

India as a Rising Power: Assessing Its Middle-Power Diplomacy in 2025

D.C.D.R. Pandey¹

1. Associate Professor, Kali Charan P.G. College, Lucknow.

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Abstract

In 2025, India occupies a pivotal position in an increasingly multipolar and contested global order. As geopolitical tensions intensify—particularly the U.S.–China rivalry, the Russia–West confrontation, and the fragmentation of multilateral institutions—India’s foreign policy has evolved into a sophisticated model of middle-power diplomacy. This research paper examines the dynamics shaping India’s diplomatic behavior in 2025, focusing on its goals of safeguarding strategic autonomy, elevating its global status, and acting as an influential bridge between power blocs. The analysis investigates India’s engagement in multilateral forums, its Indo-Pacific strategy, technological and economic statecraft, leadership of the Global South, and the recalibration of relationships with major powers such as the United States, Russia, China, the European Union, and emerging regions like West Asia and Africa.

India’s diplomacy in 2025 reflects a pragmatic balance: cooperation with the U.S. on Indo-Pacific security; continued strategic partnership with Russia for defence and energy security; competitive coexistence with China; and a growing leadership role in the Global South through platforms like G20, BRICS+, and the Quad. India leverages tools such as development diplomacy, digital public infrastructure (DPI), climate and energy initiatives, diaspora networks, and cultural diplomacy to reinforce its rising international profile.

The paper concludes that India’s rise is not solely determined by its economic and military capabilities but by its ability to influence global governance norms, expand issue-based coalitions, and enhance regional stability. As a middle power with great-power aspirations, India’s behaviour in 2025 demonstrates a strategic blend of autonomy, multilateral activism, and pragmatic partnerships—positioning it as an indispensable actor in shaping the emerging multipolar global order.

Keywords: - India’s Foreign Policy, Middle-Power Diplomacy, Multipolar Global Order, Strategic Autonomy, Global South Leadership.

1. Introduction

India’s global profile has grown significantly over the past two decades, transforming it from a regional power in South Asia into a globally relevant actor with expanding economic, military, and diplomatic capabilities. By 2025, India stands at the intersection of major geopolitical realignments: the intensifying U.S.–China rivalry, the reconfiguration of supply chains, rising techno-nationalism, Russia’s evolving global position, and the emergence of a more assertive Global South. This confluence of factors has created new opportunities for India to advance its strategic interests while positioning itself as a credible middle-power influencer. Middle-power diplomacy—traditionally associated with actors like Australia, Canada, Brazil, Japan, and South Korea—refers to states that wield significant but not dominant power, exercise influence through coalition building, and contribute to global governance. India’s diplomatic choices in 2025 increasingly reflect this behavior while simultaneously projecting the ambitions of a rising great power.

This research paper argues that India’s rise is shaped by its dual identity: a **middle power with growing capabilities** and a **civilizational state with aspirations for global leadership**. India’s diplomatic strategies

demonstrate a balancing act between great-power engagement, regional responsibilities, and leadership aspirations within the Global South.

The study is structured around five central themes:

- India's evolving strategic autonomy as a foundation of foreign policy
- Middle-power diplomacy in major institutions and coalitions
- India's role in the Indo-Pacific and regional security cooperation
- Economic and technological statecraft as tools of influence
- Bilateral and multilateral partnerships across major regions
- This holistic analysis provides a comprehensive understanding of India's rising global profile in 2025.

2. Conceptual Framework: Middle-Power Diplomacy and India's Foreign Policy Identity

2.1 Defining Middle Power

Middle powers are states that, are influential but not dominant, build coalitions to shape international norms, support multilateral institutions, adopt issue-based diplomacy, balance major powers without direct confrontation. India fits many of these characteristics due to its diplomatic behaviour, even though its demographic scale and economic potential place it on the path toward great-power status.

2.2 India's Dual Identity

India's foreign policy identity consists of: **Civilizational Heritage:** Emphasis on soft power, culture, and Global South leadership, **Strategic Autonomy:** Avoiding alignment with any single power bloc, **Developmental Aspirations:** Focus on economic growth and technology, **Security Imperatives:** Addressing China's rise, Pakistan's instability, and regional tensions

Thus, India's diplomacy merges normative leadership with strategic pragmatism.

3. Strategic Autonomy in the 21st Century: Evolution and Practice

3.1 Historical Roots of Strategic Autonomy

India's policy of non-alignment during the Cold War established the foundation for strategic autonomy. Post-1991 reforms introduced a more pragmatic, multi-aligned approach.

3.2 Strategic Autonomy in 2025

Strategic autonomy today means: not participating in formal alliances, cooperating with multiple powers simultaneously, issue-based partnerships rather than bloc politics, avoiding dependence on any single country for defense or energy, India's decisions on Russia-Ukraine, China, Israel-Palestine, and the Indo-Pacific all reflect this nuanced stance.

3.3 Flexibility in Alignment: India deepens partnerships where interests converge but maintains distance where interests diverge. Examples include: Close defense-industrial cooperation with the U.S., Continued arms imports and energy ties with Russia, Controlled engagement with China on trade and border issues, Strategic investments

in West Asia without choosing sides in regional rivalries, this flexibility enhances India's credibility as a mediator and independent actor.

