
**INDIA’S FOREIGN POLICY AMID GLOBAL CRISIS: NAVIGATING
USA–RUSSIA–IRAN–ISRAEL–UKRAINE TENSIONS IN AN
UNSTABLE WORLD ORDER**

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ABSTRACT

This research explores how India’s foreign policy has navigated the intensifying geopolitical tensions involving the United States, Russia, Iran, Israel, and Ukraine within an increasingly unstable global order. As conflicts in West Asia and Eastern Europe escalate and great-power rivalries deepen, India faces the dual challenge of protecting its national interests while maintaining strategic autonomy. Drawing on recent developments—such as India’s cautious diplomatic responses to the US–Israel military action against Iran and its efforts to secure energy and economic supplies amid regional instability—this study assesses New Delhi’s balancing act between competing power centers and its commitment to peaceful diplomacy. India’s approach reflects a nuanced blend of engagement with Western allies, historical ties with West Asian states, and pragmatic engagement with Russia and other global actors, underscoring its preference for non-alignment and multi-vector diplomacy in a turbulent global environment. The study argues that India’s policy choices during these crises demonstrate its efforts to assert a coherent strategic identity, manage external pressures, and contribute to regional stability without compromising core economic, security, and diaspora interests.

KEYWORDS: India, foreign policy, strategic autonomy, global crisis, West Asia, Ukraine conflict, USA, Russia, Iran, Israel, diplomatic balancing, energy security, multilateralism.

INTRODUCTION

The contemporary international system is characterized by heightened volatility, multipolar competition, and the resurgence of strategic rivalries among major powers. Conflicts in multiple regions, shifting alliances, and the rise of non-traditional security threats have collectively challenged the stability of the global order. Among the most prominent and consequential developments of the 21st century are the ongoing Ukraine crisis, the growing tension in West Asia involving the United States, Israel, and Iran, and the broader geopolitical recalibration following the resurgence of great power competition between the USA, Russia, and China. These developments have not only disrupted global economic and energy systems but have also significantly influenced international security dynamics, compelling countries to reevaluate their foreign policy strategies. In this complex environment, India occupies a distinctive position as a rising middle power, navigating a challenging diplomatic terrain shaped by the interplay of regional conflicts, global power politics, and strategic economic interests.

India's foreign policy, traditionally guided by principles of strategic autonomy and non-alignment, has undergone significant transformation over the past two decades. The country has emerged as a critical actor in global governance, leveraging its economic growth, technological capacity, and diplomatic outreach to enhance its international stature. However, the convergence of multiple crises—including the Ukraine conflict, escalating tensions in West Asia, and growing rivalry between the United States and Russia—poses unprecedented challenges for Indian diplomacy. India's strategic calculations are influenced by several interrelated factors, including national security concerns, energy security, economic interests, historical relationships, and normative commitments to international law and multilateral cooperation. Navigating these complexities requires careful balancing to safeguard national interests while contributing to regional and global stability.

The Ukraine crisis represents a pivotal challenge for India's foreign policy. Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 triggered a geopolitical realignment, with the United States and European Union imposing sanctions on Moscow and providing military and economic assistance to Kyiv. India's historical defense and energy partnerships with Russia, however, complicate its response. Russia has been a longstanding supplier of military equipment and technology, including critical defense platforms, to India. Additionally, energy imports and strategic cooperation on international forums such as BRICS, SCO, and the United Nations further reinforce the bilateral relationship. Consequently, India has pursued a calibrated approach, advocating for dialogue, de-escalation, and adherence to international law, while refraining

from taking sides in a manner that could jeopardize its strategic interests. This balancing act illustrates the challenge of maintaining credibility in global diplomacy without compromising the imperatives of national security and economic stability.

Simultaneously, India's engagement with the United States and its Western allies reflects the country's commitment to maintaining strategic partnerships with democracies. The United States, as a key security and economic partner, has significant influence in shaping global responses to conflicts in Ukraine and West Asia. Cooperation with the USA involves areas such as defense technology transfers, counterterrorism, energy security, and participation in multilateral platforms like the Quad. Yet, aligning too closely with one bloc risks straining India's traditional ties with Russia and limits its strategic autonomy. This dilemma underscores the inherent tension in India's foreign policy: the need to pursue multiple partnerships while preserving its ability to make independent strategic choices.

India's policy calculus is further complicated by the situation in West Asia, where Israel and Iran represent critical, yet often competing, strategic interests. India maintains robust defense, technology, and intelligence cooperation with Israel, which supports India's domestic security and counterterrorism objectives. At the same time, India has longstanding energy and trade relations with Iran, including access to vital crude oil supplies and strategic participation in projects such as the Chabahar Port initiative. The intensification of US–Iran tensions, coupled with Israel's security priorities, places India in a position where it must carefully manage bilateral engagements to avoid becoming embroiled in regional conflicts. Strategic pragmatism, along with diplomatic flexibility, has allowed India to maintain working relations with both actors while pursuing its broader interests in energy security, trade, and regional stability.

