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# **REPOSITIONING INDIA ON THE GLOBAL CHESSBOARD: PIONEERING STRATEGIES FOR GLOBAL LEADERSHIP IN THE 21ST CENTURY**

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## **Abstract:**

The concept of diplomacy is not new to India, the traces of the establishment of diplomatic relations with the other countries could be found back in the history since the time of Indus Valley civilizations. The ancient Puranas and texts like Arthashastra talked about the importance of diplomacy while framing of international relations with other nations. During the times, when India got its Independence, its condition was not that sound. The economy was shattered, and the country was divided into two parts and dwindling with the challenge of cultural conflicts and chaos. But soon India overcame the challenges and arose as a potentially powerful country in the world with its largest democracy, third largest army, fifth largest economy and leading role in many International and Regional Organisations.

India has always adopted a policy of non-interference and non-aggression based upon the principles of Indian political thinkers like Mahatma Gandhi which also helped India to frame its foreign policy tactfully during the times of Cold War era. India's foreign policy has maintained a great equilibrium between soft and hard power diplomacy. India believes that in today's contemporary era of globalisation and technical revolutions, the wars are not won by swords and guns but, with political relations and diplomacy. India has been playing a leading forefront diplomacy in various arenas, strengthening relations with powerful nations of the world, providing assistance to countries in need during extreme circumstances, strengthening ties with neighbours, a leading role in various regional and international organisations, fighting various global challenges like terrorism, environmental challenges etc. As India celebrates Azadi Ka

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Amrit Mahotsav @75 years after India's Independence, India's diplomacy has been leading it to become the Vishwa Guru again.

**Keywords:** Soft Power, Diplomacy, India, International Organisations.

## I. Introduction:

India is a vibrant country with a diverse culture, where people from different castes, colours, creeds and ethnicities live together with solidarity and cooperation. Indian population consists of approximately 79 per cent Hindus, 15 per cent Muslims, 3 per cent Christians, 2 per cent Sikh, Buddhist and Jains. All of them living with harmony and brotherhood.

When India got its independence, the condition of India was not that sound. Today, India is considered a potential superpower and has a growing international influence in the world.

Power is defined as the ability to influence the behaviour of others. There are two types of powers, the one is hard power and the second is Soft Diplomatic Power.

In terms of hard power, according to the World Economy Ranking 2022, India's economy stands as the Fifth largest in the world.<sup>1</sup> According to GFP Index India ranked as the 4th powerful Army<sup>2</sup> with nuclear capabilities and state-of-the-art defence and attack technologies. India is a nuclear-capable country. It is ranked among one of the top five nations in the field of space exploration placing it among the top nations in the world for scientific research. 7th largest country in terms of area, and recently the world's largest population, with the biggest democracy.

Considering Soft power diplomacy India is a member of various International and regional organisations and plays a forefront role in leading those organisations like G20, BRICS, SAARC, UNHRC, ICJ etc. Along with this India has established strong cultural, economic and diplomatic ties with various other superpowers of the world such as 2+2 dialogues with the USA, Australia, Japan and Russia.

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<sup>1</sup> <https://www.weforum.org/agenda/2022/09/india-uk-fifth-largest-economy-world> Accessed on 21.07.2023.

<sup>2</sup> 2023 India Military Strength, GFP Ranking, 2023. [https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country\\_id=india](https://www.globalfirepower.com/country-military-strength-detail.php?country_id=india) Accessed on 22.07.2023.

India has also remained concerned about third-world countries from Africa and Asia and shared various cultural and diplomatic ties. The proposal to invite the African Union to the G20 Summit is one such example. Prime Minister's and President's visits to such countries are another example of strengthening diplomatic ties with these nations. In return for that, India has been hailed for its leading role in the world.

