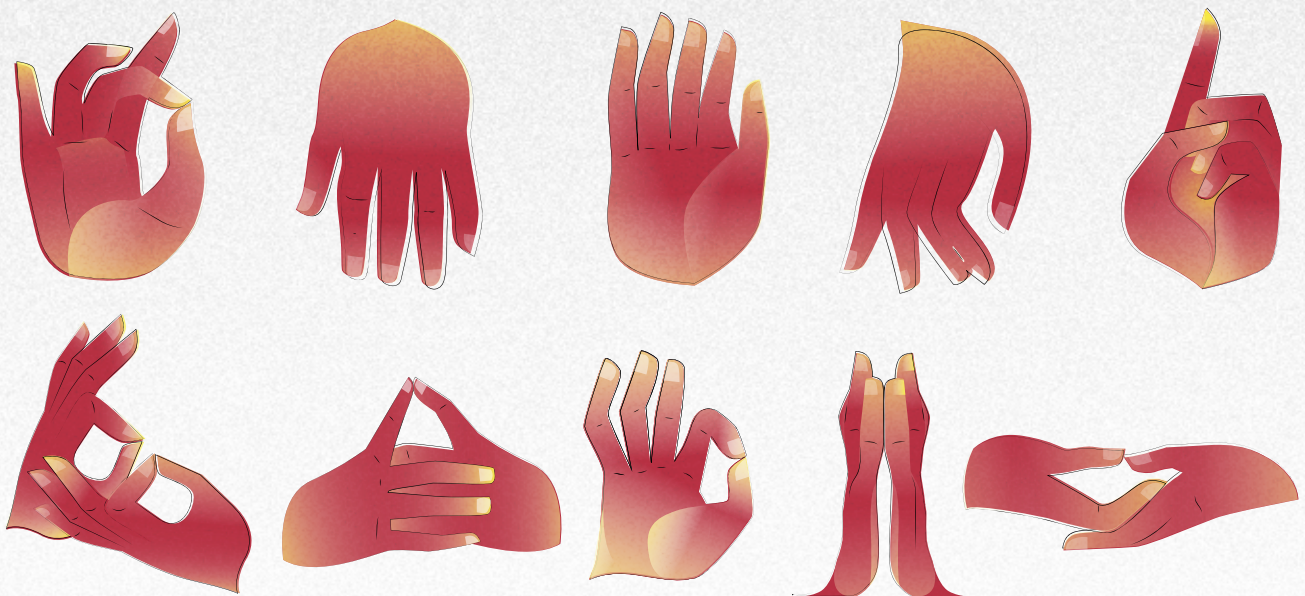


A DECADE OF TRANSITIONS

Trends in Indian Foreign Policy
2014-2024



About this report

This report reviews and assesses the key trends in Indian foreign policy over the past decade (2014-2024) and anticipates the coming decade's challenges and opportunities. As India navigates rapid technological changes, economic growth, and regional dynamics, it has experienced both successes and failures. The report highlights India's evolving role as a near-great power, its strategic alignments, and its efforts to balance relations with the U.S., Russia, and China. It also explores India's engagement with the Indo-Pacific and the Middle East. Based on insights from a workshop hosted by CSDR in February 2024, the report offers a comprehensive understanding of India's foreign policy transitions and future directions.

About the Council for Strategic and Defense Research

CSDR is a research-focused think tank founded in January 2020 by Dr. Happymon Jacob (Associate Professor, School of International Studies, JNU), and Lt. Gen. DS Hooda (Former. Northern Army Commander, Indian Army). CSDR combines academic research with policy advocacy and strategic consulting to help governments, businesses, and institutions navigate complex challenges and seize new opportunities in an increasingly complicated world. Our areas of expertise include foreign policy, geopolitical risk, connectivity and geoeconomics, defense and aerospace, military strategy, strategic technologies, conflict resolution, peacebuilding, climate change, energy security, and tech policy. We specialize in the Indian subcontinent, Eurasia, and the Indo-Pacific.

