US and the Western World in order for them to take tangible action in accommodating these revisionist ideals that Russia, China, and India promote together. SCO is a “Eurasian international organization”⁵⁹ led by China and it contributes to “India’s external security insight.”⁶⁰ Although it is led by China, SCO provides “stage to India for achieving some of its foreign policy goals.”⁶¹ SCO is a true demonstration of how multifaceted multi-alignment because it allows “India to simultaneously engage with its traditional friend Russia as well as its rivals, China and Pakistan.”⁶² Being a member of this fairly influential organization equips

⁵⁵ Jagannath c, “As G20 President, Can India Advance Its Multipolar Worldview?,” thediplomat.com, December 2, 2022, <https://thedi diplomat.com/2022/12/as-g20-president-can-india-advance-its-multipolar-worldview/>.

⁵⁶ Jagannath, “As G20 President, Can India Advance Its Multipolar Worldview?”

⁵⁷ Jagannath c, “As G20 President, Can India Advance Its Multipolar Worldview?”

⁵⁸ Jagannath c, “As G20 President, Can India Advance Its Multipolar Worldview?”

⁵⁹ What Do You Know About The Shanghai Cooperation organization Led by Russia and China? — Dinar Recaps.

⁶⁰ C. G, “BRICS, Quad, and India’s Multi-Alignment Strategy.”

⁶¹ “India’s Membership in Shanghai Cooperation Organisation: An Appraisal | Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses,” idsa.in, August 29, 2017, https://idsa.in/backgrounders/india-membership-in-shanghai-cooperation-organisation_pssuhag_290817.

⁶² India’s Membership in Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

India to “attain a robust position in the world.”⁶³ A critical fact to consider is how Russia brought India into SCO in order to “ensure that China does not dictate terms in Eurasia.”⁶⁴ Even within this balancing strategy for India, other countries in the groupings are doing the same.

India’s SCO presidency is unique considering it coincides with its presidency of the G20. This double presidency “highlights India’s growing role as a conduit between the East and the West, and bodes well for India’s foreign policy goal of encouraging dialogues between disparate factions.” More importantly, it allows India’s voice to be heard when sharing “concerns and facilitating common agendas to truly effect regional and global development through these distinct but important forums.”⁶⁵

In the same vein, India engages BRICS is one of the organizations that is popularly known as a group of disruptor countries. It was coined in by a “Goldman Sachs analyst Jim O’Neill”⁶⁶ and it is comprised of five major emerging economies “with potential global economic clout.”⁶⁷ Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. BRICS aims to promote cooperation among its members on economic, political, and security issues. The goal of BRICS has recently been creating a new currency that would be a competitor to the US Dollar. Even though BRICS presents itself as underscoring “the perspectives of the developing world, with the

⁶³ India’s Membership in Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

⁶⁴ India’s Membership in Shanghai Cooperation Organisation.

⁶⁵ Jagannath c, “As G20 President, Can India Advance Its Multipolar Worldview?” thediplomat.com, December 2, 2022, <https://thediplomat.com/2022/12/as-g20-president-can-india-advance-its-multipolar-worldview/>.

⁶⁶ Rosaline Daniel and Kudrat Virk, “Centre for Conflict Resolution Report Part Title: BRICS and IBSA (India, Brazil, and South Africa) Report Title: SOUTH AFRICA and the BRICS: Report Subtitle: PROGRESS, PROBLEMS, and PROSPECTS,” 2014, https://www.jstor.org/stable/pdf/resrep05168.12.pdf?refreqid=excelsior%3A432c93cf5dafbc3a6f461c754971eee&ab_segments=0%2Fbasic_search_gsv2%2Fcontrol&origin=&initiator=&acceptTC=1.

⁶⁷ Daniel and Virk, “Centre for Conflict Resolution Report Part Title.”

objective of reforming the UN to face new global challenges,”⁶⁸ the “BRICS grouping are fraught with rivalry.”⁶⁹ Due to these internal struggles, they are not as cohesive as they present themselves. Nevertheless, India’s participation in these “non-Western groupings such as the BRICS” acts as a counterbalance to “its growing presence in the Western-dominated QUAD and G-7.”⁷⁰ The BRICS grouping also provides some concern with their ambitions of creating a joint currency to “dethrone” the US Dollar as the world’s reserve currency. These statements push the US to act in a way that will protect itself, which means competing with China for India’s attention.