## II. History of India's Diplomacy: An ancient insight

Building diplomatic relations is not a new concept for India. Since ancient times, India's Indus Valley Civilizations have established international trade with Mesopotamia, Egypt, Rome etc. The Rome writer Pliny describing India's trade relations writes 'all the gold in the world comes to India and sinks' showing the dominance of India in trade thus obtaining the name "Sone ki Chidiya". The traces can be further seen with the regular visiting of foreign ambassadors to India eg. Greek Ambassador Meghasthenes visiting India during the reign of Chandragupta Maurya, Fa-hein from China etc.

India is the land of Buddha, Mahavira and Mahatma Gandhi who gave the world the concept of the right path, right faith and right conduct, the principles of Satya and ahimsa.

Ashoka has been said to have travelled from place to place to spread the concept of Buddhism and Dhamma, the right path to be conducted by every individual during his/her life.

India is also the land of Kautilya/Chanakya who talks about prudent diplomacy while framing foreign policy for an effective administration. Kautilya has given a strategy of "Shadgunya Siddhant" (Six-Fold Policy)<sup>3</sup> in the arthashastra that suggested following the right means at the right time with flexible planning and complete determination to the leaders while building up the relations with the neighbour countries,

The six-fold policy is as follows:

- Peace (sandhi),
- War (vigraha),

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<sup>3</sup> Kautilya (Chanakya) in India's foreign policy, Times of India. Dated: 23.06.2021. <https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/readersblog/spark/kautilya-chanakya-in-indias-foreign-policy-34133/> Accessed on 21.07.2023.

- Neutrality (asana),
- Marching (yaana),
- Alliance (saamarasya) and
- Waging war with one and making peace with another (dvaidhi bhaava).

Kautilya assumes that every move of the leader desirous of victory towards its ally or enemy should have to be based upon its interests. This found its relevance even in today's International Politics.

Where we believe that every international politics is based upon national interest, we also believe in the concept of universality and unity. Indian ancient texts, puranas and Upanishads believe in the Universality and brotherhood giving the concept of Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam to the world.

*अयं निजःपरो वेति गणना लघुचेतसाम्।*

*उदारचरितानां तु वसुधैव कुटुम्बकम्।<sup>4</sup>*

India sees the whole world as one family and believes in cooperation and peaceful co-existence.

### **III. Diplomacy during the Cold War Era:**

It was somewhere believed that "Power comes from the barrette of the Gun" as stated by Mao. But India's Intentions were very clear from the beginning of its role in International Politics as stated by Mahatma Gandhi "Means defines the end". Though India is becoming a powerful nation but not on the edge of its swords but with its soft power diplomacy, establishing healthy relations in international scenarios.

When India got its Independence, the world was dwindling with the challenge of the Cold War. The whole world was divided into two powerful blocks i.e. the United States of America on the one side and the United Soviet States on the other side. India realising the effects of joining any block to its development, has taken a sharp step to remain neutral. India formed Non- Alling Movement (NAM) to not only remain neutral but to act as a mediator between these two powerful blocks. This diplomacy helped India to get help and assistance from both the powerful blocks and boosted its development. Therefore, India has established a healthy relationship with both blocks.

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<sup>4</sup> Chapter 6, Maha Upanishad. Part- VI. 71-73.

With this India has obtained military and technologically advanced machinery and weapons from the USA as well as the USSR. Thus, creating an image as a leading power that is not going to just follow but to lead the world with its own ideologies and principles.

#### **IV. After Independence Diplomacy:**

After Independence, the foreign policy of India was framed very tactfully, taking lessons from history as Prof. Seeley has rightly quoted “History without Political Science has no fruit and Political Science without History has no Roots”

In today’s world, no country wants to shed the blood of its citizens, fighting in wars with others. The dimensions of power have taken another turn where more emphasis has been given to soft power diplomacy. India realises the importance of peace and cooperation. Jawaharlal Nehru once said “Without peace, all other dreams vanish and are reduced to ashes’. India’s foreign policies are more focused on the development and strengthening of its soft power and the role of diplomacy in conflict resolution. The traces of this ideology are clearly reflected in the foreign policies of India, from the founding member of the United Nations to Non- Alignment movement, the Panchsheel agreement, the no-first-use policy etc.