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Friedrich-Ebert-Stiftung (FES) is a non-profit German foundation, committed to the values of democracy and social justice. It was founded in 1925 and is named after Germany's first democratically elected President, Friedrich Ebert. FES India, established in the 1980s, is committed to building platforms of mutual trust for open debate and the exchange of new ideas. Using workshops, seminars, exchange programmes, and academic papers, FES India offers nuanced socioeconomic analyses and furthers the debate on a national, regional and global level.

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Foreword

As we reach the end of a decade of transition in world politics, from 2014 to 2024, the Indian nation-state and society find themselves demanding more from its foreign policy. India's pursuit of managing and unlocking the gains of rapid technological changes, creating a modern defense industrial base, and sustaining economic growth through trade and investments are increasingly influenced by its foreign policy choices and actions. Older challenges remain: the management of China's rise, the maintenance of primacy in a rapidly changing South Asia, and the acceleration of ties with partners in multiple regions, some more difficult than others. On all these fronts, India has worked to align its efforts and capacities with the scale of opportunities and challenges, experiencing both successes and failures. Often, challenges in one domain lead to opportunities in another.

Another striking feature of this decade is the sharpening of the geopolitical conflict between the U.S. and its near-equal rivals, Russia and China. India has had to navigate this shift nimbly; prioritizing relations with the U.S. over Russia and China while maintaining its space for strategic autonomy with all three. Towards the end of the decade, Indian diplomacy also acquired the consciousness of its status as a near-great power, bolstered by its growing capabilities, unique sensibilities, and ability to chart an independent foreign policy. This can be observed in the tone and nature of India's engagement with great powers, adding a new dimension. This new consciousness is most evident in India's 'embrace' of the Global South and how it actively seeks to be a channel of representation for often ignored voices. On this front, India relies on its long-standing and rich history of solidarity with various post-colonial movements since its independence.

Foreign policy is as much about geography as it is about managing external relations based on one's interest. The decade has seen the rise and emergence of the Indo-Pacific as a 'new' political geography that is now central to global trade and geopolitics and is expected to remain so for the coming decades. India itself plays a central ideational role in this construct. Over the last decade, the challenge has been to add substance to this role by increasing India's significance in the region. For better or worse, the world has had high expectations for India in the Indo-Pacific, looking to it to help the region achieve greater balance, provide an alternative to China, and reinforce the rules-based order. India, in turn, has had the unenviable task of meeting such expectations while being tested by significant accumulated constraints, including India's relations with a rising China. Even as the Indo-Pacific dominated India's mindscape during this decade, unexpected foreign policy wins came from another region— the Middle East. This became increasingly evident even as the region entered a great crisis after October 7, requiring India to readjust its apperception of interests, relations, risks, and opportunities.

This report adopts a decadal perspective to review and assess the key trends in India's foreign policy in response to global transitions. The report is divided into sections, from India's engagement with great powers to India's economic, defense, and tech diplomacy. It is designed to review the past ten years, appreciating the paths India is increasingly taking and the ones it has moved away from.

The report should also help its readers prepare a cognitive and empirical map of the challenges facing Indian foreign policy in 2024-2034. This decade will undoubtedly be crucial in determining India's impact on an increasingly fragmented world in the first half of the 21st Century.

Each chapter in the report is organized into shifts, accelerations, and adaptations. These categories are meant to comprehensively capture the decadal transition (from strategic to tactical shifts) while being sensitive to existing policy and mindful of India's larger strategic goals and interests beyond the decade.

The report is informed by a 2-day workshop CSDR hosted in February 2024 with generous support from the FES, New Delhi. Twenty Indian experts—retired diplomats, bureaucrats, academics, analysts, and former defense and intelligence officials—participated in the workshop. We thank these individuals for their insights and contributions to this exercise. While based on the discussions at the workshop, the arguments presented in the report belong to CSDR contributors and not the workshop participants.

We hope this report will contribute to debates and discussions on India's foreign policy, particularly the challenges and opportunities that the next decade will bring, which is currently shaping up to be a decade of disruptions.