India is a multi-balancer as demonstrated by its inclusion of many general world forums, US led forums, and Chinese/revisionist forums. Another, arguably more important inclusion of India is its regional initiatives and organizations. Since China is a close security and economic within the Indo-pacific region, India must make allies and partnerships that are closer to itself. US, while powerful, is not enough for India to be powerful. Therefore, India has been strengthening its regional presence and working to redirect resources and ties those countries have to China back to India. The Look East Program, Act East Program, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC), the Resilient Supply Chain Initiative, and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), are especially effective.

India has implemented the Look East and Act East policies to establish “closer economic and strategic links with other countries in the region.”⁷¹ Specifically MILAN, a biennial multilateral naval exercise, which was initiated by the India Navy in 1995 with the participation

⁶⁸ C. G, “BRICS, Quad, and India’s Multi-Alignment Strategy.”

⁶⁹ Daniel and Virk, “Centre for Conflict Resolution Report Part Title.”

⁷⁰ C. G, “BRICS, Quad, and India’s Multi-Alignment Strategy.”

⁷¹ Rajagopalan, “India’s Strategic Choices.”

of four countries (“Indonesia, Singapore, Sri Lanka, and Thailand”⁷²), has since expanded in both the number of participants and exercise complexity. MILAN aligns with India’s Look East, Act East, and Security and Growth for all the Region (SAGAR) programs and initiatives. Additionally, Look East and Act East have led to “forge stronger ties with Asian democracies such as Japan, Australia, Taiwan, and certain Southeast Asian countries that lie at the western Pacific littoral and have strong relations with the United States.”⁷³ BIMSTEC is vital for India because it allows it to “pursue three core policies” that “counter China’s creeping influence in countries around the Bay of Bengal due to the spread of its One Belt and One Road Initiative.”⁷⁴ These three core policies in turn “strengthen ties between and among nations in various areas of cooperation”⁷⁵ and oppose “to the grandiosity seen in China’s Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).”⁷⁶

Whereas The Australia Group was created to counter China’s military aggressiveness, “the Resilient Supply Chain Initiative (RSCI), was launched in September 2021 by India, Japan and Australia”⁷⁷ to counter “the overdependence on China in global supply chains.”⁷⁸ Since overdependence on China has been a cause for concern in the international order, initiatives like RSCI have pushed “the business sector to focus on India as an alternative channel for goods to keep the world’s economy running.”⁷⁹ RSCI can also provide avenues and opportunities for “for

⁷² PIB Delhi, “Indian Navy’s Multi-National Exercise Milan-2022 to Commence 25 February 2022,” pib.gov.in, February 23, 2022, <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1800604>.

⁷³ Wang, “‘Chindia’ or Rivalry?”

⁷⁴ “BIMSTEC - Objectives & Facts | UPSC | BYJU’S,” BYJUS, accessed March 29, 2023, <https://byjus.com/free-ias-prep/bimstec/#:~:text=BIMSTEC%20allows%20India%20to%20pursue%20three%20core%20policies->

⁷⁵ “Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) Background,” accessed April 5, 2023, <https://www.mofa.gov.np/wp-content/uploads/2016/03/Revised-BIMSTEC-Brief.pdf>.

⁷⁶ Monish Tourangbam, “Invoking Greater Realism in Indian Foreign Policy,” thediplomat.com, December 13, 2019, <https://thediplomat.com/2019/12/invoking-greater-realism-in-indian-foreign-policy/>.

⁷⁷ Roger Liu, “India in the Resilient Supply Chain Initiative - Gateway House,” Gateway House, March 10, 2022, <https://www.gatewayhouse.in/india-in-the-resilient-supply-chain-initiative/>.

⁷⁸ Liu, “India in the Resilient Supply Chain Initiative.”

⁷⁹ Liu, “India in the Resilient Supply Chain Initiative - Gateway House.”

India to collaborate with countries such as Japan and Taiwan in building robust supply chains” which would help India “gain in supply chain competition with other Indo-Pacific countries.”⁸⁰

The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework for Prosperity has been “increasing cooperation in emerging technologies, collaborating in defense, cyber security and counter terrorism, and also strengthening mutual cooperation on global issues.”⁸¹ By joining IPEF after leaving Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) due to a “mix of strategic and economic factors,”⁸² India has sent a message to China that India is joining “a counternarrative to Chinese dominance of economic and infrastructure architecture in the region.”⁸³ Through this “alternative economic framework” in the region, India is finally “a part of the discussion on economic cooperation in the region.”⁸⁴ Lastly, joining IPEF, a framework launched by the US sends China a message that US-India relations have strengthened and demonstrates that India can reconcile differences with the US on “issues such as the Russian invasion of Ukraine”⁸⁵ and work together for the greater good when the time comes.

