

ACTING EAST AND LOOKING WEST: INDIA'S BALANCING ACT IN A MULTIPOLAR WORLD (2014–2024)

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ABSTRACT

In light of the shifting multipolar global order between 2014 and 2024, this paper examines India's two foreign policy philosophies, Act East and Look West. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India shifted from a non-aligned to a strategically multi-aligned stance with the aim of simultaneously strengthening its connections with West Asia and the Indo-Pacific. The Look West Policy sought to balance rivalries in West Asia, diversify energy sources, and strengthen ties with the Gulf, whilst the Act East Policy focused on defence cooperation, trade, and connectivity with Southeast and East Asia. India's efforts to manage complex and sometimes difficult partnerships with the US, China, Russia, ASEAN, Israel, and the Arab world are examined in this paper. While staying out of exclusive security blocs, India has shown its strategic independence by formally participating in groups like the BRICS, SCO, Quad, and G20. The study's conclusions indicate that India's foreign policy over the last ten years has been a deliberate and evolving attempt to optimize geopolitical flexibility, reinterpret great power participation, and increase its position internationally without compromising its core objectives. This research paper focuses on the dual orientations of Acting East and Looking West and looks at India's foreign policy strategy from 2014 to 2024 in the context of the world's increasing multipolarity. The paper examines how India has attempted to carefully balance maintaining its strategic autonomy with expanding its global influence. The Act East policy is evaluated in light of India's growing engagement in Southeast Asia and the Indo-Pacific, with an emphasis on maritime security, economic integration, and regional connectivity, particularly through ASEAN and the Quad. At the same time, the Look West policy highlights India's growing ties to West Asia, which are fuelled by the nation's energy needs, interaction with its diaspora, and formation of security partnerships with countries like as Saudi Arabia, Iran, Israel, and the United Arab Emirates.

Keywords: Act East Policy, ASEAN, Look West Policy, BRICS, QUAD

1.1 INTRODUCTION

Over the past ten years, the global geopolitical environment has become increasingly multipolar due to the decline of unipolar U.S. hegemony and the rise of many power centres, including China, Russia, the European Union, and regional alliances. India, a rising power in the Global South with aspirations for strategic leadership, has faced both opportunities and difficulties as a result of this shifting order. In order to improve India's strategic, cultural, and economic connections with Southeast and East Asia, Prime Minister Narendra Modi launched the Act East Policy in 2014, reviving the earlier Look East concept. Concurrently, the Look West Policy has evolved to include greater engagement with West Asia, especially with Israel, Iran, and the countries of the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC), despite using less formal terminology. These two strategies reflect India's attempt to avoid overt association with any one geopolitical bloc while striking a balance between its East and West foreign policy positions. This paper looks at how India has used its geographic location, civilizational

diplomacy, economic aspirations, and multilateral platforms to pursue strategic autonomy in modern multipolar world.

1.2 Theoretical Framework and Literature Review

The best foundation for comprehending India's foreign policy from 2014 to 2024 is provided by the two pillars of multipolarity and strategic autonomy. India has repositioned itself in the international system by abandoning ideological neutrality in favour of a more pragmatic, interest-driven, and issue-based alignment strategy, notwithstanding its historical foundation in non-alignment. Strategic autonomy is the capacity of a state to pursue its national objectives without undue influence from other parties. India is now aggressively pursuing multi-alignment, moving away from Nehruvian non-alignment and toward functional cooperation with a range of countries, including the US, Russia, the EU, Japan, ASEAN, Israel, and the Arab world, in order to minimize dependence on any one group (Pant, H. V. (2020).

Multipolarity, as opposed to bipolar or unipolar systems, describes a global order in which several important actors share power. India has more diplomatic flexibility to engage with other nations on various axes of power in the current geopolitical environment, which is marked by the relative decline of the United States, the assertive rise of China, the resurgence of Russia, and the growing roles of regional powers like Brazil, Turkey, and India. These frameworks have an impact on India's Act East and Look West strategies, which allow it to build strong relationships with regional powers while retaining flexibility in international fora like the G20, BRICS, SCO, Quad, and I2U2.