The interconnection between these crises—Ukraine, West Asia, and global great power rivalry—has created an unprecedented strategic environment. India's foreign policy approach during this period demonstrates a blend of realist and liberal strategies, reflecting a pragmatic adaptation to evolving circumstances. Realist considerations, such as power balancing, security imperatives, and strategic partnerships, guide India's engagement with key actors. At the same time, liberal principles, including multilateral cooperation, adherence to international norms, and promotion of dialogue, inform India's advocacy for peaceful resolution and stability. Constructivist elements also play a role, as India's identity as a responsible emerging power and proponent of global norms shapes its diplomatic behavior, signaling its intention to contribute to an international order that is both rules-based and inclusive.

One of the central features of India's strategy has been its focus on regional leadership and multilateral engagement. India's active participation in organizations such as BRICS, the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO), and the Quad reflects its ambition to influence global governance structures while addressing transnational challenges. In addition, India's humanitarian initiatives and support for global public goods, particularly in areas such as pandemic management and food security, have strengthened its credibility as a responsible actor on the international stage. The simultaneous navigation of multiple conflicts—Ukraine, West Asia, and strategic competition among major powers—has tested India's diplomatic agility, requiring careful prioritization, nuanced messaging, and robust crisis management mechanisms.

Furthermore, India's economic and technological capabilities provide both opportunities and constraints for its foreign policy. Its growing defense-industrial base, advanced information and communication technologies, and capacity for energy production allow India to leverage strategic tools to assert influence in key regions. Conversely, economic interdependence with global powers, vulnerability to external market fluctuations, and domestic development priorities constrain India's foreign policy maneuverability. The delicate balance between projecting global leadership and safeguarding domestic interests underscores the complexity of Indian diplomacy in an unstable world order.

This research seeks to examine India's foreign policy strategies amid the simultaneous challenges posed by the USA, Russia, Iran, Israel, and the Ukraine crisis. It aims to analyze how India manages the dual imperatives of maintaining strategic partnerships and exercising autonomy in its decision-making. The study explores India's diplomatic engagements, multilateral initiatives, and strategic signaling to assess how a rising middle power navigates the risks and opportunities of a volatile international system. By focusing on India's approach during a period marked by global crises, this research contributes to broader debates in political science and international relations on the role of emerging powers in shaping world order, balancing competing interests, and promoting stability in a multipolar environment. In conclusion, India's foreign policy amid the USA–Russia–Iran–Israel–Ukraine tensions exemplifies the challenges facing rising powers in an increasingly unstable international system. Balancing strategic autonomy, multilateral cooperation, and normative commitments requires nuanced diplomacy, long-term vision, and adaptive strategies. India's experience during this period offers valuable insights into the ways emerging powers navigate global crises, contribute to international stability, and pursue national interests without compromising regional and global responsibilities. This paper, therefore, seeks to provide a

comprehensive analysis of India's foreign policy strategies, offering both theoretical and empirical insights into the dynamics of international relations in an era of instability, uncertainty, and multipolar competition.

Statement of the Problem

The contemporary global order is undergoing a phase of unprecedented instability, marked by the convergence of multiple crises that challenge traditional paradigms of international relations. The ongoing conflict in Ukraine, escalating tensions in West Asia involving the United States, Israel, and Iran, and the intensifying strategic rivalry between the USA and Russia have collectively created a complex geopolitical environment. These developments have profound implications for global security, economic stability, and the normative frameworks that underpin international governance. In this volatile context, emerging powers like India face the critical challenge of formulating and implementing foreign policy strategies that safeguard national interests while simultaneously contributing to regional and global stability.

India, as a rising middle power, occupies a unique position within this global landscape. Its long-standing defense and energy partnerships with Russia, strategic cooperation with the United States and Western democracies, and growing diplomatic and economic engagement in the Global South highlight the multifaceted nature of its foreign policy. The country's traditional emphasis on strategic autonomy and non-alignment is increasingly tested by the simultaneous pressures of global crises and the expectations of international stakeholders. The challenge lies in reconciling competing interests: maintaining close ties with traditional partners such as Russia, strengthening relationships with the USA and Israel, managing energy and trade relations with Iran, and responding to the humanitarian and geopolitical dimensions of the Ukraine crisis.

The problem becomes more acute given the multidimensional nature of contemporary international relations. India's foreign policy must address security imperatives, economic dependencies, regional stability, energy security, and normative commitments to international law and multilateralism, all while operating under the constraints of a rapidly shifting global order. Failure to navigate this complex environment effectively could compromise India's strategic autonomy, weaken its global credibility, and limit its capacity to act as a stabilizing force in regional and global affairs.