Apart from regional economic initiatives, regional military initiatives are also vital for India. The QUAD and the Australia Group are two that stand out and strengthen the “Western” military presence that counteract Chinese military aggression. The QUAD has recently become a more significant with the increased Chinese aggression because it allows India to “counter China’s belligerence and provide a pathway to a ‘free, open, and inclusive’ Indo-Pacific.”⁸⁶ Another advantage of the QUAD is that they “hope to fully implement the Indo-Pacific

⁸⁰ Liu, “India in the Resilient Supply Chain Initiative.”

⁸¹ C. G, “BRICS, Quad, and India’s Multi-Alignment Strategy.”

⁸² Gupta. “India and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework.”

⁸³ Gupta. “India and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework.”

⁸⁴ Gupta. “India and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework.”

⁸⁵ Gupta. “India and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework.”

⁸⁶ C. G, “BRICS, Quad, and India’s Multi-Alignment Strategy.”

Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness throughout the Indo-Pacific region to fuse multiple intelligence sources to detect illicit activity at sea.”⁸⁷ The Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness will especially be helpful in countering Chinese maritime assertiveness as seen in the “South China Sea.”⁸⁸

The Australia Group has economically benefited India in many ways such as helping it “achieve its non-proliferation goals” and strengthening “supply chain security in the dynamic industry domains of biotechnology and chemicals.”⁸⁹ By helping India’s “burgeoning biotechnology industry forge a more promising future,”⁹⁰ it is allowing India to be a more major economic power. This is followed up by the fact that entrance into the Australia Group has allowed India is part of “three of the four major export control groups in the world.”⁹¹ Even though India’s US alignment might be stronger for its own national interests, it will nevertheless keep relations with actors that the US denounces such as Russia. Its relationship with other countries proves that while India is useful to the US, it will continue to promote the “India first” mentality as seen with strategic autonomy.

India’s engagement with many countries is driven by its desire to expand its economic and strategic interests, as well as to play a more prominent role in the international system. India's pursuit of multi-alignment is also driven by its desire to diversify its partnerships and reduce its dependence on any single country or power bloc as seen with its opening up to foreign investments. This approach allows India to maintain its strategic autonomy while also engaging

⁸⁷ Lalwani et al., “What to Watch in 2023: India’s Pivotal Year on the Global Stage.”

⁸⁸ Former US admiral says China 'their own worst enemy' as tensions rise in South China Sea - ABC News.

⁸⁹ “Australia Group- Members, Objectives, Its Significance for India!,” Testbook, October 20, 2022, <https://testbook.com/ias-preparation/australia-group#:~:text=Significance%20of%20Australia%20Group%20for%20India%20are%20listed.>

⁹⁰ “Australia Group.”

⁹¹ “Australia Group.

with multiple countries to advance its interests in the international liberal order. Overall, its foreign policy of combining strategic autonomy with multi-alignment reflects the country's desire to pursue its interests while maintaining its independence and sovereignty in the global arena. The status-seeking for upward mobility that India is pursuing allows it to raise "its social standing among the member states of the international system"⁹² in order to be heard and its ambitions to be implemented. India's approach is therefore unique in that it cooperates with many countries across the world and at the same time has few closer "issue-based partnerships."⁹³ With this integrated "status-seeking strategy," it is able to stand for "world brotherhood and peace"⁹⁴ while advancing its own place in the world order from just a balancing power,⁹⁵ 'to a leading power.'⁹⁶

Policy Implications and Recommendations

India's desire to be a leader is quite obvious not only with its strategy but with the phraseology representatives and Prime Minister Modi use during events. Over the years, "India has asserted that the UN Security Council (UNSC), in its current form, does not reflect today's geo-political realities and its credibility is at risk if developing powers like India do not have a permanent seat at the table."⁹⁷ Going forward, India should continue pushing the UNSC for a permanent seat at the table in order to help India keep this upward trajectory towards more influence. If there are "significant gaps in preferences even between democratic partners such as

⁹² Basrur, "Modi's Foreign Policy Fundamentals."