#### **V. Changing dimensions of Diplomacy: Leading towards becoming the “Viswa Guru” (Global Leader):**

Today we live in the age of globalisation, the age of information. American political scientist Joseph Nye, who is known as the originator of the idea of Soft Power in modern times, recommended that American foreign policy strategists not make just the best machines and missiles, but to make the best stories/narratives.

When we speak of Goodwill in accounting/commerce, it means an intangible and invisible asset that brings in a premium for the company. In other words, it is value for the brand name. (Naam hi kaafi hai)

America’s stardom today is built on its liberal capitalist democratic foundations as much as it is built on its military supremacy. In this regard, a French leftist philosopher Regis Debray, once said that blue jeans and rock and roll are more powerful than the entire Red Army.

As we celebrate the Amrit Kaal, India today at 75 has become a global force to reckon with. It boasts of one of the most powerful military, 5th largest economy, and a thriving democracy in a matrix of multicultural, multilingual, multiethnic secular society rooted in ancient ethos. It is a soft power by default. And it has the potential of becoming the cultural superpower and the Vishwa guru.

Despite limited resources in proportion to a massive deprived population, India is seen at the forefront when natural disasters hit its neighbours. Indian diplomacy is at its peak in no overstatement taking cognisance of India's operations in hostile zones. Some of the leading eye-opener operations have proved India's stature in global politics.

- Operation Sukoon in 2006 to evacuate Indians, Sri Lankans and Nepalese citizens from the midst of the war hit Lebanon.<sup>5</sup>
- Operation Safe Homecoming in 2011 to evacuate Indian citizens fleeing from the Civil War in Libya.<sup>6</sup>
- Operation Rahat in 2015 to evacuate Indians and foreign citizens from Yemen war conflicted areas.<sup>7</sup>
- Operation Ganga in 2022 to evacuate Indians from war-conflicted Ukraine areas. And <sup>8</sup>
- Operation Devi Shakti to evacuate people including citizens and Afghan partners from Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover.<sup>9</sup>

India's humanitarian assistance to developed as well as developing countries during the COVID-19 pandemic is the epitome of India's vision of global prosperity. It has been steadfast in its stance on ceasing hostilities in Ukraine.

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<sup>5</sup> Operation Sukoon for the evacuation of Indian Nationals from Lebanon, Ministry of Defence, PIB. Dated: 24.08.2006. <https://pib.gov.in/newsite/erecontent.aspx?relid=20224> Visited on 23.07.2023.

<sup>6</sup> India unveils Operation Safe Homecoming, thousands on way, Deccan Herald. Dated: 27.02.2011. <https://www.deccanherald.com/content/141506/india-unveils-operation-safe-homecoming.html> Accessed on 22.07.2023.

<sup>7</sup> Operation Evacuation- Operation Rahat, Indian Navy. Dated 06.04.2015. <https://www.indiannavy.nic.in/content/operation-evacuation-operation-rahat> Accessed on 23.07.2023.

<sup>8</sup> 3000 Indians airlifted today by special flights from Ukraine's neighbouring countries, Ministry of Civil Aviation, PIB Delhi. Dated: 05.03.2022. <https://pib.gov.in/PressReleaseIframePage.aspx?PRID=1803193> Accessed on 23.07.2023.

<sup>9</sup> Evacuation of Indians and Afghans under 'Operation Devi Shakti' and shipment of humanitarian assistance for the people of Afghanistan, Ministry of External Affairs. Dated: 11.12.2023. <https://mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/34643/Evacuation+of+Indians+and+Afghans+under+Operation+Devi+Shakti+and+shipment+of+humanitarian+assistance+for+the+people+of+Afghanistan> Accessed on: 23.07.2023.