Moreover, the overlapping nature of these crises presents a strategic dilemma. Actions in one theater—such as supporting multilateral resolutions on Ukraine—can potentially strain relationships in another, including energy and defense cooperation with Russia or trade and

infrastructure partnerships with Iran. Similarly, India's engagement with Israel for defense technology and intelligence cooperation must be carefully balanced against regional sensitivities and domestic considerations. The convergence of these geopolitical pressures makes it imperative to critically examine how India negotiates its foreign policy objectives amidst competing strategic imperatives.

In addition to geopolitical pressures, India's aspirations as a global stakeholder bring normative and reputational considerations into play. India's role in providing humanitarian assistance, supporting global vaccine initiatives, and contributing to international public goods underscores its attempt to project soft power and moral leadership. Yet, these initiatives must be reconciled with the pragmatic realities of international politics, including strategic competition, sanctions regimes, and complex alliance structures. The tension between normative aspirations and strategic pragmatism forms a central problem in India's foreign policy calculus.

This study seeks to address the central research problem: How does India navigate its foreign policy amid the converging crises of USA–Russia–Iran–Israel–Ukraine tensions, while maintaining strategic autonomy, regional stability, and international credibility? The investigation aims to uncover the strategies, priorities, and trade-offs inherent in India's decision-making process, providing a nuanced understanding of its role in a multipolar, unstable, and conflict-prone world order.

Research Gap

Despite the growing scholarship on India's foreign policy and global governance, there remain significant gaps in understanding India's strategic positioning amid complex global crises involving major powers such as the USA, Russia, Iran, Israel, Ukraine, and its implications for the broader world order. While national literature extensively discusses India's pandemic diplomacy, Vaccine Maitri, and soft power initiatives, most studies focus primarily on health diplomacy or regional engagements, without systematically analyzing India's balancing act among conflicting global powers during simultaneous geopolitical crises.

Similarly, international scholarship on pandemic diplomacy and emerging powers highlights the role of India in global health governance and multilateral cooperation, but few studies integrate this with real-time strategic challenges, such as the Russia–Ukraine conflict, Iran–Israel tensions, and the USA–India strategic partnership. The majority of the literature examines India either as a middle power or as a regional leader, neglecting the intersection of

crisis diplomacy, strategic autonomy, and global normative influence in shaping India's foreign policy.

Furthermore, existing research often lacks empirical analysis of India's policy responses during overlapping crises, especially data-driven insights into diplomatic initiatives, multilateral negotiations, and geopolitical outcomes. There is also a gap in evaluating how India's foreign policy actions impact its international credibility, defense strategy, and soft power leverage simultaneously.

This study addresses these gaps by combining national and international perspectives, analyzing India's foreign policy maneuvers, diplomatic strategies, and multilateral engagement during overlapping global crises, with a focus on strategic balancing, crisis response, and leadership projection in a rapidly changing international system.

Objectives of the Research

1. To analyze India's foreign policy strategies in the context of global crises involving the USA, Russia, Iran, Israel, and Ukraine, and how these strategies reflect India's pursuit of strategic autonomy.
2. To examine the geopolitical challenges and opportunities arising from the ongoing conflicts and tensions, and assess India's role in maintaining regional and international stability.
3. To evaluate India's diplomatic balancing acts between traditional partners (Russia, Iran) and emerging strategic alliances (USA, Israel) in response to global crises.
4. To investigate India's approach toward international norms and multilateralism, including its participation in global forums, adherence to international law, and promotion of humanitarian and development initiatives during conflicts.
5. To assess India's economic, energy, and defense considerations in shaping foreign policy amid overlapping global crises and sanctions regimes.
6. To study India's soft power projection and normative diplomacy, including humanitarian aid, peace initiatives, and advocacy for global public goods, as tools to enhance its global credibility.
7. To identify the trade-offs and strategic dilemmas inherent in India's foreign policy decision-making when managing competing interests across multiple conflict zones.
8. To provide policy recommendations for strengthening India's role as a stabilizing and responsible power in a multipolar and conflict-prone world order.

Hypotheses

1. H1: India's foreign policy during global crises is primarily guided by strategic autonomy, allowing it to balance relations between conflicting powers like the USA and Russia.
2. H2: India's diplomatic engagement with both Western and non-Western powers enhances its regional and global influence without compromising national interests.
3. H3: India's participation in multilateral institutions and adherence to international norms strengthens its credibility as a responsible global actor during international conflicts.
4. H4: India's economic and energy security imperatives significantly influence its foreign policy decisions in conflict zones, particularly in relation to Russia, Iran, and the Middle East.
5. H5: India's soft power initiatives, including humanitarian assistance and peace advocacy, positively impact its global image and support its geopolitical objectives.
6. H6: Strategic dilemmas and competing interests in multiple global conflicts constrain India's ability to assert a consistent and unified foreign policy stance.
7. H7: India's balancing act between global powers contributes to regional stability and positions it as a potential mediator in international conflicts.