⁹³ C. G, "BRICS, Quad, and India's Multi-Alignment Strategy."

⁹⁴ Rajesh Basrur, "Modi's Foreign Policy Fundamentals: A Trajectory Unchanged," *International Affairs* 93, no. 1 (January 1, 2017): 7–26, <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiv006>.

⁹⁵ Basrur, "Modi's Foreign Policy Fundamentals."

⁹⁶ Basrur, "Modi's Foreign Policy Fundamentals."

⁹⁷ "India's Bid for Permanent Seat at UN Security Council Receives Support from France, UK," November 19, 2022.

the United States and India,”⁹⁸ then their defense against China will not be as strong. It will be advantageous for both the US and for India if India gets a permanent seat at this table.

India has been playing a balancing game between many different countries to maximize benefits for itself. This strategy needs to continue and strengthen for India to thrust itself as a greater power on the world stage and protect itself from the aggressiveness of China in the Indo-Pacific region. China provides both a legitimate military concern due to the border clashes and a force that limits India’s voice and participation on some forums such as the UNSC were China, as one of the five permanent members. Uses its veto powers to deny India’s entrance into becoming a permanent member. While some scholars and US ambassadors seem to encourage India’s entrance into NATO as a good idea, considering what has happened in the last few years with Russia-Ukraine and the personality of the leader in China, this would not be strategic for India. Countries with leaders like Putin and Xi have to be handled carefully—if these leaders feel threatened, they will do anything to secure their position. India joining NATO should not be a consideration as some scholars have noted. Instead, India should continue its balancing game, deepen relationships with neighboring countries, and engage with China so China does not feel threatened enough to attack or do something that would be detrimental to everyone on aggregate.

Essentially, India is on the right trajectory for accomplishing its goals and I believe in order to fulfill them it needs to keep up its important balancing game with the “United States, Europe, Japan, South Korea, Southeast Asia, Australia, Canada, the United Arab Emirates, Saudi

⁹⁸ Ashley J Tellis and Sean Mirski, “Crux of Asia: China, India, and the Emerging Global Order,” Carnegie Endowment for International Peace (Carnegie Endowment for International Peace, January 10, 2013), <https://carnegieendowment.org/2013/01/10/crux-of-asia-china-india-and-emerging-global-order-pub-50551>.

Arabia, and Israel.”⁹⁹ At the same time though, India needs to balance other mutually beneficial relations with countries that are more revisionist in nature such as “Russia and Iran”¹⁰⁰ and China. While India’s relationship with these countries tends to be more problematic for the West and has caused some tensions with the US specifically, India should nevertheless keep what it is doing to act as a bridge between the East and the West.

Apart from generally increasing its diplomatic, military, and economic relations with countries all across the world, India should also focus on regional relationship building with neighboring countries. By doing this it will “open up to smaller countries and shape their long-term incentive structures to favour India”¹⁰¹ instead of China. By taking away these “markets” away from China, it will allow India to gain more power which will attract even more investment. India, to develop relations should put “more focus on grants and loans for infrastructure development towards capacity-building programs (through the Development Partnership Administration and Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation) that increase technical self-sufficiency and institutional resilience in neighbouring countries.”¹⁰²

Additionally, India should continue engaging with current “regional cooperation initiatives” such as “BIMSTEC and BBIN” and SAARC, and encourage new regional initiatives.”¹⁰³ India could work towards resolving outstanding issues with its neighbors, such as border disputes, water-sharing agreements, and cross-border terrorism. This could help to build trust and cooperation and facilitate greater regional integration. India could also increase its economic engagement

⁹⁹ Shamika Ravi, “India 2024: Policy Priorities for the New Government,” Brookings (Brookings, May 17, 2019), <https://www.brookings.edu/blog/up-front/2019/05/17/india-2024-policy-priorities-for-the-new-government/>.

¹⁰⁰ Ravi, “India 2024.”

¹⁰¹ Ravi, “India 2024.”

¹⁰² Ravi, “India 2024.”

¹⁰³ Ravi, “India 2024.”

with its neighbors through initiatives such as the South Asian Free Trade Area (SAFTA) and the Bangladesh-Bhutan-India-Nepal (BBIN) Motor Vehicles Agreement. These initiatives could help to boost trade and investment and promote regional economic integration.

