

AIR Spotlight - India's Foreign Policy; India First

AIR Spotlight is an insightful program featured daily on the All India Radio Newsonair. In this program, many eminent panellists discuss issues of importance which can be quite helpful in the [IAS exam](#) preparation. In this article, the discussion is on India's foreign policy.

Context:

This article analyzes the foreign policy of India during the governance of Prime Minister Narendra Modi.

Background:

- The aim of India's foreign policy is to protect the national interests of the nation and India has always used this objective as its guiding principle.
- 'India first' is the central point of the government's foreign policy which is aimed at protecting the country's strategic interests and ensuring robust economic growth.

Key initiatives to boost foreign policy:

The following measures have been taken to boost India's position at the international level and to protect its strategic interests:

Vaccine Maitri:

- In January 2021, India launched the Vaccine Maitri (Vaccine Friendship) initiative, a major diplomatic effort to gift and supply made-in-India vaccines to low-income and developing countries globally.
- Bangladesh, Myanmar, Nepal, Bhutan, Maldives, Mauritius, Sri Lanka, Brazil, Morocco, South Africa, Afghanistan, Mexico, DR Congo, Nigeria, and the UK were among some of the beneficiaries of the Vaccine Maitri initiative.

Neighborhood First policy:

- The policy of Govt of India towards neighbours is encapsulated in the phrase, '**Neighbours First**'.
- Marked by a history of political divisions, economic differences, and geostrategic divergences, the Indian subcontinent remains deeply divided, with exceptionally low levels of integration.
- No other regional power is as disconnected from its immediate neighbourhood as India.
- Recognizing this disconnect as a challenge to India's economic and security interests, Prime Minister Modi made both intra- and inter-regional connectivity a policy priority in 2014.

- Within South Asia, the Modi government framed a Neighbourhood First policy to signal India's commitment to regional connectivity.
- India's regional policy has now shifted irreversibly towards strengthening cross-border relations.
- India wants a peaceful, prosperous and stable neighbourhood. This means less trouble for us and will enable us to focus on development, without distraction.

Act East Policy:

- India's 'Act East' policy is a diplomatic initiative to promote economic, strategic, and cultural relations with the vast Asia-Pacific region at different levels.
- The policy which was originally conceived as an economic initiative has gained political, strategic, and cultural dimensions including the establishment of institutional mechanisms for dialogue and cooperation. India has upgraded its relations to a strategic partnership with Indonesia, Vietnam, Malaysia, Japan, the Republic of Korea (ROK), Australia, Singapore, and the Association of Southeast Asian Nations ([ASEAN](#)) and forged close ties with all countries in the Asia-Pacific region.
- The objective of "Act East Policy" is to promote economic cooperation, cultural ties and develop strategic relationships with countries in the Asia-Pacific region through continuous engagement at bilateral, regional, and multilateral levels thereby providing enhanced connectivity to the States of North Eastern Region including Arunachal Pradesh with other countries in our neighbourhood.
- Prime Minister Modi gave a new thrust to intensify economic, strategic, and diplomatic relations with countries that share common concerns with India on China's growing economic and military strength and its implications for the evolving regional order.

Read more on the [Act East Policy](#) in the link.

Surgical Strike:

- In September 2016, the Indian Army launched surgical strikes against terrorist camps in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir.
- The strike on September 28, 2016, was in response to an attack by Pakistan-based terrorists on an army base in Kashmir's Uri on September 18 in which 19 soldiers were killed.
- This major initiative represented India's courage and strong action against [terrorism](#).

India's actions against China:

- The Modi government has made it clear to the forces that any unilateral action on the Line of Actual Control (LAC) should not be ignored.
- During the Galwan incident, the bravery, valour, and restraint shown by the Indian Army were incomparable and unparalleled.

- India made it clear that it will never allow the sanctity of borders to be violated.

Also read: [India - China Border Clash](#)

UNSC Presidency:

- In August 2021, India took over the presidency of the [United Nations Security Council \(UNSC\)](#) for the duration of one month.
- India, along with other members of the G4 (Brazil, Japan, and Germany) support the expansion of the UNSC's permanent membership, a move that is yet to materialize.
- The presidency offered a unique opportunity to India to display leadership skills, establish itself as a responsible stakeholder, and indicate its commitment to global governance.

QUAD and its importance to India:

- The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, or Quad, is an informal strategic forum maintained through semi-regular summits, information exchanges, and military drills among the US, Japan, Australia, and India.
- The [Quadrilateral Security Dialogue](#) is a useful instrument for India to further its interest in a “free, open, and inclusive” Indo-Pacific.
- Prime Minister Modi said at the QUAD summit that the Quad will remain an important “pillar of stability” in the Indo-Pacific region.

Climate Justice:

- The Government of India, through its [National Action Plan on Climate Change](#) and national missions, reiterates its commitment to devising impactful strategies for climate change adaptation and mitigation, energy efficiency, and natural resource conservation, while safeguarding the interests of vulnerable sections of its population.
- Addressing the World Sustainable Development Summit (WSDS), Modi said, two things will define how the progress journey of our people and the health of our planet are interlinked.
- Modi said climate justice is inspired by a vision of trusteeship where growth comes with greater compassion for the poorest.
- He further said that climate justice also means giving the developing countries enough space to grow. When each and every one of us understands our individual and collective duties, climate justice will be achieved.

International Solar Alliance:

- The International Solar Alliance was launched by PM Modi and former French president Francois Hollande in November 2015 to promote solar energy in 121 tropical countries.

- ISA commits itself to three near-term objectives:
 - Develop integrated solar or solar hybrid based cold chain solutions that bring economic value to farmers and producers, and include the post-harvest in-field technologies that can secure an extended shelf-life of perishable items.
 - Encourage the use of sustainable, low global warming potential solar-based cooling technologies through financing and incentives for small- and medium-sized farms.
 - Promote applied research and industry engagement to introduce affordable refrigeration solutions for small- and medium-sized producers with special emphasis on post-harvest processing facilities and transportation.

Promoting Soft Power:

- The ancient Indian science of wellness, Yoga, exemplifies India's soft power to the world and interconnects cultures.
- Yoga has gained admiration and captured peoples' imaginations across the world, and thus has become a source of India's soft power.
- Vaccine Maitri diplomacy is also one of the soft power tools of India.

Conclusion:

India is making continuous progress towards strengthening its position at the global level and has emerged as one of the leading nations in the world in various aspects.