Prof. C Raja Mohan

Dr. Happymon Jacob

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Executive Summary

The last decade has seen momentous transitions that have questioned accepted assumptions, challenged beliefs about the likely future of the world order, and revealed shifting power equations with ripple effects across regions and countries. It has seen the breakdown of the Washington consensus, the end of Europe's geopolitical holiday, the return of Russian territorial revisionism, a global pandemic that revealed emerging geopolitical fault lines, and, most importantly, the comprehensive rise of China.

Indian foreign policy has sought to understand and respond to these changes, even as it has undergone economic transformation and a reconceptualization of its role in a corroding world order. This effort has sought to cater to interests related to security, prosperity, sovereignty, and national pride in an unprecedentedly interrelated manner. Such a task has undoubtedly guided crucial shifts, accelerations, and adaptations in Indian foreign policy, which suggest long-term implications.

India-Great Powers

U.S.

- > Over the last decade, India and the U.S. significantly strengthened their defense and business relations. Comprehensive defense ties now include joint military exercises, plans for the co-production of defense equipment, and foundational agreements covering logistics and secure communications.
- > This period marked a shift from an emphasis on 'strategic potential' to more pragmatic outcome-based military and tech cooperation. This has been based on a convergence of shared interests with regard to China's rise and its implications for the balance of power in Asia. Despite differing views on Russia's invasion of Ukraine, the two sides managed to work together on issues like global food and energy security and nuclear safety.

China

- > In 2014, India aimed to manage China's rapid rise and assertiveness through a combination of military investments, growing strategic partnerships, and more conciliatory measures in the economic and political domain—such as greater economic interdependence and high-level political understanding.
- > The 2020 Galwan crisis prompted a reassessment of China's long-term intentions vis-à-vis India and the primary drivers of India-China relations. India's response has consisted of a drive towards strategic infrastructure expansion, economic de-risking, enhancing strategic partnerships, and a series of military-level talks to re-establish peace and tranquility at the border.

Russia

- > Since the end of the Cold War, India has valued its strategic partnership with Russia as a potential counterweight to China in Asia and in helping maintain a multipolar global order. However, long-standing defense ties had frayed over the period as concerns about quality and reliability were laid bare.
- > By the end of the decade, New Delhi found itself increasingly worried about a closer Russia-China axis but has chosen to respond by enhancing political and economic linkages with Russia to offset the adverse strategic implications of the same. Over the last decade, India and Russia have discovered innovative forms of cooperation, and political and diplomatic ties have shown resilience despite growing strategic divergences.

Europe

- > Since 2014, India has strengthened its relationship with Europe, recognizing the region's economic and political importance. The Modi government addressed longstanding issues and significantly increased high-level engagements, fostering unprecedented progress in economic and security relations. This marked a pivotal reorientation of India's foreign policy towards Europe.
- > While India and Europe have deepened their relations, significant differences remain, particularly over trade and Russia's place in the global order. Despite these differences, the partnership has expanded into promising areas of cooperation as India increasingly looks to Europe for diversification of military imports and Brussels looks towards India for diversification of its trade dependency on China.

India and the Regions

India - South Asia

- > The decade has seen India gradually redefine its role and position in the region—from stewardship to stakeholder-ship. Delhi has sought to revitalize trade ties and connectivity initiatives in the region, with some success but perhaps still short of a structural shift.
- > As South Asian countries are themselves undergoing significant and, at times, contentious transitions, New Delhi has sought to adapt by diversifying its pool of political partners within the region. New Delhi is more open to the involvement of like-minded partners in the region, partly to offset China's growing influence. By the end of the decade, New Delhi is conveying its security concerns (or red lines) to various partners in strategic cooperation with China—from Sri Lanka to Bangladesh and Nepal.

India – Middle East

- > Between 2014 and 2024, the key shift in India's Middle East strategy focused on minimizing disruptions to existing relationships during crises and maximizing gains during windows of stability. Before the large-scale disruption since October 7th, 2023, India leveraged its increased goodwill with Arab states (sustained by deepening economic partnerships) to bolster ties with Israel. It replicated this approach to steadily deepen its engagement with Iran on Chabahar, positively exploiting windows of opportunity created by its relationship with the U.S.
- > The shift towards more positive relations with both the Gulf states as well as Israel, over the decade, has been substantive and is reflected most clearly in India's enthusiastic support for IMEC, membership in I2U2, and the finalization of the India-UAE FTA. Delhi's relations with Gulf states have intersected with India's own successful de-hyphenation with Pakistan, enabling both sides to overcome historical constraints.