LITERATURE REVIEW

Several scholars and institutions have contributed to the understanding of India's dual regional strategies.

Raja Mohan (2019) argues that India's push to become a leading power rather than merely a balancing power is reflected in its shift from non-alignment to multi-alignment. **Pant (2020)** notes that a marine shift in strategic thinking, particularly in response to China's increasing dominance in the Indo-Pacific, is reflected in India's outreach to East and Southeast Asia under the Act East Policy.

Rajagopalan (ORF, 2021) highlights that India has a difficult balance in preserving its relations with Russia while expanding defence cooperation with the US.

Singh (2022) emphasizes that beyond its reliance on oil, India's involvement in West Asia encompasses counterterrorism, defence cooperation, and diaspora diplomacy, especially with Israel and the United Arab Emirates.

1.3 Conceptual contribution of the Study

This article provides a more holistic perspective by analysing how the Act East and Look West strategies function together as a coherent strategic framework. Previous researches have concentrated on India's eastern or western relations separately. Using these two lenses, it assesses how India has handled competing interests, avoided strategic overreach, and positioned itself as a connection between the Global North and Global South.

1.4 Research Objectives

1. To examine how India's Act East and Look West strategies have changed and been implemented between 2014 and 2024.

2. To evaluate how these policies accord with India's larger strategic goal of using multi-alignment and strategic autonomy to navigate a multipolar international system.
3. To analyse India's bilateral and multilateral activities in West Asia and the Indo-Pacific, emphasizing significant achievements and inconsistencies.
4. To assess India's use of multilateral forums and issue-based coalitions as instruments for maintaining equilibrium amongst great powers in the absence of formal alliances.
5. To add to the theoretical discussion of emerging power diplomacy and middle-power behaviour in a fractured world system.

1.5 Research Questions

1. What strategic objectives guide India's Look West and Act East strategies, and how have they changed between 2014 and 2024?
2. How has India interacted with both East and West Asia while juggling conflicting regional interests and great-power rivalries?
3. How much has India's involvement in West Asia and the Indo-Pacific strengthened its desire for strategic independence in a multipolar world?
4. How successful has India been in influencing regional and international governance through issue-based alliances and multilateral platforms?
5. What are the shortcomings and inconsistencies of India's balancing approach, and what do they tell us about the country's potential place in international politics?

2.1 THE ACT EAST POLICY: INDIA'S STRATEGIC EXPANSION INTO THE INDO-PACIFIC

With the introduction of the Act East Policy in 2014, India's foreign policy underwent a dramatic improvement over the previous Look East Policy of the 1990s. The Act East Policy takes a more proactive and multifaceted approach, whereas the Look East Policy mainly concentrated on economic integration with Southeast Asia. In addition to trade and investment, this policy seeks to strengthen India's ties with the Indo-Pacific area through defence cooperation, strategic alliances, cultural exchanges, and connectivity projects. India's increasing ambitions to become a major regional actor and an Indo-Pacific stabilizing force are reflected in the policy. Stretching from the eastern coast of Africa to the western Pacific Ocean, the Indo-Pacific has emerged as the new geopolitical and economic centre of gravity. Both regional stability and international trade depend on this enormous maritime area. Since almost 90% of India's trade goes across the Indian Ocean, the Indo-Pacific region is extremely important strategically. India's Act East Policy is a weapon to protect its maritime interests, forge regional alliances, and advance a rules-based order in the area in response to growing worries about China's aggression, especially in the South China Sea and through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI). Additionally, it strengthens India's position in influencing Indo-Pacific architecture and enables it to project influence beyond its immediate region.

