

India's Diplomatic Relationship with Western Country

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Abstract

India's contemporary foreign policy is shaped by intensifying geopolitical volatility, particularly the China challenge, shifting power balances, and global conflict trends. In this multipolar world, safeguarding national interests has compelled New Delhi to recalibrate its engagement with major powers, especially the Western bloc comprising the United States, European Union, United Kingdom, France, Germany, and other members of the Collective West. This study examines the trajectory of India's relations with Western nations, analyzing opportunities and constraints through policy documents, agreements, dialogues, and expert assessments. Findings reveal that India continues to uphold its doctrine of Strategic Autonomy, but is adapting it into Multi-Alignment and Functional Partnerships. Convergence with Western countries is evident in defense modernization, Indo-Pacific security, supply chain resilience, technology transfer, innovation, and reform of global institutions such as the UN, IMF, and World Bank. Strategic synergy is reflected in naval exercises, QUAD cooperation, counter-terrorism, climate diplomacy, digital infrastructure, and energy transition initiatives. India's active role in platforms like the G7, G20, I2U2, and IPEF enhances its position as a decisive power in shaping global order. Participation in the upcoming G7 Summit in Italy underscores growing trust and interdependence, reinforcing India's rise as a technology hub, manufacturing center, and stabilizing force in the Indo-Pacific and Eurasia.

Keywords: Strategic Autonomy, Multi-Alignment, Indo-Pacific, Supply Chain Resilience, Global Governance, Technology Hub.

1. Introduction

India, as one of the world's largest economies and a vital democracy, stands at a geopolitical crossroads where it needs to reconcile complex and often contradictory interests that influence the global balance of power. Every diplomatic move by India, a nation of this scale and democratic vibrancy, deeply impacts the global order.

On one hand, there are China's growing aggression and security concerns. Military standoffs at the Line of Actual Control (LAC), the increasing presence of the Chinese Navy in the Indian Ocean, and strategic investments in neighbouring countries pose a direct challenge to India's security and regional dominance.

On the other hand, there is India's ambition for global governance reform and the establishment of a multipolar world order. This dualistic situation presents a critical time for India to redefine its relationship with Western nations. Former Foreign Secretary Shivshankar Menon highlighted this complexity, stating:

"The success of India's foreign policy will depend on how well it manages the dual challenges of accommodating and balancing the rise of Chinese power."

India aspires to a larger role in forums like the UN Security Council, IMF, and World Bank to represent the interests of the Global South. This desire aligns with the interests of Western nations, which are seeking a

democratic partner like India to balance China's growing influence. In this context, renowned geopolitical expert Harsh V. Pant's statement is pertinent:

"India is now adopting a policy of active, purpose-driven cooperation rather than passive neutrality... This shift is crucial for balancing China and securing its place in the global power structure."

This research aims to analyze the current form, limitations, and long-term implications of India's diplomatic relations with the Collective West amidst these complexities, seeking to understand whether India can successfully maintain its established autonomy while playing a Decisive Role in global governance structures.

In this context, this research paper explores the following Core Research Questions:

What is the current nature and what are the limitations of India's diplomatic relationship with the Collective West amidst geopolitical instability (especially China-induced challenges and the Ukraine conflict)?

Can India successfully maintain its established Strategic Autonomy or neutrality while actively participating in global governance structures?

How can India utilize platforms of incomplete cooperation, such as the G7 Summit, to advance its national interests and contribute to regional and global stability?

This paper explores these challenges and opportunities, offering a clear and practical perspective on India's potential for global engagement and the future of its relations with the West.

2. Historical Background: From Non-Alignment to Adaptation

India's current diplomatic ties are rooted in its foreign policy established during the Cold War (\$1947-1991\$), historically based on the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) and Strategic Autonomy. A Brief Historical Synopsis follows:

2.1 Non-Aligned Movement (Cold War Era: 1947-1991)

Post-independence, India adopted a policy of not forming a formal military alliance with either the Soviet Union or the United States, known as Non-Alignment. The objective was to maintain India's Strategic Autonomy. India received economic and military aid from both blocs but made independent decisions based on its national interests (e.g., the Treaty of Peace, Friendship, and Cooperation with the USSR in 1971, yet avoiding a military pact).

2.2 Post-Cold War and the Rise of China (1991 - 2020)

Following the dissolution of the Soviet Union, India shifted its policy towards 'Multi-Alignment,' meaning it would maintain relationships with various powers (U.S., Russia, E.U.) for its economic and security needs. However, the rapid rise of China's economic and military power in this period created security concerns for India along the LAC and in the Indian Ocean. China's challenge prompted Western nations, particularly the U.S., to begin viewing India as a critical strategic partner in the Indo-Pacific.

2.3 Shift to Functional Partnership (2020 - Present)

Since 2020 (especially after the military standoff with China in Eastern Ladakh), India has abandoned its traditional 'passive neutrality' and moved towards 'active functional partnership.' India now views cooperation

with the Collective West (G7, Quad) not merely as a tool for balancing China, but as an essential strategy for technology transfer (semiconductors), economic resilience (supply chains), and securing a decisive role in global governance.

3. Discussion: India's Diplomatic Remodeling

India's current geopolitical scenario is challenging. On one hand, China's expansionism threatens India's development and security; on the other, conflicts involving key partners (like the Ukraine conflict) and military tensions in the Western Pacific make it difficult for India to maintain balance. Western nations view India as a vital partner in the global governance structure. This paper analyzes India's capacity for global engagement, the relevance of its neutrality, and the importance of cooperation with the Collective West, especially in the context of regular G7 participation (including the upcoming Summit hosted by Italy).