## VI. Analyses of Leading Roles of India in recent times:

- **Presidency at G20:** 2023 is also the year of India's G20 presidency, an important time frame when the world is looking up to India to set the receding multilateralism in order. This time the presidency under India has been organised with the theme of "One Earth, One Family, One Future" with our strong belief of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam".<sup>10</sup> Many activities and agendas have been put forward by the Indian government. Some of them are as follows:
  - Many Jan Bhagidari activities were also simultaneously held with public participation in the whole of nation. These include G20 University Connect lecture series, Model G20 meetings, Special G20 sessions in Schools/Universities, G20 Pavilions in major festivals, Quiz contests, Selfie competitions, #G20India stories, workshops, marathons, awareness rallies, cleanliness drives, Yuva Samvaad and hundreds of other G20-theme events by the civil society and private sector.
  - Substantive deliberations during India's leadership included inclusive and resilient growth, progress on SDGs and green development, women-centric development and the topics on international peace and harmony.
  - India addressed the geopolitical issue of wars such as the ongoing war in Ukraine.
  - It also helped in achieving a greater goal of inducting the African Union as a member of the G20.
  - India has called for bigger, better, more effective and more representative MDBs.
  - Many discussions were held on global food security and it endorsed for the millet production initiatives taken to enhance food security while maintaining the soil productivity simultaneously.
  - Points were put to endorse the role of traditional medicine and noted the role of WHO's centre in Jamnagar.
  - Some new initiatives taken during the presidency were the Disaster Risk Reduction Working Group, Chief Scientific Advisors Roundtable, Millet Research Initiative, Cooperation in traditional medicines, etc.
  - Another achievements covered were the launch of the Global Biofuel Alliance, India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor, India-Brazil-South Africa-USA meeting, and

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<sup>10</sup> <https://www.g20.in/en/about-g20/about-g20.html#overview> accessed on 20.12.2023.

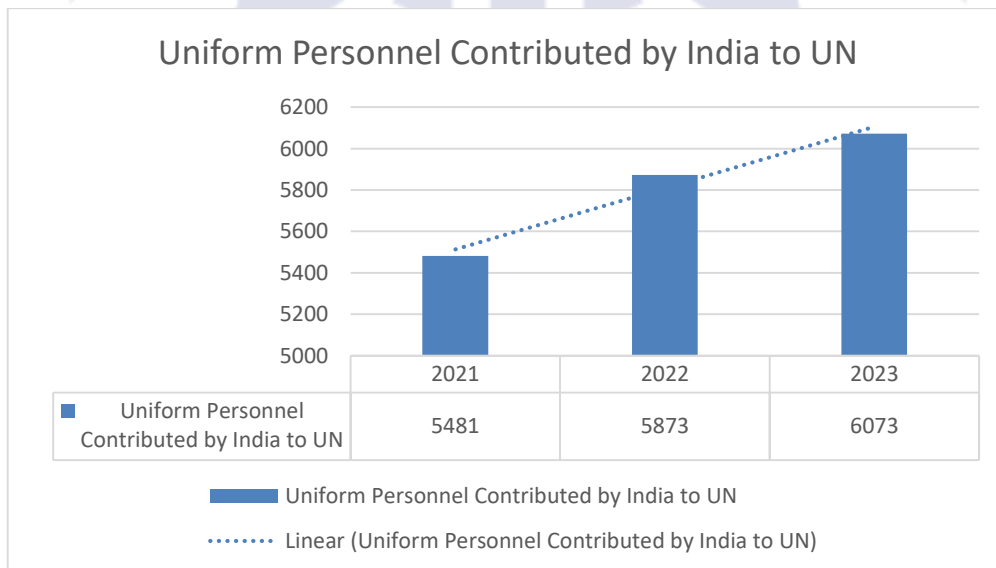
Partnership for Global Infrastructure and Investment that includes the health, telecom and renewable energy sectors.

- **Membership in UNSC:**

India's contention for a permanent seat on the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) has been supported by several points. Some of them are described as follows:

**Global Significance and Population:** India is the world's largest democracy with a population exceeding 1.3 billion people. Its growing economic power, diverse culture, and significant global influence make a compelling case for its representation in the UNSC. Also, India almost accounts for about 17% of the world population so such a large share of the population should have a permanent seat for the overall development of the world.<sup>11</sup>

**Contributions to Peacekeeping Operations:** India has been one of the largest contributors to UN peacekeeping missions, showcasing its commitment to maintaining global peace and security even at the hard times India always showed its commitment towards maintaining world peace. Its consistent involvement in peacekeeping efforts demonstrates its capability and dedication to upholding UN principles.