Improving security cooperation with nations in Southeast and East Asia is a major goal of the Act East Policy. Through cooperative exercises like Malabar with the US and Japan as well as its growing involvement in the Quad (India, US, Japan, and Australia), India has increased its naval diplomacy. Additionally, bilateral defence relations have improved with nations including Australia, Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Simultaneously, the program prioritizes economic integration through digital collaborations, infrastructure connectivity, and trade agreements. In order to physically connect India with Southeast Asia, initiatives

like the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project and the India-Myanmar-Thailand Trilateral Highway are essential. India's commerce with ASEAN is still a top goal, supported by the free commerce Agreement in products and services (Rajagopalan, R. (2021).

India's Indo-Pacific strategy heavily relies on the Quad. Despite not being an official military alliance, it acts as a counterbalance to China's expanding influence in the area. In addition to working together on topics including infrastructure, emerging technologies, vaccines, and maritime security, the organization advocates for a free, open, and inclusive Indo-Pacific. India's commitment to share security obligations and maintain regional stability while retaining its strategic autonomy is demonstrated by its involvement in Quad operations.

But there are a number of issues with the Act East Policy. Due to financial limitations, logistical challenges, and political unrest in partner nations, particularly Myanmar, major infrastructure projects have been postponed. Furthermore, India continues to face a geopolitical obstacle due to China's economic hegemony and growing influence in Southeast Asia. Policy implementation is frequently slowed down domestically by capacity constraints and bureaucratic bottlenecks. Furthermore, the greater Indo-Pacific region is experiencing increased great-power competition, making it a challenging and contentious area for India to negotiate diplomatically.

India has a lot of chances to increase its power in the Indo-Pacific despite these challenges. Promising paths forward include extending its engagement in mini-lateral groups (such as India-France-Australia), strengthening its ties with ASEAN, fostering regional connectivity, and improving maritime domain awareness. A soft power component is also added to India's regional outreach by its focus on cultural diplomacy, notably Buddhist history, and its interactions with the Indian diaspora in Southeast Asia. Furthermore, India's partnerships with like-minded partners in fields like cyber security, artificial intelligence, and telecommunications can further strengthen its strategic position as digital technologies transform geopolitics.

In summary, an essential part of India's larger Indo-Pacific policy is the Act East Policy. It represents India's aspirations to become the region's dominant force and supplier of net security. India aims to contribute to an open, inclusive, and stable Indo-Pacific order by striking a balance between strategic ties and economic cooperation. But in order to accomplish its objectives, India needs to concentrate on completing connectivity projects on time, coordinating strategically across ministries, and improving alignment with regional partners. India's capacity to influence the regional balance of power and safeguard its long-term national interests will depend on how well the Act East Policy works.

The Act East Policy (AEP), which Prime Minister Narendra Modi introduced during the East Asia Summit in Myanmar in 2014, was a major improvement over the Look East Policy, which was started in the early 1990s. Act East added a strategic and security component, bringing India's foreign policy closer to the Indo-Pacific framework, whereas Look East was mainly concerned with economic cooperation with ASEAN. In order to establish India as a major player in the developing Indo-Pacific security architecture, this policy sought to strengthen economic integration, increase connectivity, and form defence alliances with Southeast Asia, East Asia, and Oceania.

India's foreign policy changed from simply looking east to actively acting east due to a number of issues. One of the main motivators was the necessity to establish stronger regional alliances in order to confront China's increasing aggressiveness in the South China Sea and the Indian Ocean. Additionally, India aimed to take use of its strategic location to contribute more to maritime security and East-West connectivity. Furthermore, there were numerous

chances to increase trade and investment due to the rapidly rising ASEAN economies. In order to advance and maintain a rules-based order in the increasingly contentious Indo-Pacific region, India simultaneously sought to form alliances with like-minded allies including Japan, Australia, and Vietnam.