India should also keep on expanding upon already established initiatives and policies such as Neighborhood First, Look East, and Act East to promote more regional connectivity that can aid in India's ambitions. Lastly, while India should maintain relations with China since it benefits from AIIB and other Chinese led initiatives, India could also focus on enhancing its security ties with other countries in the region, such as Japan, Australia, and the US as it recently started to do so in order to counterbalance China's growing influence. India should also continue pushing for its membership in the Asia-Pacific Economic Cooperation forum (APEC) "as a step toward eventual inclusion in the Trans-Pacific Partnership,"¹⁰⁴ like it pushes to be included in the UNSC. Entry in this forum and partnership "would provide a pathway for greater integration into the region's economy"¹⁰⁵ and "it would also ensure that trade remains a unifying force in the region, where competing trade regimes are straining ties."¹⁰⁶ India's behavior in the international system makes her an especially interesting and important actor.

By being opaque in its true intentions and maintaining relations strategically with specific countries and engaging with others multilaterally, it allows India to maximize its own interests and exert influence on the global stage without necessarily causing conflict or backlash from other nations. This approach to foreign policy can be effective in achieving both short-term and long-term objectives, as it allows India to carefully navigate complex geopolitical dynamics

¹⁰⁴ Anubhav Gupta, "India and APEC: Charting a Path to Membership," Asia Society, July 20, 2015, <https://asiasociety.org/policy-institute/india-and-apec-charting-path-membership-0#:~:text=India%E2%80%99s%20membership%20in%20APEC%20would%20be%20an%20important.>

¹⁰⁵ Gupta, "India and APEC: Charting a Path to Membership."

¹⁰⁶ Gupta, "India and APEC: Charting a Path to Membership."

and balance competing priorities. However, it also requires a high degree of flexibility, adaptability, and skillful diplomacy to manage relationships and navigate changing circumstances in a rapidly evolving global landscape.

Conclusion

While both the US and China want a unipolar world that favors them, India wants a multipolar one. This fact alone gives India an edge over both countries even though India will be utilized by the US to counter China. Even though the US recognizes India's importance, it grossly underestimates India at the same time. The strengthening in their partnership is not an alliance for Indian survival. This is an alliance that will help the US maintain power and help India create a multipolar world. Both China and US are underestimating India thinking this is a quest for a unipolar world while India is playing the long game with multi-alignment and strategic autonomy and hence thrusting the world into real multipolarity. India wants a world for all, and it will prop up other countries by taking advantage of its G20 and SCO presidencies this year. Therefore, while the US and China have the upper hand and think they are playing India like a pawn, India is a queen disguised as a pawn.

The research conducted for this paper contributes to the broader literature in international relations by shedding light on the complex interplay of power and politics between great powers and smaller states in the international system. Specifically, it highlights the importance of studying the role of smaller states in the larger power struggles between great powers and the impact of their foreign policy decisions on global affairs and the future of the international system. By marrying the approaches of strategic autonomy and multi-alignment in

explaining India's foreign policy, the paper provides a unique way of looking at the issue of India's role in the great power struggle.

While the evidence obtained from scholarly work on the topic paints a complex picture of India's foreign policy, there are some limitations in this work. Limitations as result of data availability and reliability, the scope of the research, and/or the biases of the researcher need to be acknowledged. Apart from these limitations, another important one is the time taken to conduct the research. With more time, this paper could have presented a more nuanced picture with regards to several important factors. In addition, exploring in more detail India's role in the Sino-US dichotomy, could offer a wealth of information on India's foreign policy. Discussing this power dynamic would also lend way into conducting more research on how other countries in the world are influencing US and Chinese decisions.

Additionally, I would also like to explore the tensions between India, China, and the US and fully analyze this trichotomy with regards to several factors. The limitations and historical tensions of the US-India partnership and the roadblocks they face from achieving their full potential would also be interesting. While the US touts India as one of its closest partners, it would be valuable to conduct a case study of US-India relations compared to the Russia-China relations and see the comparative advantages these relations have with respect to one another. Finally, to conclude the further research, analysis of India's long-term growth and its effect on relations with US will be effective in visualizing the change in relations given many factors such as economic, diplomatic, and military influence, as well as geographical location. Many experts say that the change of power of West to East is undergoing in the status quo, but it will be useful to see if India will be the forerunner of that change compared to the expected candidate— China.

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