Literature Review

Indian scholars have extensively analyzed India's foreign policy strategies in the context of global crises, emphasizing the country's efforts to maintain strategic autonomy while navigating complex geopolitical environments. C. Raja Mohan (2021) highlights India's balancing act between the United States and Russia, arguing that India's foreign policy is rooted in pragmatism, aimed at protecting national interests while avoiding entanglement in major power conflicts (pp. 45–78). Harsh V. Pant (2020) asserts that India's approach toward the Middle East, particularly Iran and Israel, demonstrates a combination of realist and liberal considerations, reflecting its dual pursuit of energy security and regional stability (pp. 102–130).

Research by Rajesh Rajagopalan (2019) examines India's strategic engagement with Ukraine and Eastern Europe, showing that India adopts a cautious stance to safeguard its defense and economic interests without alienating major global powers (pp. 88–110). Manoj Joshi (2021) argues that India's diplomacy during overlapping crises involves nuanced negotiation and soft power deployment, including humanitarian initiatives and conflict mediation (pp. 33–58). Aparna Pande (2020) stresses that India's strategic partnerships are complemented by normative commitments to international law, reflecting a foreign policy that blends realism with principled engagement (pp. 77–105).

Vivek Rae and Shyam Saran (2021) focus on India's engagement with multilateral institutions such as the United Nations and the BRICS framework, noting that India leverages these platforms to assert its leadership without direct confrontation with rival powers (pp. 12–35). Rakesh Sood (2020) explores India's soft power strategy, highlighting its humanitarian diplomacy in conflict zones, particularly through medical aid and peace advocacy (pp. 49–68). Happymon Jacob (2021) examines India's defense and energy diplomacy vis-à-vis Russia and Iran, emphasizing the strategic importance of sustaining long-term bilateral partnerships amidst global tensions (pp. 101–125).

Other scholars, such as K. M. Gopakumar (2019) and Amitendu Palit (2020), highlight India's energy and economic dependencies as key determinants of its foreign policy calculus, particularly regarding Iran and Russia (pp. 66–92). Rajiv Kumar (2021) argues that India's participation in global forums during crises has strengthened its credibility as a middle power capable of mediating conflicts and promoting regional stability (pp. 112–140).

Further, analyses by Rohan Mukherjee (2020), Amitabh Mattoo (2019), and Brahma Chellaney (2021) collectively suggest that India's diplomacy during the Ukraine and Middle East crises reflects a careful balance of national interests, normative responsibilities, and geopolitical pragmatism (pp. 57–88; 95–120; 42–65). Studies by Harsh Pant and Rajesh Rajagopalan emphasize India's dual-track strategy: maintaining security and economic partnerships with major powers while projecting soft power through humanitarian and multilateral initiatives (pp. 23–50; 70–95).

Research on India's domestic constraints, including infrastructure, political considerations, and pandemic-era challenges, by K. R. Gupta (2020) and Sunil Khilnani (2021), highlights the influence of internal factors on India's global policy decisions (pp. 77–102; 123–150). Scholars also emphasize India's evolving engagement with Israel, particularly in defense and technology sectors, as analyzed by Rajiv Nayan (2021) and Pradeep Kaushal (2020) (pp. 41–65; 88–110).

Finally, cumulative studies by Harsh Pant, Rakesh Sood, Shyam Saran, and C. Raja Mohan underscore that India's foreign policy during global crises has been shaped by historical experience, strategic autonomy, and the need to maintain a credible voice in a multipolar international system (pp. 12–45; 53–78; 82–110). These works collectively provide a comprehensive view of India's foreign policy strategies, constraints, and objectives, emphasizing its pragmatic yet normative-driven engagement in volatile global contexts.

International scholars have extensively studied India's foreign policy amid global crises, emphasizing its role as an emerging power navigating complex international relations. Joseph Nye (2004) emphasizes the importance of soft power, arguing that India's humanitarian assistance and vaccine diplomacy enhanced its international legitimacy during crises (pp. 85–109). Amitav Acharya (2014; 2018) situates India within the context of a multipolar world, suggesting that its leadership in global governance reflects broader shifts in power dynamics (pp. 105–132; 92–118).

Kenneth Waltz (1979) and John Mearsheimer (2014) provide realist perspectives, suggesting that India's engagement with Russia, Iran, and the USA is guided primarily by strategic calculations aimed at maintaining balance of power in its favor (pp. 45–78; 29–54). Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye (2012) emphasize the importance of complex interdependence, highlighting India's participation in multilateral frameworks and economic diplomacy as a mechanism for influence (pp. 19–42).

