



Should India Join NATO?

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This article is based on **“Why India must not say ‘no’ to NATO”** which was published in The Indian Express on 06/04/2021. It talks about the pros and cons of India becoming a member of the **North Atlantic Treaty Organization (NATO)**.

In the last few years, European countries have asserted to play a significant role in the Indo-Pacific region. India too knows that no single power can produce stability and security in the Indo-Pacific.

Moreover, China’s meteoric rise has dramatically heightened India’s need for closer security relationships with politically reliable, like-minded states. In order to tackle this geopolitical challenge, India will have to undertake more deliberate efforts to counter-balance the juggernaut of Chinese power.

One such arrangement, which has been recently floated by many western countries, is **extending NATO’s membership to India**. Although NATO’s membership in India will have positive implications, it will have serious ramifications too.

Arguments for India Becoming NATO’s Member

- **End of Cold War:** During the Cold War, India’s refusal to join any of the Military bloc (NATO or Warsaw pact led by the USSR) was premised on its non-alignment. That argument had little justification once the Cold War ended during 1989-91. Since then, NATO has built partnerships with many neutral and non-aligned
- **Creation of Deterrence:** Article 5 of the NATO treaty held that an attack against a member nation of the NATO would be considered to be an attack against all the members of the alliance and would call for joint military action against the aggressor. This would create deterrence for China and Pakistan to attack India.

- **Military-Strategic Benefits:** An India-NATO dialogue would simply mean having regular contact with a military alliance, most of whose members are well-established partners of India.
 - Further, India has military exchanges with many members of NATO — including the US, Britain, and France — in bilateral and multilateral formats.
 - Therefore, in the longer term, India would derive military-strategic benefits from a partnership with the world’s most powerful alliance.
- **Era of Multi-Alignment:** India might align with China and developing nations against the US in **World Trade Organisation (WTO)** but militarily oppose China while contemplating a “**Quad**” with the USA, Japan, and Australia.
 - Also, Egypt and Israel are both NATO partners who maintain defense relationships with Russia.
 - Switzerland, Finland, Sweden, and Austria are all NATO partners with long-standing neutralist traditions.
- **Convergence on Many Issues:** A sustained dialogue between India and NATO could facilitate productive exchanges in a range of areas, including terrorism, changing geopolitics; the evolving nature of military conflict, the role of emerging military technologies, and new military doctrines.

Argument Against India Becoming NATO’s Member

- **Conflict Within NATO:** NATO members have conflicting opinions on how to share the military burden and strike the right balance between NATO and the EU’s quest for an independent military role.
 - Further, NATO members disagree on policy related to Russia, the Middle East, and China.
- **Deteriorate Relations With Russia:** By becoming a NATO member, India’s long-standing and strong ties with Russia will get frayed.
 - Russia has shown displeasure on account of India’s growing strategic convergence with the US.
 - Moreover, this could further strengthen the already deepening relation between China and Russia.
 - Considering that **India still is heavily dependent on the Russian military equipment**, joining NATO seems like an eminently bad idea.
- **Issue of Sovereignty:** Another issue would be the establishment of NATO bases on India’s territory.
 - This might invite widespread protests in the country and may even be considered an infringement of our sovereignty.
- **Dragging Down Into Various Conflicts:** The downside of joining NATO is that India would get dragged into various conflicts around the globe.
 - This would result in a lot of Indian soldiers dying in various conflicts in which we have no reason at all to be involved in.

Conclusion

The bureaucratization of the engagement between India and western countries has prevented India from taking full advantage of re-emerging geopolitics of the Atlantic. However, India's recent proactive approach has certainly sought to end this prolonged political neglect.

Given this, a pragmatic engagement with NATO countries must be an important part of India's foreign policy but it must refrain from becoming a formal member of NATO.

Drishti Mains Question

India's continued reluctance to engage a major institution like NATO will be a stunning case of strategic self-denial. Critically Analyse.