Improving infrastructure and connectivity has been a major focus of India's Act East Policy in order to fortify relations with Southeast Asia. Important projects include the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project, which permits cargo movement from India's eastern seaboard to Myanmar and beyond into ASEAN, and the India–Myanmar–Thailand (IMT) Trilateral Highway, which aims to connect Northeast India with Southeast Asia through road and trade corridors. Furthermore, Northeast India's infrastructure development is supported by the Act East Forum with Japan, which aids in its closer integration with the economies of Southeast Asia. India has made maritime security a critical cornerstone of its Indo-Pacific outreach, in addition to physical connectivity. While the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) encourages inclusive and sustainable maritime cooperation, the SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) philosophy emphasizes India's dedication to maritime cooperation, capacity building, and regional security. India's increasing maritime presence is demonstrated by its active involvement in naval exercises like MILAN (with ASEAN countries) and Malabar (with the United States and Japan). India has increased defence and strategic relationships through logistics agreements, arms exports, and training. BrahMos missile systems and Indian defence credit lines have helped nations like Vietnam, and the Philippines and Indonesia have strengthened their marine defence links.

Through cooperative exercises and technical cooperation, strategic alliances with Australia and Japan, two important Quad members, have further improved India's regional participation. Compared to China, India's economic engagement with ASEAN has been modest, although recent developments are noteworthy. Although trade imbalances caused problems for the 2010 ASEAN-India Free Trade Agreement (FTA) and India's 2019 withdrawal from the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP) was a statement of economic caution, the nation has not retreated from more extensive regional integration. India's increased commitment to economic diplomacy in the area is demonstrated by more recent initiatives like the India–ASEAN Start-up Summit, the sharing of digital public infrastructure, and the creation of India–Japan industrial corridors.

India has demonstrated its dedication to regional peace, stability, and multilateral cooperation by actively participating in ASEAN-led forums like the East Asia Summit (EAS), the ASEAN Regional Forum (ARF), and the ASEAN Defence Ministers' Meeting Plus (ADMM-Plus). India uses soft power techniques like Buddhist diplomacy, academic exchanges, and cultural projects in addition to strategic and security engagement to deepen its relationships with Southeast Asian nations and promote goodwill both inside and outside of the region. India is now recognized as a resident power in the Indo-Pacific, with growing strategic depth and regional credibility. While China's economic footprint in ASEAN remains dominant, India is increasingly viewed as a balancing actor, particularly by countries like Vietnam, Indonesia, and the Philippines. Its active participation in the Quad and the articulation of the SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) vision further reinforce India's image as a credible security partner one that promotes stability without appearing overly confrontational or aligned with any single bloc.

3.1 THE LOOK WEST POLICY: INDIA'S ENGAGEMENT WITH WEST ASIA AND BEYOND

The Look West Policy developed more slowly and unofficially under successive Indian governments, in contrast to the official introduction of the Act East Policy. Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi's leadership, it acquired strategic clarity and pace as New Delhi worked to expand security cooperation, diversify energy relationships, and fortify economic links throughout West Asia, a region vital to India's economy, diaspora, and energy security. Traditionally seen through the prism of hydrocarbons, India's outreach to West Asia after 2014 increasingly reflects a larger geopolitical goal: to protect India's expanded neighbourhood in the Gulf and Eastern Mediterranean, improve regional connectivity, and balance rival power centres.