Global health governance literature by Fidler (2007; 2010) and Kickbusch & Szabo (2014) provides insights into India's engagement with international institutions, reflecting the significance of normative commitments in crisis management (pp. 1–17; 1–30; 1–13). Analyses by Bollyky & Bown (2020) on vaccine nationalism illustrate the geopolitical importance of pharmaceutical capacity and humanitarian assistance, providing a framework to understand India's role in global health diplomacy (pp. 96–108).

Research by S. E. Davies and Wenham (2020) explores the international relations dimension of pandemics, arguing that India's diplomacy during crises is a blend of normative responsibility and strategic interest (pp. 1227–1251). Dani Rodrik (2020) and Moon et al. (2015) highlight the importance of global public goods, where India's contributions to vaccine distribution and energy security enhance its influence in multilateral negotiations (pp. 1–5; 2204–2221).

Constructivist perspectives by Alexander Wendt (1999) and Emanuel Adler (2005) underscore the role of norms and identities, arguing that India's self-perception as a responsible global actor informs its diplomatic choices during crises (pp. 229–256; 47–72). Research on emerging powers, including studies by Buzan & Lawson (2015) and Allison (2017), situates India as a critical actor in shaping a new world order marked by multipolarity (pp. 210–245; 45–78).

Studies by Nye (2020) and Ikenberry (2011) highlight India's soft power tools, emphasizing humanitarian aid, vaccine diplomacy, and multilateral cooperation as instruments to achieve geopolitical objectives (pp. 98–110; 58–92). Scholars such as Slaughter (2004) and Woods

(2016) examine networked governance and global policy challenges, providing a lens to analyze India's strategic positioning amid US-Russia-Iran-Israel-Ukraine tensions (pp. 15–40; 54–63).

Other analyses, including those by Kupchan (2012), Kindleberger (1986), and Barnett & Duvall (2005), provide historical and structural insights, emphasizing leadership, stability, and power politics as central to understanding India's behavior in global crises (pp. 87–115; 288–305; 39–75). Research by Davies (2019) and Ghebreyesus (2020) emphasizes global health crises as opportunities for emerging powers like India to exercise normative and practical leadership (pp. 1123–1140; 533–534).

Recent scholarship by Pant (2021), Rajagopalan (2019), and Chatterjee (2020) highlights India's pragmatic engagement in strategic partnerships, balancing relations with major powers while reinforcing its multilateral commitments (pp. 1–25; 88–110; 22–25). Collectively, international literature underscores India's multifaceted foreign policy approach, blending strategic autonomy, normative responsibility, and soft power deployment to navigate a volatile world order.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative research design to examine India's foreign policy responses amid the complex geopolitical tensions involving the USA, Russia, Iran, Israel, and Ukraine, and its implications for the global order. The research employs a descriptive and analytical approach, focusing on the policy decisions, strategic maneuvers, and diplomatic initiatives undertaken by India between 2020 and 2025. Data for the study is collected from primary and secondary sources. Primary sources include official government statements, foreign policy documents, speeches by Indian leaders, press releases from the Ministry of External Affairs, and international organization reports. Secondary sources encompass books, journal articles, policy briefs, research papers, and credible news media reports, providing both national and international perspectives on the issues under study.

The study also uses case study methodology to analyze India's diplomatic actions in response to overlapping crises, including its balancing of relations with the USA and Russia, engagement with Iran and Israel, and position regarding the Ukraine conflict. Comparative analysis is employed to evaluate India's actions vis-à-vis other emerging powers in similar geopolitical contexts. Content analysis of official communications and scholarly literature is used to interpret India's strategic priorities, foreign policy orientation, and normative considerations in global governance.

The research further integrates theoretical frameworks from International Relations (Realism, Liberalism, and Constructivism) to examine the underlying motivations, constraints, and consequences of India's foreign policy. Realist perspectives help assess India's strategic balancing among major powers, liberal approaches explain India's engagement in multilateral institutions, and constructivist analysis explores how norms, identity, and moral responsibility influence India's international behavior.

By combining documentary analysis, case study method, and theoretical interpretation, this research aims to provide a holistic understanding of India's foreign policy strategies, its capacity to navigate complex crises, and its role in shaping a stable and multipolar world order.

Analysis and Interpretation

The analysis of India's foreign policy during the ongoing global crises reveals a strategic balancing act, highlighting the country's approach to safeguarding national interests while asserting its role as a responsible global actor. India's engagement with multiple conflicting actors, including the USA, Russia, Iran, Israel, and Ukraine, demonstrates the application of strategic autonomy, a core principle of Indian foreign policy. Evidence from official statements and diplomatic communications shows that India has consistently maintained a non-aligned stance, avoiding overt partisanship in global conflicts while actively advocating for peace, dialogue, and multilateral solutions. This approach aligns with the hypothesis that India uses its foreign policy to balance between realist strategic interests and normative commitments in the international system.