India – Indo-Pacific

- > India's engagement in the Indo-Pacific has intensified, especially following China's aggressive postures along its borders in 2020. India, recognizing the Indo-Pacific's geopolitical and economic significance, has gradually embraced a more proactive role, particularly through its participation in the Quad.
- > India has significantly expanded its naval presence and strategic partnerships in the Indo-Pacific. The Indian Navy has increased its joint exercises, port calls, and mission-based deployments with regional navies, enhancing interoperability and maritime security. India's engagement in anti-piracy and humanitarian assistance operations further underscores its growing maritime security role. Additionally, India's strategic partnerships have broadened beyond the Indian Ocean to encompass Southeast Asia and the Pacific. These efforts aim to counterbalance China's naval activities and strengthen India's strategic foothold in the region.

India – Global South

- > Between 2014 and 2024, India has found greater positional salience in the concept of the 'Global South', in some contrast to its fading commitment to the Cold War-era Non-Aligned Movement. This shift, in a sense, marks India's return to the politics of third-world solidarity and global representation—but in a more pragmatic form.
- > Moving away from ideological solidarity towards an interest-based approach, India's instrumentalization of the Global South is its response to global geopolitical changes and its desire to position itself as a leader of developing states as well as an emergent great power.
- > By championing the Global South, India positioned itself as a fair and just power due to its fierce advocacy and also bolstered its strategic autonomy. India's redefined solidarity helped build a robust platform for cooperation, allowing it to leverage its Global South credentials to establish more equitable terms of engagement with the Global North - fostering collaboration rather than confrontation.

Trade, Tech, and Defense

India's economic diplomacy

- > Amid a shift towards deglobalization, India's economic diplomacy has attempted to complement its vision of self-reliance and its pursuit of an export-led growth model. At the same time, India has sought to position itself as an alternative manufacturing hub to China.
- > India has increased its economic influence through strategic partnerships and bilateral trade agreements, even as it has stayed out of major regional trade agreements. India's economic diplomacy has also extended substantial credit flow to the Global South, attempted to align business interests with national strategic objectives, and signaled its intent to become a global solutions provider (for instance, by promoting Digital Public Infrastructure).

India's Defense Posture

- > India's defense posture has shifted significantly over the past decade due to its complex relationships with Pakistan and China. Military responses emphasize India's readiness to defend its borders while balancing diplomatic engagement and military preparedness. The decade witnessed a shift from bolstering deterrence to conflict prevention.
- > India has undertaken significant defense reforms, notably appointing the Chief of Defence Staff in 2020 to enhance jointness among the services. The government has also prioritized a new recruitment model and self-reliance in defense manufacturing. Despite progress, challenges remain, including the need for continued import of major weapon systems and addressing funding shortfalls in R&D, which are crucial for the maturation of India's indigenous defense industry.

Tech Diplomacy

- > India's foreign policy has sought to integrate tech diplomacy, recognizing the pivotal role of technology in global geopolitics, and the construction of new roles for global governance of advanced technologies. With over half of its GDP stemming from foreign trade, India's engagement in global tech advancements has become crucial. India's digital public infrastructure has garnered international attention, and the government has leveraged this momentum to foster self-reliance, aiming to attract foreign investment and technology partners while enhancing its global digital and technological footprint.
- > Domestically, India has expanded the private sector's role in defense and space, simplified government procurement processes, and introduced incentives to boost tech-related manufacturing. Internationally, India has forged significant tech-focused partnerships covering a wide array of advanced technologies. However, India faces challenges in coordinating these efforts across various governmental departments and ensuring a cohesive approach that maximizes benefits.