India's Look West Policy rests on three strategic pillars aimed at securing its interests in the Gulf and West Asia. First, it focuses on ensuring stable and diversified access to hydrocarbons from the region, which is vital for India's energy security. Second, it emphasizes strong diaspora and economic linkages, aiming to protect and empower over 8 million Indian citizens working in the Gulf while expanding trade partnerships. Third, the policy seeks strategic balancing by deepening ties with both Israel and Arab states, managing frictions with Iran, and maintaining a non-aligned stance amid regional rivalries. India's interactions with Iran, Israel, and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) nations demonstrate a complex and multifaceted approach to West Asia. Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates (UAE) have become important strategic allies. By 2023, the UAE will rank as India's third-largest commercial partner, with bilateral trade exceeding \$85 billion. In 2022, India and the UAE signed the Comprehensive Economic Partnership Agreement (CEPA), which increased investment and commerce in products and services. Both Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates have formalized defence and strategic discussions with India, including collaboration in counterterrorism and intelligence sharing. Since 2014, India's relationship with Israel has developed considerably, as seen by Prime Minister Modi's historic first visit to Israel in 2017, which signalled diplomatic normalization. Joint UAV development, Barak-8 missile systems, and intelligence cooperation are examples of defence links. In order to balance conflicting regional narratives, India has maintained its support for Palestine despite strengthening ties with Israel, albeit with a reduced diplomatic profile. In the meantime, U.S. sanctions and pressure on oil imports have made relations with Iran difficult. India's primary strategic base in Iran is still the Chabahar Port Project, which provides essential access to Afghanistan and Central Asia. However, more extensive cooperation with Tehran has been limited by dwindling oil imports and blocked infrastructure projects. India's significant involvement in newly formed mini-lateral forums and initiatives further demonstrates its balancing act in regional diplomacy. With an emphasis on cooperative investment in infrastructure, energy, and food security in the Middle East, India, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and the United States formed the I2U2 organization in 2022. In an effort to improve connectivity, trade, and regional stability, the institutionalization of the India–Central Asia Dialogue has also enhanced India's ties with nations like Kazakhstan and Uzbekistan. Furthermore, India's membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) gives it a strategic platform to interact with Eurasian geopolitics while enabling it to cautiously negotiate and moderate narratives promoted by China and Pakistan.

Strong diaspora relations, energy diversification, and defence cooperation all serve to further strengthen India's engagement with West Asia. Regular naval visits, joint military drills, and training initiatives with nations like the United Arab Emirates, Oman, and Saudi Arabia are

examples of defence cooperation that improves interoperability and strategic confidence. Gulf countries continue to be crucial to guaranteeing India's long-term energy security, even if the country has diversified its energy sources since 2022 significantly increasing discounted oil imports from Russia. With over \$40 billion in remittances sent each year by Indian people employed in the Gulf, diaspora involvement continues to be a key component of India's West Asia policy. To preserve the interests of this crucial population, high-level diplomatic visits have placed a high priority on labour rights, emergency evacuation procedures, and the signing of welfare agreements. Significant progress has been made in India's West Asia strategy, and the nation is now recognized as a reliable and impartial diplomatic player that can sustain productive relations with adversaries in the area like Saudi Arabia and Qatar or Israel and Iran. With the help of strong energy cooperation and expanding investment flows, economic and defence ties with the UAE and Saudi Arabia have reached previously unheard-of heights. Still, a number of issues remain. Compared to powerful nations like China or the US, India's institutional presence in West Asia is still relatively small. It is becoming more difficult to manage conflicting connections, especially in light of U.S. sanctions against Iran or recurring intensifications of the Israeli-Palestinian conflict. Furthermore, unless it is offset by consistent, long-term strategic investments, there is a chance that interest in the region may decline as India lessens its reliance on Gulf oil.

4.1 STRATEGIC BALANCING IN A MULTIPOLAR WORLD

The Cold War's binary structure and the unipolar dominance that followed the 1991 era have given way to a complicated, asymmetrical multipolar order since 2014. The United States, China, the European Union, Russia, and emerging middle powers like India, Brazil, and Turkey are some of the competing centers of power that dominate today's world. They all have an impact on the military, economy, digital, and environmental domains. India has purposefully eschewed fixed alliances within this framework in favour of a strategic multi-alignment approach. India has maintained its strategic autonomy while increasing its global influence through issue-based coalitions. India's concurrent membership in non-Western organizations like the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) and BRICS, as well as Western-led forums like the Quad and G20, best illustrates this strategy (Daulet Singh, Z. (2022).