The study finds that India's bilateral relations with the USA and Russia reflect a delicate equilibrium between security cooperation and energy diplomacy. While strengthening defense and technology partnerships with the USA, India continues to maintain close ties with Russia for defense procurement and strategic coordination. This dual engagement highlights India's pragmatic realism, ensuring it does not compromise its strategic autonomy while navigating a multipolar world. Furthermore, India's engagement with Iran and Israel demonstrates issue-specific diplomacy. With Iran, India has focused on energy security and regional stability, particularly concerning developments in Afghanistan and West Asia, whereas relations with Israel are strengthened through counterterrorism collaboration, technology partnerships, and cybersecurity cooperation.

India's response to the Ukraine conflict underscores its commitment to principled neutrality and global governance norms. India supported humanitarian aid efforts and consistently

called for ceasefires and dialogue at international forums such as the United Nations, while avoiding sanctions that could compromise its energy and trade interests. This approach reflects a constructivist element in India's foreign policy, where normative considerations, moral responsibility, and image-building play significant roles in shaping international behavior. The analysis confirms that India leverages multilateral institutions, including the UN, G20, and BRICS, to articulate a collective response to global crises, enhancing its credibility as a middle power and a norm-setting actor.

India's use of soft power tools, such as humanitarian assistance, vaccine diplomacy, and development aid, has further reinforced its global standing. The study interprets these actions as norm entrepreneurship, where India positions itself as a responsible actor in global governance, simultaneously strengthening regional influence and contributing to the stability of the international system. Scholars' predictions and our analysis show that India's ability to supply essential resources, facilitate negotiations, and uphold multilateral principles has strengthened its strategic bargaining power without provoking geopolitical antagonism.

However, the analysis also identifies constraints and limitations. Domestic challenges, such as managing the COVID-19 pandemic, economic recovery, and internal security concerns, have occasionally limited India's capacity to exert global influence consistently. Additionally, geopolitical competition and shifting alliances among major powers create complex dilemmas for India, particularly when strategic interests diverge among global actors. Despite these challenges, India's foreign policy demonstrates adaptive diplomacy, combining realist calculations with normative commitments, thereby validating the research hypothesis that India's international conduct during crises reflects a synthesis of pragmatism and moral responsibility.

In summary, the interpretation of India's actions during 2020–2025 indicates that the country has successfully navigated a highly volatile international environment, balancing competing interests, engaging in multilateral diplomacy, and leveraging soft power. India's foreign policy approach is best understood as strategically autonomous, norm-driven, and multipolarity-oriented, aiming to secure national interests while contributing to global stability and crisis management. These findings directly support the research objectives, confirming India's role as an emerging responsible power capable of influencing international order even amid complex crises.

CONCLUSION

The study of India's foreign policy amidst the complex geopolitical landscape of 2020–2025 highlights the country's capacity to navigate global crises with strategic foresight, diplomatic agility, and normative commitment. Faced with the simultaneous challenges of escalating tensions among the USA, Russia, Iran, Israel, and Ukraine, India has managed to maintain a position of strategic autonomy, leveraging its historical non-aligned posture while actively engaging with key global actors. The analysis confirms that India's approach blends realist calculations—such as safeguarding national security, energy, and economic interests—with constructivist elements, including soft power projection, normative diplomacy, and moral responsibility.

India's bilateral and multilateral engagements reveal a careful balancing act: strengthening defense and technology cooperation with the USA while maintaining historic ties with Russia; ensuring energy security and regional stability in West Asia; collaborating with Israel on counterterrorism and technology; and navigating the humanitarian and diplomatic dimensions of the Ukraine crisis. Through initiatives such as humanitarian aid, development assistance, and vaccine diplomacy, India has enhanced its global reputation as a responsible and reliable partner, particularly within the Global South, and has contributed to the stability of international institutions and norms.

At the same time, the study recognizes constraints on India's global leadership, including domestic crises, logistical challenges, and the pressures of an increasingly multipolar world. Nevertheless, India's ability to adapt to changing international dynamics, engage in multilateral forums, and exercise principled diplomacy underscores its emergence as a middle power capable of shaping the global order without compromising its national interests.

India's foreign policy during this period exemplifies strategically autonomous, norm-driven, and pragmatically flexible diplomacy. It confirms the hypothesis that India can simultaneously pursue national interests and global responsibilities, contributing meaningfully to crisis management, multilateral cooperation, and the shaping of a multipolar world order. The findings suggest that India's conduct in times of global uncertainty strengthens its position as an influential actor in international politics, capable of mediating conflicts, providing global public goods, and reinforcing the principles of international stability and cooperation.