Introduction: Trends and Transitions

Five broader and cross-cutting shifts characterize India's foreign policy response to the past decade of global transitions. These transitions may serve as guideposts as one dives into more concrete shifts within critical policy domains. Conspicuous as these reorientations may be, their trajectories are much less certain, occasionally working at cross-purposes and complicated by empirical realities and geopolitical pushbacks. Decision-makers have struggled to find the perfect balance, and understandably so. Moving ahead, India will strive for greater reconciliation between its objectives and capabilities and a foreign policy that best combines the two. However, to any interested observer, these five transitions are crucial to understanding India's sense of constraints and opportunities in the coming years.

Rising power to an emergent power

India has sought to move beyond the rhetoric of a developing and rising economy and towards claims of being a great power in its own right. Such a claim has animated India's Presidency of the G20 summit, positioning during the ongoing Russia-Ukraine war, leadership of the Global South, and expectations of mutual sensitivity from China. However, India has struggled to make a similar shift in its region in South Asia, where it is positioned as a power in relative decline compared to China. There is a similar challenge vis-à-vis Russia, given India's acute defense dependency on Moscow. As New Delhi increasingly asserts its great power status, it implicitly emphasizes a moral and inclusive identity (Vishwamitra), distinct from China, the U.S., and Russia. India views its elevation in the international system as necessitating a 'third voice' in international politics to

mitigate polarization and conflict. PM Modi's "Not an era of war" invocation underscores this distinct worldview. This shift also animates India's approach towards established great powers, from careful deference to a more transactional stance based on power equations.

“As New Delhi increasingly asserts its great power status, it implicitly emphasizes a moral and inclusive identity (Vishwamitra), distinct from China, the U.S., and Russia.”

Multi-alignment to strategic partnerships

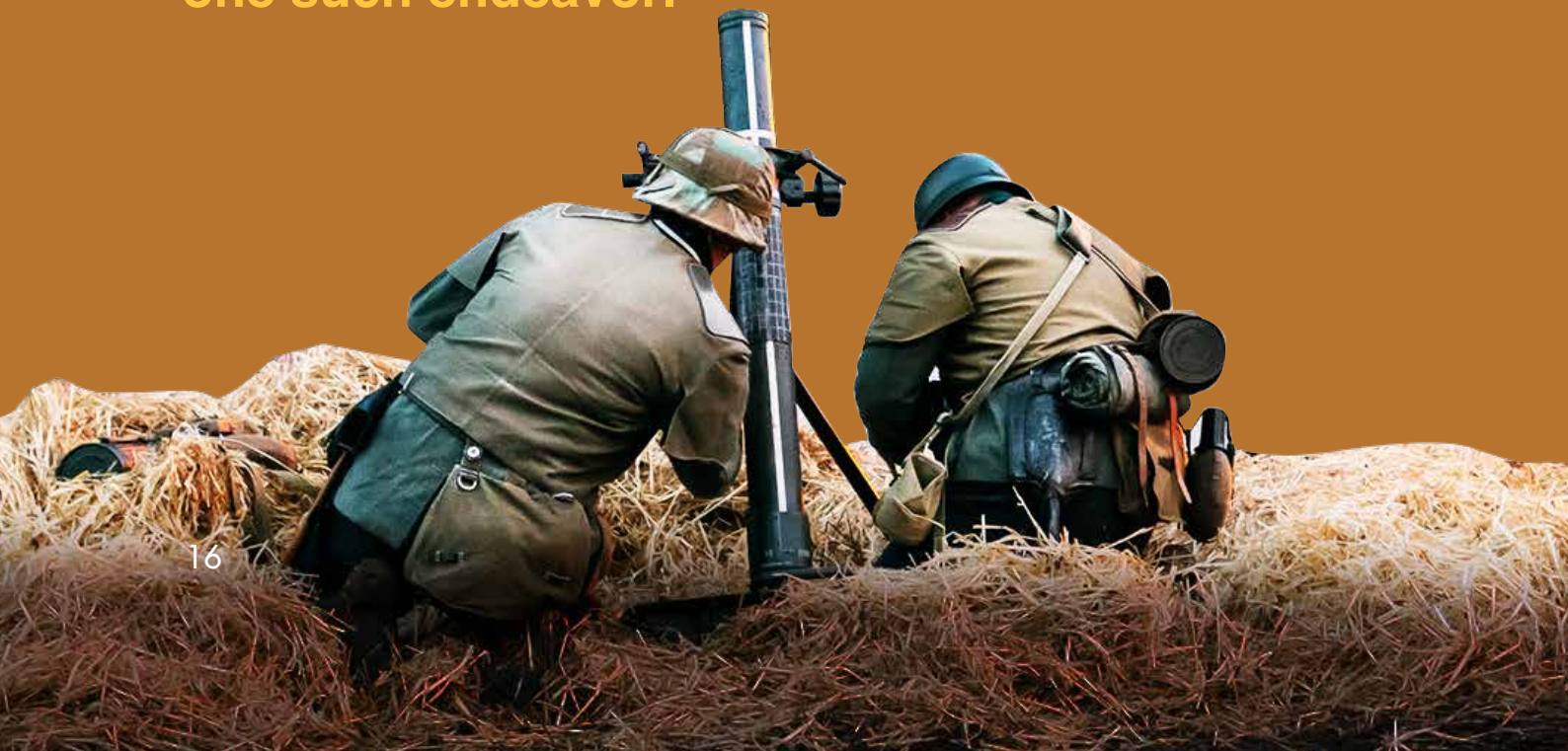
While not a military alliance, the Quad reflects India's growing confidence in participating in a coalition with security issues on its agenda, albeit implicitly. Phrases such as 'like-minded partners' have come to represent India's alignment (not alliance) with powers in a geographic setting and are aimed at addressing China's rise. This has moved parallelly with India's embrace of the Indo-Pacific, membership in IPEF over RCEP, India's enthusiastic faith in IMEC, and the rise of plurilateral groupings such as the I2U2. Such a shift also represents India's adjustment to the transition in the global balance of power from unipolarity to emerging bipolarity. In the post-Cold War era, multi-alignment effectively responded to the reality of great power peace that characterized the international system. With the rise of China and its assertiveness, India pivoted towards the realization that it needed to 'lean on one side' even while retaining strategic autonomy. This has driven India towards welcoming the presence of 'like-minded' extra-regional partners in South Asia. Hence, even as India may appear multi-aligned due to its membership in the SCO and BRICS, its primary partners of choice and comfort lie in the West.

