



INDIA'S STRATEGIC AUTONOMY IN A MULTIPOLAR WORLD: REASSESSING FOREIGN POLICY IN THE CHANGING GLOBAL ORDER

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Abstract:

In the 21st century, where diverse actions are taking place, the dominance of America continues to grow. Therefore, despite the emergence of a multipolar international system, the world is moving towards unipolarity. Emerging powers such as the European Union, China, Russia, Japan, Brazil, and India are on the rise. Of course, in this changing context, India's long-term strategic autonomy efforts have gained importance. This underscores the fact that India is capable of making independent foreign policy decisions that are consistent with its national interests. India's role is important not only politically but also economically and strategically at the global level. The positive growth in India's economy is also enough to remain active in the global policy process. India's leadership in the Global South as the voice of developing countries is important, and India's assistance to neighbouring countries is benefiting those countries. This is not only building diplomatic relations but also fostering long-term friendly relations.

Keywords: Unipolarity, Conflict, Global South, Partnership, Foreign Policy

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Introduction:

Developing countries like India are facing many difficulties in the era of global transition. Challenges posed by the rise of the Indo-Pacific, tensions between major nations and regional conflicts, as well as economic instability, require India to maintain a balance of sovereignty and strategic cooperation. India's participation on the platform of emerging regional organizations seeks to maintain flexibility and balance of national interests in the international scenario. At the domestic level, India's defence preparedness and technological modernization act as a complement to rising economic aspirations and autonomy. Also, every leader of India has expressed a desire to contribute actively to global governance beyond protecting freedom.

Objectives:

- 1) To explain the concept of strategic autonomy and put it in an Indian perspective.
- 2) To assess the role of India's contemporary foreign policy.
- 3) To discuss future opportunities to strengthen India's autonomy and face on the world stage.
- 4) To provide policy recommendations to the experts formulating India's foreign policy.
- 5) To analyse India's policy responses in the changing global order.



Methodology:

The study uses a qualitative research design to examine India's strategic autonomy in a multipolar world. Primary sources mainly use government documents and policy statements, including annual reports of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs, parliamentary debates, and reports on foreign relations. The Prime Minister, the Defence Minister, and the External Affairs Minister were also present on the occasion. Secondary sources include books and journals on international relations and foreign policy. Includes reports from prestigious think tanks such as ORF and IDSA. The help of newspapers and journals like The Hindu, Indian Express, Loksatta, and Third Concept has been taken. Commentaries and interviews of ambassadors and experts have been used as references. The study also includes case studies of key foreign policy decisions, such as India's relations with major countries and regional organizations, to study the process of balancing national interests with India's global dynamics.

Research Questions:

- 1) How has India's concept of strategic autonomy evolved since independence?
- 2) What are the salient features of India's foreign policy in a multipolar system?
- 3) What are the internal and external challenges hindering India's strategic autonomy?
- 4) What kind of opportunities are available for India to increase its autonomy?

Theoretical and Conceptual Framework:

India's strategic autonomy has a historical background. It has evolved from the isolationism of the Nehru era to the multi-separatism of the present Modi era, reflecting changing strategic structures, power relations, economic priorities, and security challenges. India has always respected the sovereignty of other countries. It is a challenge for every country to remain free from external domination. This is why such an effort is inherent in the concept of strategic autonomy. India enhanced its friendly engagement with other important organizations such as the East Asia Summit, which was perceived to have a subtle blend of autonomy and activism. The Act East Policy emerged, transforming the dominant Look East Policy into action. It reflected India's positive approach to sustaining its relations in Asia. In the present international system, the trend of the world seems to be moving from unipolar to multipolar. Of course, collective action by all countries is necessary for world peace.

India's strategic position in the multipolar world:

India has a unique strategic position on the world map. A major economy that has overtaken France to become one of the world's top five economies, India has the reputation of being a civilized nation with global aspirations but adhering to the principle of balance of power. India has friendly relations with most of the world powers. India emphasized enhancing strategic convergence with a technology-savvy nation like the US. India has maintained a long-standing partnership with Russia, upholding traditional friendships and resisting pressure from the West. Despite some border tensions, India is a major trading partner for China. India has always given priority to enhancing cooperation with a powerful bloc like the European Union. France is seen as a reliable strategic partner. In a multipolar world, India has always tried to maintain a balanced environment by taking an inclusive stand. This shows that India is capable of becoming a global leader.



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The Challenges of Strategic Autonomy:

India's strategic autonomy faces some challenges. We have to depend on Russia and other countries in terms of security and especially in terms of the import of defence material. Due to the limitations in terms of cyber and space technology, the assistance of the United States has to be sought for the related capabilities and modernization. The continuing border conflict with Pakistan and China poses a major challenge to strategic options. As a result, relations with neighbouring countries are strained. At the same time, China's overreach in the Indian Ocean limits India's strategy. Instability in smaller regions like Afghanistan, Nepal, Bangladesh, Sri Lanka, and Myanmar, as well as in the Indian Ocean region, also has a strategic impact. The increasing competition between different superpowers has a serious impact on developing countries like India. Therefore, barriers are being created to reflect India's interests on multilateral platforms at the global level. As a result, India's stability and credibility can be questioned by other countries. Often, when domestic activities are given more priority, matters outside the borders can take a limited form. Bureaucratic inaction has a huge impact on implementation. Political polarization has wide-ranging effects on coherent policy planning.

Limitations of Study:

The study is largely limited by its emphasis on India's strategic autonomy in the post-Cold War era and the contemporary multipolar context, in which detailed historical projections of earlier phases have not been made. Data is used primarily on secondary sources and publicly available data rather than primary sources. This analysis highlights conceptual and strategic approaches. Despite these limitations, the study seeks to comprehensively reassess India's strategic autonomy efforts.

Conclusion and Policy Recommendations:

India's strategic autonomy appears to have been translated into a pragmatic framework that suits the world. At a time when there is a tussle for supremacy among the global superpowers, India is giving priority to building resilient interests with changing dynamics. By engaging with various groupings like QUAD, BRICS, and



SAARC, India continues to collaborate with key leaders in the Global South. Therefore, India's role in shaping the global order is unique.

- 1) Look closely at India's territorial integrity, economic growth, regional stability, and national interest.
- 2) Build institutional capacity with foreign policy mechanisms, defence production ecosystems, and digital sovereignty.
- 3) Build relationships with your neighbours. Also actively shape the Indian Ocean Framework.
- 4) Reduce over-reliance on any one partner nation. Invest in indigenous manufacturing, research, and development.
- 5) Cultivate leadership with the influence of soft power in democracy, yoga, diaspora, and cultural exchange, as well as global issues like health and climate.

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