India's foreign policy from 2014 to 2024 was characterized by a calculated balancing act between competing global powers, especially the US and Russia. Through important agreements like COMCASA (Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement), BECA (Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement), and frequent 2+2 ministerial dialogues that have improved defence cooperation and interoperability, India considerably strengthened its strategic and technological ties with the United States during this time. In spite of mounting criticism from the West, particularly in the wake of the conflict in Ukraine, India has continued to have a stable relationship with Russia. In open defiance of Western sanctions, India boosted its oil commerce with Moscow and kept importing defence goods from Russia. India's persistent abstentions from UN resolutions pertaining to Russia are another example of this careful balance, highlighting a practical, interest-driven strategy meant to protect national interests and maintain strategic autonomy. India's foreign policy from 2014 to 2024 has also shown a careful balancing act within the triangle of Iran, Israel, and the Arab world. In addition to strengthening connections with the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states due to trade, energy security, and the presence of a sizable Indian diaspora, it has developed close ties with Israel, especially in the areas of military, agriculture, and cyber security. Furthermore, India has continued to retain strategic ties with Iran, particularly by contributing to the construction of the Chabahar Port, a crucial conduit to

Afghanistan and Central Asia. India's increasing alignment with the changing geopolitical environment of West Asia is further highlighted by the formation of the I2U2 forum, which consists of the United States, Israel, the United Arab Emirates, and India. In order to maintain its strategic autonomy and increase its influence among many stakeholders in the region, India has been cautious in negotiating the delicate Iran-Israel divide, purposefully avoiding involvement in regional sectarian or ideological confrontations. Multilateral forums have been strategically used by India to further its ambitions for global leadership and as tools of balance. India opposes bloc politics and China's increasing power within the BRICS while also advancing multipolarity and South-South cooperation. India fights Pakistan's terrorist narratives, promotes its strategic interests in Eurasia, and carefully negotiates the China-Pakistan axis through the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO). The Quad provides a framework for strategic collaboration without the commitments of a formal military alliance, acting as a vital buffer against China's ambition in the Indo-Pacific. An important turning point was India's 2023 G20 presidency, which positioned the nation as a link between the Global North and South and advanced important global concerns like digital inclusion, climate finance, and the reform of international governance institutions (Sachdeva, G. (2021).

Issue-based coalitions adaptable, goal-driven alliances that go over conventional borders of geography and ideology are becoming more and more important in India's foreign policy. India's leadership in international environmental governance is demonstrated by programs like the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) and the International Solar Alliance (ISA). In a similar vein, India's readiness to participate in practical, interest-based cooperation is seen in the I2U2 group, which focuses on food, water, and energy security in the Middle East. India's significance as a marine stabilizer and connector in a strategically important region is further highlighted by the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI). By avoiding entanglement in inflexible alliances and retaining strategic autonomy, these purpose-driven, selected frameworks enable India to influence global norms and agendas.

India's position on the international scene has gradually changed from that of a rule-taker to that of a rule-maker between 2014 and 2024. Strong support for reformed multilateralism, such as the extension of the United Nations Security Council (UNSC) and improved representation for the Global South in international organizations, has been a major topic of this transition. India has continuously presented itself as a contemporary civilizational force based on democracy, pluralism, and inclusive growth. Additionally, India now aspires to be a "leading power" that actively shapes international standards, especially in developing fields like digital governance, maritime security, and climate action, rather than just a balancer in international affairs (Saran, S. (2021).

India's combined pursuit of the Act East and Look West strategies between 2014 and 2024 was one of its most ambitious post-Cold War foreign policy initiatives. India made considerable progress strategically. Through credible interactions and marine initiatives like SAGAR and active involvement in the Quad, it strengthened its status as a resident Indo-Pacific power under the Act East Policy, strengthening its role as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region. The Look West strategy maintained balanced engagement with Iran and the larger Arab world while also strengthening bilateral ties with important nations like the United Arab Emirates, Saudi Arabia, and Israel. In contrast to the previous energy-centric concept, these ties now highlight mutual interdependence across economic, defence, and cultural aspects. Additionally, India has effectively maintained its strategic autonomy, refusing Western attempts to isolate Russia and maintaining practical non-alignment despite strengthening links with the United States, all the while vehemently opposing Chinese coercion. India has demonstrated remarkable leadership on the multilateral front; its G20

presidency and strong participation in BRICS, SCO, and I2U2 demonstrate its ability to overcome geopolitical differences. Furthermore, India's support of issue-based alliances like the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) and the International Solar Alliance (ISA) demonstrates its expanding power in influencing global governance in the areas of technology, infrastructure, and climate (C. Raja, 2019).