\*Source: United Nations Peacekeeping.

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<https://www.worldometers.info/world-population/india-population/#:~:text=The%20current%20population%20of%20India,of%20the%20total%20world%20population.>  
Accessed on 20.12.2023.

India has been placed at 3 position in terms of contribution to peacekeeping forces in the world. In 2021 India deployed 5481 uniform personnel in various peacekeeping operations which was constantly raised to 5873 and 6073 in 2022 and 2023 respectively.<sup>12</sup>

**Economic Powerhouse:** India's economic growth and potential as a major global economic player are substantial. Its contribution to the world economy, trade, and development aid to various countries makes it a significant stakeholder in international affairs. India is one of the fastest-growing economies in the world. This also approves its position to claim the seat in the UNSC.

**Commitment to Multilateralism:** India has a long-standing commitment to the principles of multilateralism, diplomacy, and the rule of law. It actively engages in various international forums, advocating for peaceful resolution of conflicts and adherence to international laws.

**Strategic Geo-Political Importance:** India's geographical location in South Asia places it strategically amidst a region with various geopolitical challenges. Its representation in the UNSC could provide unique insights and perspectives on regional security issues. It also serves as the main route of the African continent to the eastern continents of the Japan and South China Sea route. It states that India's bid is of crucial importance for the maintenance of peace in this area so that a peaceful trade can be established with the support of the nations lying next to the Indian Ocean and the Arabian Sea.

**Democratic Values and Pluralistic Society:** India being the largest democracy in the world is known for its commitment to democratic values, pluralism, and diversity. As a representative of the UNSC, it can bring these values to the forefront of discussions on global peace and security.

**Support from Various Countries:** India has received endorsements and support for its bid for a permanent seat on the UNSC from several nations and regional blocs, reflecting a widespread acknowledgement of its role as a responsible global actor. The main

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[https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/01\\_contributions\\_to\\_un\\_peacekeeping\\_operations\\_by\\_country\\_and\\_post\\_66\\_september\\_2023.pdf](https://peacekeeping.un.org/sites/default/files/01_contributions_to_un_peacekeeping_operations_by_country_and_post_66_september_2023.pdf)

countries in support of India are G4 countries which include Germany, Brazil and Japan.

**Reform of UNSC:** There's a consensus among many countries that the UNSC needs reform to better represent the current geopolitical landscape. This includes increasing representation from regions like Africa, Latin America, and Asia, with India being a prominent contender for such expansion.

- **Member of UNHRC:** India has been re-elected to the United Nations Human Rights Council (UNHRC) for the 2022-24 term and vowed to continue to work for the promotion and protection of human rights through "Samman, Samvad and Sahyog".<sup>13</sup> Human Rights Council candidates are elected in geographical groups to ensure even representation. Thus, India's re-election to such a high platform proves India's strong position at the world arena.

- **International Court of Justice:**

India has made significant contributions to the International Court of Justice (ICJ), both through its participation in cases and the involvement of Indian judges on the court. Some points can be justified as follows:

**India's judges on the ICJ:** India has had its judges serve on the International Court of Justice. Notably, Judge B. N. Rao, a prominent Indian jurist, served on the ICJ from 1982 to 1991. His tenure contributed to the court's jurisprudence and decisions during that period. Additionally, Dalveer Bhandari, another Indian judge, served on the ICJ from 2012 to 2021<sup>14</sup>. Bhandari's tenure saw him actively participating in various cases and decisions, bringing forth his expertise and perspective to the court's deliberations.

**India's commitment to International Law:** India's participation in the ICJ cases underscores its commitment to the rule of law and the peaceful resolution of disputes through international legal mechanisms. India's involvement in ICJ cases has been aimed at upholding international law, ensuring justice, and seeking fair resolutions to disputes.

