



India's Multi-alignment in Contemporary Geopolitics

This editorial is based on “[Message from Moscow: India-Russia relationship is not in ‘terminal decline’](#)” which was published in The Indian Express on 11/072024. The article highlights India's nuanced multi-alignment strategy, balancing relations with Russia amid global geopolitical challenges, emphasizing diplomatic finesse, economic cooperation, and strategic engagement to reinforce bilateral resilience and navigate international complexities effectively.

For Prelims: [22nd India-Russia Annual Summit](#), [India's G20 Presidency 2023](#), [African Union](#), [New Delhi Leaders' Declaration](#), [G7 summit](#), [Quadrilateral Security Dialogue](#), [Shanghai Cooperation Organisation](#), [I2U2 group](#), [Chabahar Port development](#), [S-400 missile](#), [International Solar Alliance](#), [Global Biofuels Alliance](#), [Artemis Accords](#).

For Mains: India's Multi-Alignment Stance in Global Geopolitics, Issues Related to India's Foreign Policy Amidst Changing World Order.

Indian Prime Minister's recent visit to Russia ([22nd India-Russia Annual Summit](#)) showcased India's **adept multi-alignment strategy**. While maintaining warm ties with Russia, including agreements on boosting trade and cooperation on various fronts, India also addressed concerns about the [Ukraine war](#) and the need for peaceful resolution. This visit highlights India's ability to navigate complex geopolitical situations and maintain strong relationships with major powers despite their differences.

However, the **trade imbalance with Russia** and potential limitations in military cooperation due to sanctions requires India to find multifaceted solutions. To ensure the long-term viability of its **multi-alignment approach**, India will need to carefully balance its relationships with various powers and address these emerging issues.

How is India Maintaining a Multi-Alignment Stance in Global Geopolitics?

- **Balancing Russia and the West:** India's relationship with Russia and the West exemplifies its multi-alignment approach.
 - Despite pressure from Western allies, India has maintained its strategic partnership with Russia, as evidenced by the Indian Prime Minister's recent visit to Moscow.
 - Simultaneously, India has strengthened its ties with the [United States through Strategic Partnership](#).
 - This delicate balancing act allows India to leverage its historical ties with Russia while also benefiting from technological and strategic partnerships with Western powers.
- **African Union Inclusion in G20:** [India's G20 Presidency 2023](#) marked a significant diplomatic achievement, showcasing its ability to **bridge divides in a fractured global landscape**.
 - A major highlight was India's successful push for the [African Union's permanent membership in the G20](#), elevating the representation of the Global South.

- This move demonstrated India's commitment to **reforming global governance structures and its role as a voice for developing nations**, while also strengthening its ties with African countries.
- The [New Delhi Leaders' Declaration](#), achieved glory despite geopolitical tensions, further underscored India's diplomatic prowess in fostering consensus on critical global issues.
- **Navigating the Russia-Ukraine Conflict** India's stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict exemplifies its nuanced diplomacy.
 - While maintaining its historic ties with Russia, including **continued oil purchases at discounted rates**, India has also expressed concern over the conflict.
 - The Indian Prime Minister's statement to the Russian President that **"today's era is not of war" gained global attention**.
 - Also, the Indian Prime Minister of India met the President of Ukraine during the [G7 summit in Italy](#).
 - This balanced approach allows India to maintain its strategic autonomy while positioning itself as a **potential mediator in global conflicts**.
- **Balanced Approach to the Israel-Hamas Conflict:** India's response to the Israel-Hamas conflict exemplifies its nuanced multi-alignment approach in foreign policy.
 - While swiftly condemning **the 7th October, 2023 Hamas attack** and expressing solidarity with Israel, India has simultaneously called for **de-escalation, dialogue, and a return to diplomacy**.
 - Maintaining its **long-standing support for a two-state solution**, India continues to advocate for an **independent Palestinian state** alongside Israel.
 - Through this approach, India manages to maintain its strategic partnership with Israel, uphold support for the Palestinian cause, reinforce its anti-terrorism stance, and position itself as a **responsible global player** capable of navigating complex geopolitical issues.
- **Quad Engagement and Indo-Pacific Strategy:** India's active participation in the [Quadrilateral Security Dialogue \(Quad\)](#) with the US, Japan, and Australia represents a key aspect of its Indo-Pacific strategy.
 - Concurrently, India maintains its involvement in other regional forums like the [Shanghai Cooperation Organisation \(SCO\)](#) and [BRICS](#), showcasing its ability to engage with seemingly opposing blocs to further its interests in the Indo-Pacific region.
- **Middle East Diplomacy:** India's involvement in the [I2U2 group \(India, Israel, UAE, USA\)](#) marks a new chapter in its Middle East diplomacy.
 - This quadrilateral economic forum aims to leverage private sector capital and expertise to modernize infrastructure, advance low carbon development, and improve public health.
 - Alongside this, India continues to **balance its relationships with Iran** ([Chabahar Port development](#)) and **Saudi Arabia**, demonstrating its ability to navigate complex regional dynamics.
- **Strategic Autonomy in Defense Acquisitions** India's defense procurement strategy epitomizes its multi-alignment approach.
 - The country has diversified its defense imports, acquiring [S-400 missile systems from Russia](#), [Rafale jets from France](#), and [MQ-9B drones from the US](#).
 - Simultaneously, India is pushing for indigenous development through the **"Atmanirbhar Bharat" (Self-Reliant India) initiative in defense**, as seen in the production of the [Tejas fighter jets](#) and the development of indigenous aircraft carriers like [INS Vikrant](#).
- **Climate Leadership and Energy Partnerships:** India has positioned itself as a leader in climate action while balancing its development needs.
 - The [International Solar Alliance](#), spearheaded by India, now has over 100 member countries.
 - India's ambitious renewable energy targets and the recent launch of the [Global Biofuels Alliance at the G20 summit](#) showcase its commitment to sustainable development.
 - Simultaneously, India continues to **engage with multiple partners for its energy security, including oil imports from Russia** and nuclear cooperation with countries like France and the US.
- **Space Diplomacy and Technological Cooperation** India's space program exemplifies its diverse international cooperation.
 - The **successful Chandrayaan-3 lunar mission** not only demonstrated India's technological capabilities but also its collaborative approach, with [NASA's Deep Space Network](#) providing support.

