

Navigating India's Complex Foreign Policy Challenges in 2025

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What's in today's article?

- Why in News?
- Key highlights of India's external relations
- Challenges that preoccupied South Block in 2024
- How did Indian foreign policy navigate global conflict?
- India's diplomatic agenda for 2025

Why in News?

- After Prime Minister Modi's third term began in June, 2024 saw intense diplomatic activity amidst global insecurity and regional shocks, especially in Bangladesh.
- With 2025 likely to be even more unpredictable, India's foreign policy must stay adaptable to change.

Key highlights of India's external relations

- **Key Developments in India-China Relations**

- The most challenging negotiation of 2024 was the disengagement at the Line of Actual Control with China.
- The first Modi-Xi Jinping meeting in five years, held at Kazan during the BRICS summit in Russia, marked a significant step towards rebuilding trust after PLA transgressions since 2020.

- **Strengthening Strategic Ties with France**

- French President Emmanuel Macron attended Republic Day as the chief guest, solidifying India-France cooperation in defence, energy, and maritime sectors.
- While India aimed to host U.S. President Biden and the Quad summit, Macron's visit reinforced bilateral dependability.

- **Progress on Trade Agreements**

- The conclusion of the India-European Free Trade Association agreement early in 2024 was a milestone, serving as a template for future FTAs.
- However, no substantial progress was made on agreements with Australia, the U.K., or the EU by year-end.

- **Diplomatic Engagements in the Neighborhood**

- India hosted leaders from most neighboring countries during PM Modi's swearing-in, except Pakistan.
- Notable highlights included Bhutan's leadership visits, PM Modi's trip to Thimphu, and successful diplomatic exchanges with Sri Lanka and Maldives, mending earlier tensions.

Challenges that preoccupied South Block in 2024

- **Estranged Relations with Bangladesh**

- The ousting of Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina in August marked a significant setback for India-Bangladesh ties.
- Rising attacks on Hindu minorities and Ms. Hasina's stay in India further strained the once-strong partnership.

- **Worsening Ties with Canada**

- Relations with Canada deteriorated after allegations of Indian involvement in the Nijjar killing, with even Home Minister Amit Shah being named.
- India retaliated by freezing diplomatic ties with PM Justin Trudeau's government, awaiting potential change in 2025.

- **Legal and Diplomatic Challenges with the U.S.**

- Tensions with the U.S. escalated due to indictments against the Adani group and an Indian official linked to the alleged Pannun assassination plot.
- However, the election of U.S. President Donald Trump and his pro-India administration offers a glimmer of hope.

- **Regional Rivalries and China's Influence**

- The U.S.'s involvement in South Asia, changes in Bangladesh, and China's growing influence in Nepal and neighboring countries remain persistent challenges for India's foreign policy.

How did Indian foreign policy navigate global conflict?

- **Balancing Act in Global Conflicts**

- India maintained a neutral stance, advocating for peace amidst the Russia-Ukraine conflict and Israel's war in Gaza.
- PM Modi's visits to Russia and Ukraine sparked speculation about a potential mediatory role.
- Despite meeting Palestinian PM Mahmoud Abbas at the UN and condemning civilian casualties, India avoided explicitly holding Israel accountable at the UN.

- **Shifting Focus in West Asia**

- With multilateral initiatives like IMEC and I2U2 facing challenges, India pivoted to bilateral engagements with West Asian nations.
- In 2025, navigating tensions between Iran and the Israel-U.S. alliance will be a key challenge for Indian diplomacy.

India's diplomatic agenda for 2025

- **Strengthening U.S.-India Relations**

- External Affairs Minister Jaishankar's meetings with the Trump transition team signal a U.S. focus for 2025.
- Key events include President Trump's visit for the Quad Summit and PM Modi's potential trip to Washington beforehand.

- **Engagement with Iran and iCET Discussions**

- India will host a ministerial visit from Iran early in 2025, followed by U.S. NSA Jake Sullivan's visit for a crucial iCET (Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology) meeting.

- **High-Profile Diplomatic Visits**

- Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto will be the Republic Day guest, and Russian President Vladimir Putin's first visit to Delhi since the war began is expected to be finalized.

Q.1. How did India navigate global conflicts in 2024?

India maintained a neutral stance in the Russia-Ukraine war and Israel-Gaza conflict, advocating for peace. PM Modi's visits to Russia and Ukraine suggested a potential mediatory role, while India avoided taking sides in the Israel-Palestinian conflict at the UN.

Q.2. What is India's diplomatic focus for 2025?

India aims to strengthen its relations with the U.S., engage with Iran on critical technology, and host key diplomatic visits. Notable events include the potential visit of U.S. President Donald Trump and the Republic Day visit of Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto.

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