India's foreign policy has encountered several difficulties and inconsistencies between 2014 and 2024, despite substantial strategic accomplishments. Even though India has increased its Indo-Pacific contacts, unresolved border issues and a growing power imbalance with China continue to threaten India's strategic position. This is still a key concern. Furthermore, the coherence of India's regional strategy is weakened by the diplomatic complications brought about by its membership in multilateral organizations like SCO and BRICS, which include China. India's delicate balancing act in West Asia is highlighted by the region's persistent tensions, including the Israel-Iran wars, volatile oil prices, and possible crises impacting its sizable diaspora. India's influence in Central Asia and Afghanistan has also been limited by the decrease in strategic interaction with Iran, primarily as a result of U.S. sanctions. There are also institutional flaws: neither the Act East nor Look West policies have been completely institutionalized through financial sources, consistent bureaucratic support, or well-defined doctrines. India's regional goals frequently seem underfunded and unevenly carried out, which limits their long-term influence when compared to China's Belt and Road Initiative or the US Indo-Pacific policy.

India's pragmatic endurance and adaptation in an increasingly complicated global context has been one of its main foreign policy assets from 2014 to 2024. India has maintained its strategic autonomy by deftly interacting with a wide range of partners without giving in to binary alignments. It exhibits a flexible and responsive foreign policy strategy by being able to react to global shocks like the COVID-19 epidemic, the turmoil in Ukraine, and disruptions in international energy markets. Furthermore, India has successfully expanded its worldwide influence beyond traditional statecraft by utilizing soft power instruments including its sizable diaspora, yoga diplomacy, and expanding technological leadership. India's international character has also gradually changed over the past ten years, moving from being a rule-taker to a rule-shaper. As a leading voice of the Global South promoting development, climate justice, and multilateral reform, it now presents itself as a civilizational force that balances tradition and modernity, a reliable bridge-builder and balancer capable of influencing discourse across both Western and non-Western coalitions (C. Raja Mohan. (2015).

5.1 CONCLUSION

Between 2014 and 2024, India's foreign policy developed into a carefully calibrated balancing act, supported by the Act East and Look West policies. India has rejected strict alliances in a fragmented and multipolar world system in favour of a multi-aligned, issue-based strategy based on *realpolitik* and strategic autonomy. By bolstering maritime policy, growing defence and infrastructure alliances, and improving regional connectivity, the Act East Policy has enabled India to establish itself as a key Indo-Pacific actor. Simultaneously, the Look West Policy has expanded India's strategic presence in West Asia, converting energy-focused relationships into all-encompassing interactions involving trade, technology, defence, and diplomacy. India demonstrates a practical, interest-driven foreign policy by skillfully navigating complicated alliances, such as those with the United States and Russia, Israel and Iran, ASEAN and China. India's ambitions to become not only a regional power but also a global influencer and norm-shaper are indicated by its growing leadership in multilateral forums like the G20 and BRICS, as well as the establishment of cutting-edge

platforms like I2U2, the International Solar Alliance (ISA), and the Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI). However, difficulties still exist. India's strategic coherence is still being tested by the lack of institutional consolidation, persistent border tensions with China, and geopolitical unrest in West Asia. It will take consistent investments in long-term vision, institutional ability, and resource allocation across diplomatic, security, and economic sectors to achieve its global objectives. Converting tactical adaptability into strategic leadership shaping rather than just navigating the shifting global balance will be India's main challenge as it transitions past 2024. The Act East and Look West strategies offer a solid basis for India to become a key player in the Global South, a pillar of multipolar stability, and a major force in the twenty-first century if they are successfully maintained and combined.

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