

INDIA'S LEADERSHIP IN THE GLOBAL SOUTH: REDEFINING FOREIGN POLICY IN A MULTIPOLAR WORLD

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Abstract

Global politics have been profoundly altered by the rise of a multipolar world, giving nations in the Global South additional chances to articulate their shared interests. India has established itself as a major leader in this group thanks to its long history of anti-colonial leadership, rising economic capacity, and developing diplomatic clout. This study looks at how India is changing its foreign policy to better serve the interests and goals of developing countries in Latin America, Asia, and Africa. It examines India's evolution from the Non-Aligned Movement's moral voice to a practical leader supporting international reforms, development, technology, and climate justice. Initiatives like South-South cooperation, disaster assistance, digital public infrastructure sharing, and development partnerships show India's dedication to inclusive global governance. In order to better reflect the concerns of the Global South, the report also emphasizes India's active participation in organizations like the G20, BRICS, and International Solar Alliance. India's strategy, which is based on cooperation, respect for one another, and sustainable development, enhances its credibility as a leader despite obstacles including resource scarcity, geopolitical restrictions, and rivalry from China. According to the study's findings, India's shift in foreign policy makes it a key player in creating a just multipolar world.

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Introduction

The advent of multipolarity, in which power is dispersed across multiple powerful governments rather than concentrated in a single superpower, is a sign of the significant shift of the 21st-century global political environment. The phrase “Global South,” which refers to emerging countries in Asia, Africa, and Latin America that have comparable histories of colonialism, economic inequality, and underrepresentation in international decision-making, has gained fresh prominence as a result of this change. India’s population strength, economic expansion, democratic roots, and strong diplomatic outreach have made it a prominent leader of the Global South in this changing geopolitical environment. India’s current leadership position was made possible by its past participation in the Non-Aligned Movement and its support of decolonized countries. But today’s leadership takes more than just moral authority; it also calls for technical innovation, economic prowess, and strategic vision. India’s foreign policy has changed to meet modern circumstances as it strives to become a significant world power. India today takes a pragmatic and multi-aligned strategy that enables it to interact with a variety of global entities while preserving its strategic autonomy, moving past the ideological stances of the Cold War era. This has made it possible for India to more successfully advocate and defend the interests of the Global South in international fora. India’s reputation as a responsible and inclusive leader has been bolstered by its involvement in global governance, development diplomacy, humanitarian aid, and digital collaboration. India’s leadership is increasingly essential to creating a more just global order for poor countries in a multipolar world that is changing quickly.

Historical Roots of India’s Global South Leadership

India’s leadership in the Global South is firmly anchored in its anti-imperial fight, colonial past, and early dedication to establishing a just and equitable world order. India became a leading voice for recently liberated countries seeking autonomy and respect in a Western-dominated international order after attaining independence in 1947. During the Cold War, nations reluctant to join power blocs found a common platform in the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), which was largely shaped by leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru. This movement developed into a potent emblem of emerging countries’ unity, sovereignty, and peaceful cohabitation. The G77 alliance, which promoted economic fairness, development rights, and increased representation for the Global South in international organizations, was formed in large part because to India. India’s backing of South-South cooperation improved relations with Latin America, Africa, and Asia. These programs demonstrated India’s dedication to common challenges, such as reducing poverty, reducing economic inequality, and

achieving political freedom, laying the groundwork for mutual trust throughout the Global South. These historical foundations continue to influence India's identity and legitimacy as a representation of developing countries, despite the fact that world politics have changed since the middle of the 20th century. India's leading position in modern multipolar international relations is still influenced by this moral and diplomatic heritage.

Transformation of India's Foreign Policy in a Multipolar World

India's foreign policy has changed significantly in reaction to the multipolar world's constantly shifting dynamics. The current global climate necessitates flexibility, pragmatism, and strategic clarity, in contrast to the Cold War era, when India primarily followed a moralistic and ideal-driven strategy under the banner of non-alignment. India must establish a foreign policy that strikes a balance between maintaining national interests and forming a variety of relationships as the might of a single superpower diminishes. The transition from non-alignment to multi-alignment, where India interacts with all major powers—including the US, Russia, the EU, Japan, ASEAN, and BRICS—based on issue-specific collaboration, lies at the heart of this change. This strategy enables India to profit from several diplomatic and commercial alliances while retaining strategic autonomy and autonomous decision-making. In keeping with a more global perspective, India's foreign policy has also shifted its attention beyond its immediate neighborhood to the Indo-Pacific, Africa, Central Asia, and Latin America. Additionally, a more proactive and ambitious foreign policy is demonstrated by India's focus on development diplomacy, technological collaboration, climate leadership, and active engagement in international forums. India is now better equipped to speak for the concerns of the Global South and make a significant contribution to the creation of a more equitable multipolar world.

India's Leadership Through Multilateral Platforms

India's leadership in the Global South has become increasingly noticeable via its active involvement in key multilateral platforms, where it continuously fights for better global governance and more representation for developing states. One of the most significant demonstrations of this leadership came during India's G20 Presidency in 2023, where India prioritized Global South concerns and successfully secured permanent membership for the African Union in the G20. This accomplishment demonstrated India's dedication to building an international system that is more inclusive. Additionally, India is a key member of BRICS, where it fosters collaboration in technology, health, and sustainable development while advancing financial independence for poor nations through programs like the New

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Development Bank. In a similar vein, India can enhance democratic and development-focused South-South cooperation through venues like IBSA (India–Brazil–South Africa). Furthermore, India continues to be a fervent supporter of changing international organizations such as the World Bank, the IMF, and the United Nations Security Council, claiming that they fail to sufficiently reflect the realities of the twenty-first century. India portrays itself as a link between developing countries and the larger international community by using these multilateral activities to strengthen the voice of the Global South.