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<sup>13</sup>India gets re-elected to U.N Human Rights Council for 2022-24 term, The Hindu. 14.10.2021. <https://www.thehindu.com/news/national/india-gets-re-elected-to-un-human-rights-council-for-2022-24-term/article36999783.ece> accessed on 25.12.2023.

<sup>14</sup> <https://www.icj-cij.org/all-members> accessed on 25.12.2023.

**Conflict Resolution and India's role:** India's engagement with the ICJ reflects its dedication to resolving disputes through diplomatic and legal channels rather than resorting to unilateral actions or escalations. By pursuing cases in the ICJ, India demonstrates a willingness to engage in peaceful resolution mechanisms provided by international law.

- **CO Summit host Country:**

- India was granted full membership to the SCO in 2017, and it was an extraordinary feat for the group members to have chosen India to host the summit in 2023.
- All the countries signed the New Delhi Declaration to counter the activities of terrorist, separatist and extremist groups, to suppress religious intolerance, ethnic and racial discrimination, etc.
- India created the five pillars and cooperation in the SCO that includes Startups and Innovation, traditional medicine, youth empowerment, digital inclusion and shared Buddhist heritage.<sup>15</sup>

- **Leading role in Regional Organisations:**

- India has been a part of many regional organisations within the subcontinent of Asia and South Asia such as; the South Asian Association of Regional Cooperation (SAARC), Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIM-STEAC), the Indian Ocean Rim Association for Regional Cooperation (IOR-ARC).<sup>16</sup>
- India also engages with other organisations such as the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN), and the Mekong Ganga Cooperation (MGC).<sup>17</sup>
- India is also a member of the world's leading economies such as G20 countries whose leadership was given to her in 2023 and it was concluded with many fruitful outcomes.
- India always had the vision to engage in regional organisations and has been actively working as part of many of them, especially in the close region of the Indian subcontinent and has always been at the forefront of the major agendas of cooperation in the fields of health, trade and business, open market policies, etc. It has also played a vital role in

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<sup>15</sup> Wani, Ayjaz. *SCO under India's Presidency*. Observer Research Foundation. <https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/sco-under-indias-presidency>, accessed on 30.12.2023.

<sup>16</sup> Wapmuk, Sharkdam. *The Role of India in Regionalism: SAARC, ASEAN, EU, BIMSTEAC, LOR-ARC, And MGC: Lessons for Nigeria in the ECOWAS*. The IUP Journal of International Relations, Vol.IX, No. 1, January 2015, pp.21-42.

<sup>17</sup> Ibid.

strengthening the cooperation within these countries to maintain peace and security in the area.

- **International Events of Sports and Culture taking place in India:** Soft power diplomacy does not only include bilateral and multilateral agreements with political intentions but also includes the sharing of common interests like culture, and diaspora and even includes sports interests. In recent years India has been participating in various sports events around the Globe like the Asian Games, Olympics, Commonwealth Games etc. India has not only remained a participating member but has remained a host country. In 2023 India has been hosting the ICC World Cup where teams and diaspora from different countries will be visiting India and further extending the soft power diplomacy of the Country.

## **VII. Conclusion:**

In the past few years, India has been very vocal about its cultural heritage. Not less than 3, Parliamentary Standing Committees have been formed to deliberate on soft power and devise a soft power matrix for India.

This is high time India inculcates Goodwill Diplomacy/ nation branding in its grand scheme of things. Although a long-term exercise, the returns on this investment are immutable.

The recent developments in India's Foreign Policies have remained more focused on actions and more vocal in nature. India's forefront role in establishing diplomatic relations and creating a balance between first and third-world countries has been appreciated worldwide. This is a time when India should also give a fresh impetus to its bid for the permanent seat in the United Nations Security Council as India has gained a majority of support from nations around the globe. The recent G20 submit gave a new stimulus to this. Various countries from the African Union have also quoted India as a 'leader'.