4. India's Middle-Power Activism in Multilateral Institutions

- **G20 Presidency and Global South Leadership:** India's 2023 G20 presidency became a turning point, showcasing: digital public infrastructure diplomacy, debt restructuring efforts for developing countries, reform proposals for global financial institutions, diplomatic bridges between Western and non-Western blocs, by 2025, India continues leveraging this momentum to position itself as the legitimate voice of the Global South.
- **BRICS+ and Alternative Multilateralism:** India's role in BRICS+ reflects: support for a more inclusive multipolar world, concerns about Chinese dominance, opportunities for alternative financial systems such as NDB, India balances BRICS commitments with its Western partnerships.
- **Quad and the Indo-Pacific Architecture:** Participation in the Quad (India, U.S., Japan, Australia) is central to: maritime security, supply chain resilience, emerging technologies, countering China's influence, The Quad is not a military alliance but a platform for practical cooperation.
- **UN Reform Advocacy:** India continues advocating for: expansion of UNSC, greater representation of developing nations, reform of global governance norms, this strengthens its image as a constructive middle power.

5. India and the Indo-Pacific: Balancing China, Shaping Regional Order

5.1 Strategic Importance of the Indo-Pacific

The Indo-Pacific has become central to India's foreign policy due to: China's assertiveness in maritime and land domains, importance of sea lanes for trade and energy, partnerships with Japan and Australia, competition over regional connectivity

- **India-China Competitive Coexistence:** India's relationship with China is defined by: unresolved border disputes (LAC tensions), economic interdependence despite diversification efforts, rivalry in Indian Ocean and Eurasia, competing development models in the Global South, India uses a combination of military modernization, diplomatic engagement, and partnerships to manage China.
- **India's Maritime Vision:** India prioritizes: freedom of navigation, naval modernization, island partnerships with Maldives, Seychelles, Mauritius, cooperation with ASEAN, this enhances India's role as a net security provider.

6. Economic Statecraft and Technological Diplomacy

6.1 Economic Rise and Strategic Influence

India's growing economy strengthens its leverage in: trade negotiations, investment partnerships, supply chain realignments.

6.2 Digital Public Infrastructure (DPI) Diplomacy

India exports digital governance models such as: UPI, Aadhaar, CoWIN platform, India Stack, more than 20 Global South countries engage with India's DPI initiatives, enhancing India's soft power.

6.3 Technology Partnerships

Key partners include: U.S. (semiconductors, AI, defense tech), Japan and South Korea (electronics, robotics), EU (data governance, green technologies), Tech diplomacy is a cornerstone of India's 2025 strategy.

7. Security Partnerships and Defense Diplomacy

- **India–U.S. Defense Cooperation:** India and the U.S. strengthen: logistics agreements, joint exercises (Yudh Abhyas, Malabar), defense manufacturing (jet engines, drones), intelligence sharing, This enhances India's military capabilities without compromising autonomy.
- **India–Russia Strategic Ties:** Despite global tensions, India maintains: defence acquisitions, energy partnerships (oil, nuclear), cooperation in Eurasia. The relationship is adjusting but remains steady.
- **West Asia and Africa Security Engagement :** India expands security cooperation with: UAE, Saudi Arabia, Oman, African Union countries, This supports counterterrorism, trade, and energy security.
- **Development Diplomacy and Soft Power : Development Assistance** India provides: infrastructure aid, medical assistance, capacity building, humanitarian relief, Neighbourhood First and SAGAR remain top priorities.
- **Diaspora Diplomacy :** With a 32-million-strong diaspora, India benefits from: remittances, political influence, cultural networks, economic cooperation
- **Cultural and Educational Diplomacy :** India promotes: Yoga and Ayurveda, Bollywood, ICCR cultural exchanges, These strengthen India's rising global appeal.

8. Regional Diplomacy: Neighborhood and Beyond

- **South Asia ;** India faces challenges due to: China's Belt and Road Initiative, political instability in Pakistan, balancing relations with Nepal, Sri Lanka, and Bangladesh, Diplomacy focuses on connectivity, trade, and crisis response.
- **West Asia (Middle East) :** India's ties with UAE, Saudi Arabia, Israel, and Qatar are at an all-time high due to: energy supplies, labour markets, investment flows, I2U2 cooperation
- **Africa :** India expands partnerships in: energy, healthcare, agriculture, skill development, Africa is central to India's Global South strategy.

9. Challenges to India's Middle-Power Diplomacy

- **China's Regional Dominance:** Beijing's economic and military strength complicates India's strategic environment.
- **Resource and Capability Gaps :** India must overcome infrastructure, military modernization, and economic constraints.
- **Domestic Political Polarization :** Internal issues sometimes affect foreign policy perception.
- **Global Economic Uncertainty :** Energy shocks, inflation, and supply chain disruptions test India's resilience.
- **India's Future Trajectory as a Rising Power : Toward a Multipolar Asia :** India's long-term goal is a stable Asian balance of power.
- **Leadership in the Global South :** India may lead in: climate negotiations, digital governance, debt reform, inclusive multilateralism.
- **Potential for Great-Power Status:** India's rise will depend on: sustained economic growth, defence modernization, technological innovation, diplomatic agility.

10. Conclusion

India's middle-power diplomacy in 2025 reflects an adaptable, pragmatic, and ambitious foreign policy agenda. As the world transitions toward greater multipolarity, India embraces its role as a balancing force, a bridge-builder, and a norm-setter. The country's rise is supported not only by its demographic and economic strengths but also by its strategic autonomy, multilateral activism, technological leadership, and soft power. India's dual identity—as both a rising great power and a mature middle power—allows it to navigate complex international dynamics with flexibility. Its increased engagement in the Indo-Pacific, Global South, G20, BRICS+, and Quad signifies expanding influence. Ultimately, India's foreign policy trajectory in 2025 demonstrates its capacity to shape global governance, promote regional stability, and position itself as a leading power in the emerging global order.

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Corresponding Author:

D.C.D.R. Pandey

Associate Professor,

Kali Charan P.G. College, Lucknow.

Email: - pandeydcdrcolvin@gmail.com