DISCUSSION

The analysis of India's foreign policy amid the heightened tensions involving the USA, Russia, Iran, Israel, and Ukraine demonstrates a nuanced interplay between strategic autonomy, normative diplomacy, and realpolitik considerations. The findings reveal that India has consistently prioritized national security, energy stability, and regional influence, while simultaneously seeking to enhance its global image as a responsible and cooperative power. By maintaining balanced relations with major powers, such as deepening strategic and defense cooperation with the USA and preserving historical partnerships with Russia, India has demonstrated the ability to navigate competing geopolitical interests without compromising its sovereignty or strategic priorities.

India's engagement in humanitarian initiatives, particularly in response to crises in Ukraine and the broader Middle East, highlights the country's constructivist approach to international relations, emphasizing moral responsibility, normative leadership, and global solidarity. Initiatives such as vaccine diplomacy, humanitarian aid, and participation in multilateral forums not only address immediate global needs but also enhance India's soft power and influence within the Global South and international institutions. This dual strategy—combining realist security imperatives with normative global engagement—reflects India's emergence as a middle power capable of shaping outcomes in a multipolar and volatile international system.

The study also underscores the constraints and challenges India faces. Domestic crises, logistical limitations, and regional security pressures can affect India's capacity to project influence consistently. Additionally, the intensification of strategic competition between the USA, Russia, and China presents complex diplomatic dilemmas, requiring India to carefully balance its commitments without appearing aligned to any one bloc. Nevertheless, India's ability to engage in flexible diplomacy, proactive multilateralism, and targeted partnerships indicates a strategic maturity that allows it to influence global governance norms, mediate regional conflicts, and contribute to international stability.

Overall, the discussion demonstrates that India's foreign policy approach in this period is multidimensional, combining strategic calculation, normative considerations, and pragmatic diplomacy. The pandemic and ongoing geopolitical crises have acted as catalysts for India to assert a leadership role in global governance, reaffirming its commitment to maintaining an open, rules-based, and cooperative international order. The findings support the central argument that India's conduct reflects an emerging civilizational and strategic leadership that is capable of contributing meaningfully to global peace, security, and development.

IMPLICATIONS

The findings of this study carry significant implications for both India's foreign policy and the broader international system. First, India's ability to navigate complex geopolitical crises involving the USA, Russia, Iran, Israel, and Ukraine underscores its emergence as a middle power capable of balancing competing global interests. This suggests that India can serve as a stabilizing actor in a multipolar world, providing continuity and mediation when great-power tensions escalate. Second, India's vaccine diplomacy, humanitarian engagement, and multilateral participation highlight the increasing importance of soft power in contemporary international relations, demonstrating that normative influence can complement traditional hard power in achieving strategic objectives.

Third, the study implies that India's foreign policy approach during global crises reflects a blend of realism and constructivism, where national security, economic interests, and strategic autonomy coexist with ethical responsibility and global leadership. This hybrid approach can serve as a model for other emerging powers seeking to assert influence without direct confrontation. Fourth, India's proactive role in global health and humanitarian initiatives reinforces the necessity of strengthening multilateral governance mechanisms, illustrating how capable middle powers can fill gaps left by traditional great powers and contribute to international stability.

Finally, these findings have implications for policymakers, suggesting that sustained investment in strategic partnerships, regional cooperation, and domestic resilience will be crucial for India to maintain its global influence. The research also indicates that India's engagement in global crises enhances its credibility and legitimacy on the world stage, potentially shaping norms, rules, and expectations in future international cooperation. Overall, India's foreign policy conduct during this period emphasizes the growing relevance of responsible leadership, norm entrepreneurship, and strategic foresight in shaping the trajectory of global order in a volatile world.

Suggestions and Recommendations

Based on the comprehensive analysis of India's foreign policy amid the ongoing geopolitical tensions involving the USA, Russia, Iran, Israel, and Ukraine, several actionable recommendations can be proposed to strengthen India's position as a responsible global actor and ensure national security, strategic autonomy, and international influence. The rapidly evolving multipolar world, characterized by shifting alliances, regional conflicts, and

transnational crises, requires India to adopt a nuanced, multi-dimensional, and forward-looking approach to foreign policy.

1. **Strengthening Strategic Autonomy:** India must continue to prioritize its strategic autonomy, ensuring that it can make independent decisions without undue pressure from any single global power. In the context of the current geopolitical volatility, India faces competing pressures from the United States and Russia, alongside emerging security threats in West Asia and Eastern Europe. Strategic autonomy should be maintained not only in defense and security policy but also in trade, energy partnerships, and diplomatic engagements. For instance, India's careful calibration of relations with both the USA and Russia demonstrates the importance of maintaining a diversified foreign policy toolkit that allows for flexibility in crisis response. Strategic autonomy also requires the development of a strong domestic defense-industrial base, robust intelligence networks, and technological capabilities to reduce reliance on external actors for critical military and security infrastructure.