- India is also part of the [Artemis Accords](#), a US-led initiative for lunar exploration, while maintaining **space cooperation with Russia through programs like [Gaganyaan](#)**.
- This multifaceted space diplomacy allows India to benefit from various partnerships while asserting its position as a major space power.
- **Vaccine Diplomacy and Health Partnerships:** India's response to the [Covid-19 pandemic](#) through its **Vaccine Maitri initiative** showcased its capacity as a global health partner.
 - By supplying vaccines to numerous countries, including both Western nations and Global South partners, **India reinforced its image as the "pharmacy of the world"**.
 - This was balanced with meeting domestic vaccine needs and collaborating on vaccine development with multiple countries, **including the US (Novavax) and Russia (Sputnik V)**.

What are the Major Challenges Related to India's Multi Alignment Approach?

- **Balancing Conflicting Interests:** One of the primary challenges is maintaining a delicate balance between conflicting interests of various partners.
 - For instance, India's continued oil purchases from Russia amid the Ukraine conflict have **strained its relations with Western allies, particularly the EU**.
 - This balancing act becomes increasingly difficult as geopolitical tensions rise, forcing India to make tough choices that may disappoint one partner or another.
- **Responding to Regional Power Dynamics:** India's multi-alignment approach is constantly **tested by shifting regional power dynamics**, particularly in its neighborhood.
 - Balancing relations with countries like **Nepal, Sri Lanka, and the Maldives**, where China has made significant inroads, requires careful diplomacy.
 - The **recent strain in [India-Maldives relations](#)** following the pro-China stance of the new Maldivian government exemplifies this challenge.
- **Reliability Concerns:** India's multi-alignment strategy may lead to perceptions of unreliability among its partners.
 - For example, India's withdrawal from the [Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership \(RCEP\)](#) in 2019 raised questions about its commitment to economic integration initiatives.
 - Similarly, its stance on issues like **data localization and e-commerce regulations** has sometimes put it at odds with the US and other Western partners, potentially impacting its image as a reliable strategic ally.
- **Navigating Economic Pressures:** Economic interdependence can limit India's ability to maintain true strategic autonomy.
 - The **threat of secondary sanctions from the US** over dealings with Russia or Iran puts India in a difficult position, potentially forcing it to choose between economic interests and strategic partnerships.
 - The challenge of reducing dependence on Chinese imports while seeking to maintain economic engagement highlights the complexities of economic multi-alignment.
- **Technological and Strategic Autonomy:** Maintaining technological independence while benefiting from partnerships is a major challenge.
 - India's participation in initiatives like the **Quad's critical and emerging technology working group** must be balanced with its own technological development goals.
 - The debate over **5G technology and the exclusion of Chinese firms like Huawei** illustrates the difficulty in balancing security concerns with technological advancement.
- **Defense Cooperation and Interoperability:** Procuring defense equipment from diverse sources (like S-400 systems from Russia and P-8I aircraft from the US) **raises issues of interoperability** and may **complicate joint military exercises** and operations with various partners.
 - It also risks running afoul of partner countries' sanctions or export control regimes, as seen with the **potential [CAATSA sanctions](#) over the S-400 purchase**.
- **Climate Action vs. Development Needs:** India's commitment to climate action (like the International Solar Alliance) often conflicts with its development needs and energy security concerns.
 - Balancing **ambitious climate goals with continued reliance on coal and oil imports** presents a significant challenge in maintaining credibility across different international climate forums.
- **Diaspora Dynamics:** India's large and influential diaspora, while an asset, can also complicate its multi-alignment strategy.

- For example, **balancing the interests of the Indian diaspora in the Gulf countries (recent release of navy veterans from Qatar)** with India's growing ties with Israel requires careful diplomacy.
- Similarly, the Indian diaspora's influence in countries like Canada and the UK (like the **recent escalation of [Khalistan Movement](#)**) can sometimes create diplomatic pressures that conflict with India's broader foreign policy objectives.
- **Non-Traditional Security Challenges:** Addressing non-traditional security issues like terrorism, cybersecurity, and pandemics requires India to cooperate with various, sometimes competing, international partners.
 - For instance, **counter-terrorism cooperation with the US** might conflict with maintaining cordial relations with countries like Iran or Turkey.

