

The 2024 Indian general election II: Reflections on foreign policy

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The influence of the 18th Lok Sabha elections in India extends beyond internal affairs to shape the nation's foreign policy and, by extension, its approach to global affairs.



Picture credit: News18

Introduction

During this crucial period, the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP) and Prime Minister Narendra Modi has led the ruling National Democratic Alliance (NDA) government, showing the

intricate connection between a country's domestic and foreign policies. The Prime Minister and the Ministry of External Affairs have made numerous promises throughout the electoral campaign.

Prior to the parliamentary elections and throughout the electoral process, India's foreign policy witnessed several noteworthy developments that are likely to have a significant impact on the formulation and execution of its foreign policy in the near future. The [Palestine issue](#) is extremely sensitive for India, primarily due to its large Muslim population. In a display of support, India voted in favour of Palestine's membership in the United Nations General Assembly.

Conversely, India has also been fostering a multi-dimensional relationship with Israel, driven by the growing synergies between the two nations since 1991. Washington's involvement often influences the dynamics between New Delhi and Jerusalem. Over the years, the US has not only emerged as an economic partner for India but also as a strategic, technological, and counter-terrorism collaborator.

However, the United States (US) has expressed its dissatisfaction with India's decision to enter into a treaty with Iran for the management of a seaport. On May 13, India and Iran officially signed a [10-year agreement](#) for the management and development of the strategically significant Chabahar Port in southeastern Iran. India Port Global Ltd. (IPGL) was awarded an annual contract for this purpose.

India's strategic autonomy

There are common areas of alignment and divergence in interests between the US and India. One common concern shared by both countries is the need to counter China's increasing influence in the Indo-Pacific region, particularly in South Asia. The US, India, Australia, and Japan established the QUAD in 2017 to address this shared concern. On May 26, 2024, China's escalating threat to Taiwan prompted India to express support for Taiwan against a potential Chinese attack.

Furthermore, when Russia initiated military operations against Ukraine, India sought to maintain a delicate balance between the two conflicting parties. Despite pressure from Washington to sever ties with Moscow, New Delhi has asserted its commitment to maintaining its '[strategic autonomy](#)' in managing its bilateral and multilateral relationships, emphasising that it will not succumb to external pressures.

India's 'Look East Policy' was initiated by former Prime Minister Narashima Rao in 1991 and developed and renamed 'Act East Policy' by the Narendra Modi government after coming into power in 2014. The basic motto of the '[Act East Policy](#)' is to enhance the multi-dimensional relationship between India and Southeast Asian nations. Since 1991, India has expanded its relationship with Japan and South Korea, a trend that has intensified since 2014. Modia has visited Japan several times, while former Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe and current Prime Minister Kishida Fumio have also visited India to enhance connectivity and economic engagement. Japan heavily relies on India as part of its 'Free and Open Indo-Pacific' (FOIP). In search of new partners, India expanded its foreign policy throughout the globe.

Following the clash with China in June 2020 at [Galwan Valley](#), the current administration in India implemented a strategy of self-reliance, which involved a boycott of Chinese products. This move had a notable effect on the domestic political landscape of India, with the ruling BJP government leveraging the situation to foster a sense of nationalism among the populace. The government also expanded its soft power diplomacy efforts, highlighting Indian ancient culture, heritage, philosophy, yoga, Ayurveda, and civilisation on the global stage. India has emerged as the 5th-largest economy globally.

The BJP has strategically used this achievement during their electoral campaign. In recent years, economic diplomacy has been a focal point in India's foreign policy. Furthermore, energy security has emerged as a significant aspect of India's foreign policy, with a particular focus on engaging with the African continent and Latin America.

India's aspiration to be a global power

India hosted the Group of Twenty (G-20) summit in 2023. The G-20 is the premier intergovernmental forum for international economic cooperation. The forum plays an

important role in shaping and strengthening global architecture and governance on all major international economic issues. Modi is securing the country's position as a [‘Vishwamitra’](#) (literally meaning ‘friend of the world’ and, in Hindu mythology, a sage known for both hauteur and compassion). Even prior to that, when COVID-19 struck, Modi was able to position the country as an important pharmaceutical manufacturing centre and leader of the Global South, providing vaccines to countries in Africa and North America. India is one of the world's fastest-growing economies, and the Modi government has set the goal of becoming a developed country by 2047, the centenary of Indian independence.

In 2023, [India denied the allegations](#) put forth by Canadian Prime Minister Justin Trudeau regarding his involvement in the June 2023 assassination of pro-Khalistani activist Hardeep Singh Nijjar outside his gurdwara in Surrey, Canada. India aspires to be a global leader, often referred to as a ‘Vishwaguru’. However, India's pursuit of global leadership may encounter obstacles due to the increasing anti-Indian sentiment among its South Asian neighbours beginning in early 2024. The objections raised by India and its South Asian neighbours against the Narendra Modi government's decision to implement the Citizenship Amendment Act (CAA) prior to the commencement of the 2024 parliamentary elections could potentially impact the election results.

In January 2024, shortly after the inauguration of the [Ram temple by Modi](#) at the disputed mosque site in India, he inaugurated the first Hindu temple in the Middle East. The United Arab Emirates (UAE), home to over 3.5 million Indian expatriates, saw this move as an effort to enhance economic and cultural relations between the two nations. Despite facing certain challenges, India effectively executes its strategies in Central Asia and the Middle East. Additionally, India actively engages in various regional and global platforms. Narendra Modi strives to navigate the permanent members of the UN Security Council and secure India's position as a permanent member.

Conclusion

The NDA government, led by the BJP, has been censured by certain nations for eroding the secular fabric of the Indian state through intolerance and extreme Hindutva ideology. India's steady advancement in various fields has enhanced its reputation on the world stage.

However, certain contentious domestic political and policy matters have painted India in a negative light in the eyes of the global audience. In this regard, the Indian government must recognize its role.

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