



Mains Practice Question

Q. Evaluate India's foreign policy towards its neighbors and how it has evolved over time. (250 words)

07 Mar, 2023 GS Paper 2 International Relations

Approach

- Start your answer by briefly providing historical overview of India's foreign policy.
- Discuss evolution of India's Foreign Policy towards its Neighbors.
- Conclude accordingly.

Introduction

- India's foreign policy has been evolved through many phases in 75 years, its neighbors play a critical role in shaping its foreign policy. India shares land borders with several countries, including Pakistan, Nepal, Bhutan, China, and Bangladesh. It also has maritime borders with Sri Lanka and the Maldives. India's foreign policy towards its neighbors has evolved significantly over the years.

Body

- **Historical Background:** India's foreign policy towards its neighbors has been influenced by its historical legacy. India has long been a **regional power in South Asia**, with its cultural, economic, and political influence extending beyond its borders.
 - India's influence in the region can be traced back to the Mauryan Empire, which ruled a significant portion of South Asia in the third century BCE.
 - India's cultural and religious ties with its neighbors have been a crucial factor in shaping its foreign policy.
- **Post-Independence Period:** After India gained independence from British colonial rule in 1947, it faced several challenges in its foreign policy towards its neighbors.
 - India's relationship with Pakistan, which was carved out of British India, has been characterized by conflict and rivalry. The two countries have fought several wars, including the 1965 war, the 1971 war, and the Kargil war in 1999.
 - India's relationship with China has also been contentious, with the two countries fighting a brief border war in 1962.
 - India's relationship with its other neighbors, such as **Nepal, Bhutan, and Bangladesh**, has been **relatively stable**.
 - India has maintained close ties with Nepal, which shares a long and porous border with India. India has also provided **economic and military assistance to Bhutan**, which is strategically important for India's security.
 - India played a **crucial role in Bangladesh's independence** in 1971 and has maintained close ties with Bangladesh since then.
- **Evolution of India's Foreign Policy towards its Neighbors:** India's foreign policy towards its neighbors has undergone **significant changes in the post-Cold War period**.
 - **Economic Integration:** India has shifted its focus towards economic cooperation and regional integration. India has **signed several free trade agreements** with its neighbors, including the **South Asian Free Trade Agreement (SAFTA)** with the members of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) and the **Bay of**

Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC) with countries in the Bay of Bengal region.

- **Neighborhood First Policy:** India has also taken several initiatives to strengthen its relationship with its neighbors. The "Neighborhood First" policy, launched by the Indian government in 2014, **seeks to prioritize India's relationship with its neighbors.**
 - The policy aims to enhance connectivity, trade, and people-to-people contacts with its neighbors. India has also **launched several development projects** in its neighboring countries, including the construction of roads, railways, and power plants.
- **Defense Collaboration:** India's relationship with its neighbors has also been influenced by external factors, such as the **rise of China in the region.** India has sought to counter China's influence in the region by strengthening its relationship with its neighbors.
 - India has signed **several defense agreements** with its neighbors, including the **India-Nepal Treaty of Peace and Friendship** and the **India-Bhutan Friendship Treaty.**
 - India has also provided military assistance to its neighbors, including Bangladesh and Maldives, to enhance their defense capabilities.

Conclusion

- India's foreign policy towards its neighbors has evolved significantly over time. India has shifted its focus towards economic cooperation and regional integration in the post-Cold War period. India has sought to counter China's influence in the region by signing defense agreements and providing military assistance to its neighbors.
- Overall, India's foreign policy towards its neighbors has been a **mix of pragmatism and principle**, with a focus on maintaining regional stability and promoting economic cooperation. India's relationship with its neighbors will continue to be a critical aspect of its foreign policy, and India will **need to navigate the complex geopolitical dynamics in the region to ensure its security and prosperity.**