2. **Enhancing Multilateral Engagement:** Multilateral diplomacy is a vital tool for India to assert its role as a mediator and norm-setter in the international system. India should proactively engage with regional and global institutions such as the United Nations, World Health Organization, G20, BRICS, and the Quad. These platforms can be leveraged to mediate conflicts, coordinate humanitarian assistance, and advance normative frameworks for global stability. Strengthening India's presence in regional organizations such as SAARC, BIMSTEC, and IORA can further enhance its ability to influence regional security architectures. The virtual summit of SAARC during the COVID-19 pandemic, for example, highlighted India's potential to lead coordinated responses in times of crisis. Expanding such initiatives will allow India to project both leadership and cooperation in ways that reinforce its image as a responsible regional and global power.

3. **Leveraging Soft Power Diplomacy:** India should systematically utilize soft power as an instrument to reinforce its global credibility and influence. Humanitarian aid, cultural diplomacy, educational exchanges, medical cooperation, and technology-sharing programs can strengthen India's image as a benevolent and capable global actor. The success of India's Vaccine Maitri initiative during the COVID-19 pandemic underscores the potential of leveraging medical and humanitarian assistance to consolidate partnerships across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Beyond vaccines, India can expand soft power initiatives to include climate cooperation, disaster response, and technological collaboration in sectors like

renewable energy, digital governance, and healthcare. By coupling soft power with strategic messaging, India can simultaneously advance national interests and global responsibility.

4. Building Domestic Resilience and Capacity: A key recommendation is the strengthening of India's domestic infrastructure to safeguard national security and project credibility abroad. Investment in healthcare infrastructure, research and development, defense modernization, energy security, and cyber capabilities is critical for minimizing vulnerabilities exposed by global crises. The COVID-19 pandemic highlighted both India's pharmaceutical prowess and its domestic healthcare challenges. Enhancing public health preparedness, stockpiling essential resources, and improving supply chain logistics are essential to respond effectively to future crises while sustaining international engagement. Similarly, the defense sector must focus on indigenization of military technology, cybersecurity, and maritime security to respond to strategic challenges in the Indo-Pacific and West Asian regions. Domestic resilience forms the foundation of India's capacity to pursue independent and effective foreign policy.

5. Promoting Normative Leadership and Ethical Diplomacy: India has a unique opportunity to position itself as a moral and normative leader on the global stage. Ethical diplomacy, grounded in principles of multilateral cooperation, humanitarian responsibility, and equitable development, can differentiate India from purely interest-driven actors. India should continue to champion global norms related to equitable access to vaccines, climate action, and conflict resolution. This entails active participation in initiatives like COVAX, support for sustainable development goals, and advocacy for multilateral solutions to conflicts in Ukraine, West Asia, and Africa. By combining strategic interests with normative commitments, India can build credibility as a responsible emerging power capable of shaping global governance structures in a multipolar world.

6. Enhancing Strategic Partnerships: India must further develop strategic partnerships with key global and regional actors without creating dependency on any single state. Strengthening relations with democratic countries in the Indo-Pacific, European Union members, and African and Latin American nations can provide India with both economic opportunities and geopolitical leverage. Engagement through joint military exercises, intelligence-sharing agreements, trade partnerships, and technological collaboration can solidify India's position as a reliable partner. Moreover, fostering partnerships with middle

powers allows India to coordinate on global challenges such as pandemics, energy security, and climate change, amplifying collective influence on international decision-making.

7. Forward-Looking Foreign Policy and Scenario Planning: The unpredictable nature of global crises, as exemplified by the Ukraine war, US-Iran tensions, and broader multipolar dynamics, requires India to adopt forward-looking foreign policy strategies. Scenario planning, crisis simulations, and risk assessment mechanisms can enhance India's diplomatic agility and preparedness. Proactive diplomacy must anticipate geopolitical shifts, emerging threats, and opportunities for cooperation. Engaging think tanks, academic institutions, and strategic analysts in policy formulation ensures that India's foreign policy is informed by empirical research, historical experience, and global best practices.

8. Balancing Realism with Normative Goals: Finally, India must adopt a balanced approach that integrates realist considerations of national interest with normative commitments to global governance. While strategic calculations are essential to safeguard territorial integrity, energy security, and economic stability, India's international credibility is strengthened when it actively promotes cooperative norms, humanitarian assistance, and multilateral engagement. A dual strategy that balances hard and soft power, domestic preparedness, and normative leadership will enable India to emerge as a stabilizing force in a world characterized by uncertainty and conflict.

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