Development Diplomacy and South–South Cooperation

One of the most powerful foundations of India's leadership in the Global South is development diplomacy, which reflects a partnership paradigm built on respect, empowerment, and shared development. India's development cooperation places more emphasis on long-term sustainability and capacity building than conventional Western aid, which frequently bears political or economic limitations. Every year, thousands of participants from poor countries receive training from India in areas including public administration, information technology, agriculture, governance, and health under the Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program. These programs build strong interpersonal relationships and institutional capacities. Additionally, India offers grants and Lines of Credit for rural development, energy projects, education, and infrastructure development in Asia, Africa, and Latin America. The goal of this financial cooperation is to assist nations in developing robust and independent economies. India's humanitarian efforts, particularly in times of crisis, add to its credibility. During the COVID-19 epidemic, India demonstrated its commitment to global health justice by providing vaccinations to more than 100 countries through the Vaccine Maitri project. Through these initiatives, India has established itself as a responsible development partner, bolstering solidarity throughout the Global South and the spirit of South-South Cooperation.

India's Engagement with Africa as the Heart of Global South Strategy

Due to their shared historical links, developmental goals, and aspirations for a more just global order, Africa plays a key role in India's Global South policy. In contrast to the competitive or resource-driven strategies of many global powers, India's engagement with Africa is based on the values of mutual respect, collaboration, and non-interference. With an emphasis on capacity building, digital transformation, agriculture, education, and public health, India has formalized political discourse and development collaboration through the India–Africa Forum Summit (IAFS). One of Africa's main development partners, India provides grants, scholarships, Lines of Credit, and training programs that promote technology transfer,

skill improvement, and infrastructure development. India's dedication to sustainable development throughout Africa is demonstrated by cooperation in areas like renewable energy through the International Solar Alliance (ISA). India has become one of Africa's biggest commercial partners as trade and investment have grown dramatically. Additionally, India is a fervent supporter of Africa's presence in international governance, backing Africa's desire for UN Security Council changes and pushing for the African Union's permanent membership in the G20. India anchors its leadership in the Global South and fortifies South-South solidarity through these initiatives.

Technology and Innovation as Tools of India's Global Leadership

India now uses innovation and technology as key tools to bolster its leadership in the Global South. India has established itself as a model for other developing countries looking for inclusive and affordable solutions because to its expertise using digital tools to achieve significant development gains. The ability of India to create scalable digital public infrastructures (DPIs) that improve governance, financial inclusion, and service delivery is demonstrated by programs like Digital India, Aadhaar, Unified Payments Interface (UPI), and DIGI-Locker. India is progressively sharing these technologies with partner nations, especially through the India Stack Global Initiative, in recognition of their global importance. This allows countries in Africa, Asia, and Latin America to adopt comparable frameworks. In fields including health, pharmaceuticals, space technology, and renewable energy, India is also becoming a center for reasonably priced innovation. Several Global South nations looking for space-based communication and climate monitoring solutions have been drawn to ISRO due to its experience in offering affordable satellite launches. India's ability to produce vaccines and its telemedicine platforms make a substantial contribution to global public health. India provides a development paradigm based on accessibility and cooperation through such technology-driven collaborations. These initiatives strengthen India's standing as a transformational leader in the Global South while simultaneously addressing the technology deficiencies in developing nations.

Challenges to India's Global South Leadership

India's leadership in the Global South confronts a number of geopolitical, economic, and strategic obstacles despite its expanding power. The growing rivalry from China, whose enormous financial resources and extensive infrastructure projects through programs like the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) can overshadow India's comparatively little development aid, is one significant barrier. In places like Africa and South Asia, this gives India an unfair advantage. Furthermore, India's ability to

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devote resources to foreign development partnerships is constrained by its own internal developmental goals, which include reducing poverty, expanding infrastructure, and advancing technology. Global geopolitical changes, such as the intense competition between the US and China, provide another key obstacle to India's diplomatic balance. Although many nations in the Global South anticipate that India would adopt more assertive stances on international matters, strategic autonomy occasionally prevents decisive action. India's capacity to maintain long-term obligations is further impacted by economic limitations, particularly shifting growth rates and reliance on energy. India's reputation is also impacted by institutional constraints, such as bureaucratic hold-ups and poor coordination in the execution of development programs. All of these difficulties show how difficult it is for India to redefine its leadership in the Global South and increase its influence in foreign policy.

Conclusion

India's rising self-assurance as a key player in a multipolar world is demonstrated by its changing leadership in the Global South, which signifies a substantial change in the balance of power in the globe. India's involvement with the Global South represents both continuity and change in its foreign policy approach, with roots in common development concerns, anti-colonial collaboration, and historical solidarity. India has effectively expressed the concerns of developing countries and advocated for a more inclusive and representative global governance system through forums like the G20, BRICS, IBSA, and the UN. Its development diplomacy, technology-sharing programs, Lines of Credit, humanitarian outreach, and collaborations with a focus on Africa showcase a comprehensive model of collaboration based on reciprocal advantages and long-term advancement. India's leadership is confronted with a number of difficulties at the same time, including institutional inefficiencies, resource constraints, and geopolitical rivalry. Maintaining its position as a voice of the Global South will require navigating these limitations while retaining credibility. However, India has distinct advantages that few other nations have due to its focus on digital innovation, renewable energy, supply chain resilience, and development-centric foreign policy. India is positioned to play a pivotal role in determining the future of the Global South due to its strategic vision, dedication to South-South cooperation, and support for fair global frameworks as the international system grows more multipolar. In the end, India's leadership will rely not only on its skills but also on its capacity to promote unity, establish trust, and support the goals of developing countries.

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