What Strategies can India Implement to Achieve More Sustainable Diplomacy?

- **Adaptive Strategic Frameworks:** Develop flexible, **scenario-based strategic frameworks** that can quickly adapt to changing global dynamics.
 - This could involve creating a multi-tiered engagement model where relationships are categorized based on shared interests, values, and strategic importance, allowing for nuanced responses to different international situations.
- **Enhanced Inter-ministerial Coordination:** Establish a more robust inter-ministerial coordination mechanism, perhaps a '**Diplomatic Strategy Group**', that brings together representatives from various ministries (**External Affairs, Defense, Commerce, Science & Technology, etc.**) to ensure coherence in India's international engagements across different domains.
- **Specialized Diplomatic Cadres:** Develop specialized diplomatic cadres focused on emerging areas like **tech diplomacy, climate diplomacy, and health diplomacy**.
 - These experts can navigate the complex intersections of these fields with geopolitics, ensuring more informed and nuanced engagement in these crucial areas.
- **Leveraging Diaspora Networks Strategically:** Create a structured program to engage the Indian diaspora in diplomatic efforts. 4
 - This could include establishing a '**Diaspora Diplomacy Council**' that leverages the expertise and networks of overseas Indians to enhance India's soft power and economic diplomacy.
- **Regional Engagement Platforms:** Initiate regional dialogue platforms that bring together diverse stakeholders from neighboring countries.
 - These forums could focus on shared challenges like **climate change, water security, or regional economic integration**, positioning India as a constructive regional leader.
- **Tiered Economic Partnership Model:** Develop a tiered economic partnership model that allows for **varying levels of economic integration** with different partners.
 - This could **help balance protectionist needs with the imperative of global economic engagement**, offering flexibility in trade negotiations.
- **Cultural Diplomacy 2.0:** Launch a 'Cultural Diplomacy 2.0' initiative that goes beyond traditional cultural exchanges.
 - This could involve collaborative projects in areas like **digital art, virtual reality experiences of Indian heritage, or global esports tournaments**, appealing to younger, tech-savvy global audiences.
- **Sustainable Development Diplomacy:** Position India as a leader in sustainable development diplomacy by initiating a '**Global South Sustainability Alliance**'.
 - This platform could focus on sharing best practices, technologies, and resources for sustainable development among developing nations, enhancing India's soft power and leadership in this crucial area.
- **Track 1.5 Diplomacy Enhancement:** Strengthen **Track 1.5 diplomacy** efforts by creating a network of **think tanks, academic institutions, sport athletes, industry experts** that can engage in informal diplomacy.
 - This network can serve as a testing ground for new diplomatic ideas and a buffer for sensitive discussions.
 - **Cricket diplomacy** could pave the way for India to engage with Western countries through its **charismatic cricket professionals as coaches**.
- **Digital Sovereignty Initiative:** Launch a '**Digital Sovereignty Initiative**' that focuses on developing indigenous digital infrastructure and standards for developing countries .

- This could help India navigate the challenges of technological fragmentation while positioning itself as a key player in **shaping global digital norms**.
- **Multilateral Reform Leadership:** Take a leadership role in reforming multilateral institutions like **UNSC** by proposing innovative governance models.
 - This could involve advocating for **more inclusive decision-making processes or suggesting new frameworks** for global cooperation that reflect the current multipolar world order.
- **Space-Based Diplomatic Missions:** Propose the concept of space-based diplomatic missions or 'orbital embassies'.
- This futuristic approach could symbolize India's commitment to space exploration while creating a unique platform for international cooperation.
- **Asymmetric Engagement Strategy:** Develop an "Asymmetric Engagement Strategy" that allows India to maintain different levels and types of engagement with various partners without compromising its core interests.
 - This could involve **creating a sophisticated matrix of engagement levels** across different domains (economic, strategic, cultural) with each international partner.

Drishti Mains Question:

Evaluate India's approach to multilateralism. How does this strategy influence its position and role in global geopolitics?

UPSC Civil Services Examination, Previous Year Questions (PYQs)

Prelims:

Q. In which one of the following groups are all the four countries members of G20? (2020)

- (a) Argentina, Mexico, South Africa and Turkey
- (b) Australia, Canada, Malaysia and New Zealand
- (c) Brazil, Iran, Saudi Arabia and Vietnam
- (d) Indonesia, Japan, Singapore and South Korea

Ans: (a)

Mains:

Q. At the international level, bilateral relations between most nations are governed on the policy of promoting one's own national interest without any regard for the interest of other nations. This leads to conflicts and tension between nations. How can ethical consideration help resolve such tensions? Discuss with specific examples. (2015)

Q. 'The long-sustained image of India as a leader of the oppressed and marginalised nations has disappeared on account of its new found role in the emerging global order.' Elaborate. (2019)