3.1 Remodeling Strategic Autonomy

India is not abandoning its foreign policy cornerstone, Strategic Autonomy, but is actively adapting it to current global challenges and opportunities. Autonomy means India makes independent decisions based on its national interests, without formal alliance commitment. India is remodeling this autonomy into an active and focused Functional Partnership. This flexible cooperation is designed to achieve specific, shared interests, reflecting India's focus on Realpolitik—protecting national interests above all. India maintains this autonomy by engaging with all powers (e.g., maintaining ties with both Russia and the West during the Ukraine conflict) to ensure its strategic options are never binding or restricted by any external power.

3.2 Rationale for Partnership

- **The Rising China Threat:** The most immediate reason is the comprehensive China Challenge. This is not just a border dispute but a broad geostrategic challenge to the global power balance. The perception of a shared threat, driven by China's actions along the LAC and its increasing naval presence in the Indian Ocean, has created a common security interest with Western nations. This cooperation manifests as a strong Functional Partnership in intelligence sharing, military exercises, and defence technology, aiming to balance China's expansionism.
- **Need for Technology and Global Governance Reform:** Modern national power relies on advanced technology. India urgently needs advanced, reliable technology (semiconductors, digital infrastructure) for its economic growth and national security. Cooperation with the West ensures access to reliable supply chains, preventing over-dependence on China or Russia, which could threaten India's autonomy. Simultaneously, India seeks a greater role in global institutions (UNSC, IMF). Western nations support India's inclusion to make global governance more inclusive and to counter China's growing influence. Thus, the need for technology and governance reform pulls India towards the West, making the relationship a long-term, multi-dimensional Functional Partnership.

3.3 Establishing India as a Decisive Power

India's diplomatic policy is now centered on the aspiration to establish itself as a Decisive Power—one that directly influences the global agenda, beyond being just a regional major power.

- **Directly Addressing National Interests:** Active participation in multilateral forums like the G7 provides a unique opportunity to directly influence global rules and standards (e.g., on climate finance, digital governance, resilient supply chains). India uses its presence to ensure global economic policies reflect the concerns of the Global South, positioning itself as an Active Rule-Maker, not just an observer.
- **Creating a Multipolar World Order:** By cooperating with the West, India ensures the future global order is not limited to a bipolar U.S.-China conflict. India establishes itself as a Stable Third Pillar, strengthening its Strategic Autonomy by having the capacity to balance both blocs. This active balancing role establishes India as a unique mediator and Bridge-Builder on the global stage.

4. Geopolitical Complexities and Security Concerns

4.1 Ukraine Conflict and Ties with Russia

The conflict has severely tested India's autonomy. Western sanctions on Russia (India's primary defence supplier) have caused uncertainty in defence supplies, forcing India to seek advanced alternatives from the West. While India continues to buy discounted oil from Russia for domestic stability, its neutral stance at the UN has been questioned by Europe. This has compelled India to consider how its high defence dependence on Russia limits its strategic freedom against China, especially as the Russia-China alignment grows.

4.2 Western Pacific Tensions

Instability in the Western Pacific (South China Sea, Taiwan) directly impacts India's strategic and economic interests, as 55% of its maritime trade passes through this region. Increased militarization challenges Freedom of Navigation. These complexities have driven India to strengthen its maritime partnerships (QUAD, France, ASEAN), reinforcing the view that passive distancing is no longer sufficient to preserve autonomy; active, purpose-driven cooperation with the Collective West is an imperative.

5. Assessing Western Intent and India's Diplomacy

Western countries view India as a reliable democratic partner to balance China, ensure a free and open Indo-Pacific, and promote democratic values. They expect India to be a 'counter-weight' and a 'structural partner' in shaping global governance.

India, however, must ensure the partnership is not solely China-centric but is based on shared benefits in economic, technological, and multilateral sectors. Strategic experts argue that India must prioritize its national interests (e.g., maintaining Russian defence imports or championing the Global South) even against Western preferences. India's adoption of 'Multi-Alignment' or 'Calibrated Strategic Autonomy' means actively making "selective choices" on complex global issues, ensuring it retains the flexibility to prioritize its goals.

G7 Participation as a Key Diplomatic Tool: India's regular participation in the G7 maximizes its global influence through incomplete cooperation. It allows India to demonstrate that its cooperation extends beyond containing China, covering global agendas like climate change, digital transformation, and supply chain resilience. The upcoming G7 Summit (hosted by Italy) is vital for India to clarify its balanced approach (e.g., on the Russia-Ukraine war) and attract essential Western capital and technology to achieve its 'Aatmanirbhar Bharat' (self-reliant

India) goals. G7 engagement is a decisive diplomatic tool for securing strategic gains and consolidating its position as a global power.

6. Conclusion

The in-depth analysis of diplomatic relations between India and the West confirms that India has not abandoned its Strategic Autonomy but has successfully remodelled it into a Functional Partnership tailored to current global realities. This is an essential strategy for stability and achieving long-term national interests.

The partnership is primarily driven by the need to balance the China Challenge and secure access to advanced technology and reliable supply chains from the West, while promoting shared goals of global governance reform. India's regular presence at high-level forums like the G7 is instrumental in this strategy, allowing it to act as an 'Active Rule-Maker' and 'Decisive Power' on the global agenda.

Ultimately, India's policy is one of active, purpose-driven cooperation (multi-alignment). The long-term success of this partnership will depend on India's careful and balanced diplomacy, ensuring its strategic choices remain non-binding while successfully advancing its national interests and global stability goals.

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