



Indian Foreign Policy In 2021

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This article is based on “**Reframing India’s foreign policy priorities**” which was published in The Hindu on 12/01/2021. It talks about the current challenges and opportunities in pursuit of fulfilling foreign policy objectives.

Like any other country, India’s foreign policy envisages to widen its sphere of influence, enhance its role across nations, and make its presence felt like an emerging power. The year 2021 presents a bunch of challenges and opportunities in pursuit of fulfilling foreign policy objectives.

For instance, the rise of China and its influence in India’s neighbourhood is a cause of worry for India. Moreover, concluding the negotiations for an **EU-China Comprehensive Agreement on Investment** debunks the myth of Chinese isolation after **Covid-19 pandemic** and further strengthened China’s position.

Moreover, India’s foreign policy decisions like growing convergence with the US have led to weakening its links with traditional friends like Russia and Iran.

Therefore, in shifting the balance of power in the region, India needs to tackle foreign policy challenges and leverage opportunities carefully.

Challenges in Front of India

- **A Stronger China:** China is the only major country that had a positive growth rate at the end of 2020, and its economy is poised to grow even faster in 2021.
 - Militarily, China has further strengthened itself and now seeks to dominate the Indo-Pacific Ocean with its announcement of its third aircraft carrier’s launch in 2021.
 - In this context, any breakthrough in Sino-Indian relations is unlikely to occur, and the confrontation between Indian and Chinese armed forces is expected to continue.

- **Growing Russia-China Axis:** Russia is beginning to display more significant interest in its periphery's affairs. Moreover, the sanctions imposed on Russia after Crimea's annexation in 2014 has pushed Russia towards a tighter embrace of China.
 - This seems to signal reduced interest in countries such as India.
 - Also, India's closeness to the U.S. has weakened its links with traditional friends such as Russia and Iran.
- **Changing Middle East Equations:** The US-brokered rapprochement between Israel and four Arab countries — the UAE, Bahrain, Morocco and Sudan — reflected the changing landscape in the region.
 - However, despite the hype surrounding **Abraham Accords**, the situation remains fluid and has not reduced the risk of a confrontation between Iran and Israel.
 - Given the region's strategic flux, Iran could well be tempted to use its nuclear capability to enhance its position.
 - This does pose problems for India since both have relations with it.
- **Self-Imposed Isolation of India:** Currently, India remains isolated from two important supranational bodies of which it used to be a founding member, viz., the **Non-Aligned Movement (NAM)** and the **South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC)**.
 - Moreover, India has opted out of the **Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP)**.
 - This self-imposed isolation doesn't synergise with India's aspiration of becoming a global power.
- **Weakening Ties with Neighbors:** A more worrying concern for Indian foreign policy is weakening ties with the neighbours.

This can be seen from instances like **China's Cheque Book Diplomacy** vis-a-vis Srilanka, strain in relation with **Bangladesh on NRC issue** and recent **border controversy with Nepal** due to the release of the new map.

Way Forward

- **Neighbourhood First:** Through a series of diplomatic efforts, India should make valiant efforts to improve relations with some of its neighbours such as Bangladesh, Myanmar and Sri Lanka,

In this context, as the world emerges from the pandemic, India has a lot to gain from what could be “**vaccine diplomacy**” with neighbours in 2021 — supplying vaccines either free or at affordable costs.

- **External Aid in Adequate Measure:** The current standoff with China has reinforced JL Nehru’s belief in 1963 that India needs “**external aid in adequate measure**”.
 - In this context, India will need continuing support from the US, Japan, Australia, besides European leaders such as France, Germany and the UK.
 - India should appreciate European entry into Indo-pacific narrative, as already, France and Germany have come up with their Indo-Pacific strategy.
- **India at UNSC High Table:** As India enters the **UN Security Council as a non-permanent member** for the eighth time, India should raise all-important global matters like China’s aggressiveness— from Tibet to Taiwan, Iran-Saudi rivalry, refugee crisis between Bangladesh and Myanmar, etc.
 - India should refrain from a limited focus on isolating Pakistan, as it would distract from India’s aspirations of being a global leader.
- **Engaging With US:** As the future of **Quad** and the **Indo-Pacific strategy** relies on the new US administration, India will need to build on its deepening strategic and defence ties with the US and resolve trade and visa issues.

Conclusion

In the light of the changing actualities of the international situation, India must cautiously play foreign policy, if it wants to emerge as a global rather than an aspirational player.

Drishti Mains Question

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Comment.



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This editorial is based on “**The diaspora dilemma**” which was published in The Hindustan Times on January 10th, 2020. Now watch this on our Youtube channel.