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Globalization to self-reliance

India's assessment of the Ukraine war, rising protectionism in the developed West, as well as perceptions related to the U.S.' hasty exit from Afghanistan in 2021 has reinforced the idea that India is 'on its own' and will have to rely on its capabilities to see through troubled times that lie ahead. The border stand-off with China at the LAC and dislocations in defense imports from Russia (spares and services) have pushed India towards greater military self-reliance. However, this imperative has also evolved parallel to India's growing need for foreign investments and tech cooperation with advanced economies of the West. India's defense reforms have increasingly emphasized laying the foundation of an increasingly corporatized defense industrial base and domestic procurement by the three services. As such, the trends towards self-reliance may counteract the trend towards strategic partnerships, but Delhi has also been able to deftly combine the two on various occasions, with iCET representing one such endeavor.

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Continental deadlocks to maritime opportunities

By overcoming historical path-dependencies related to threats from Pakistan and China, India had made a conscious choice to play to its strengths by relying on its advantageous maritime geography. Such a pivot aligned well with the trend toward strategic partnerships and India's embrace of the Indo-Pacific. Moreover, greater expansion of maritime capabilities and ties also served to establish India's credentials as an emerging great power. The decision to field three Aircraft Carriers for power projection tasks illustrates this most acutely.

India has notably improved interoperability with like-minded partners, evident in recent naval responses to Houthi and pirate attacks on international shipping since October 2023.¹ In fact, India's much greater engagement with the U.S., compared to Russia, is a trend strongly tied to India's maritime gambit over the past decade.

“By overcoming historical path-dependencies related to threats from Pakistan and China, India had made a conscious choice to play to its strengths by relying on its advantageous maritime geography.”

New Praxis

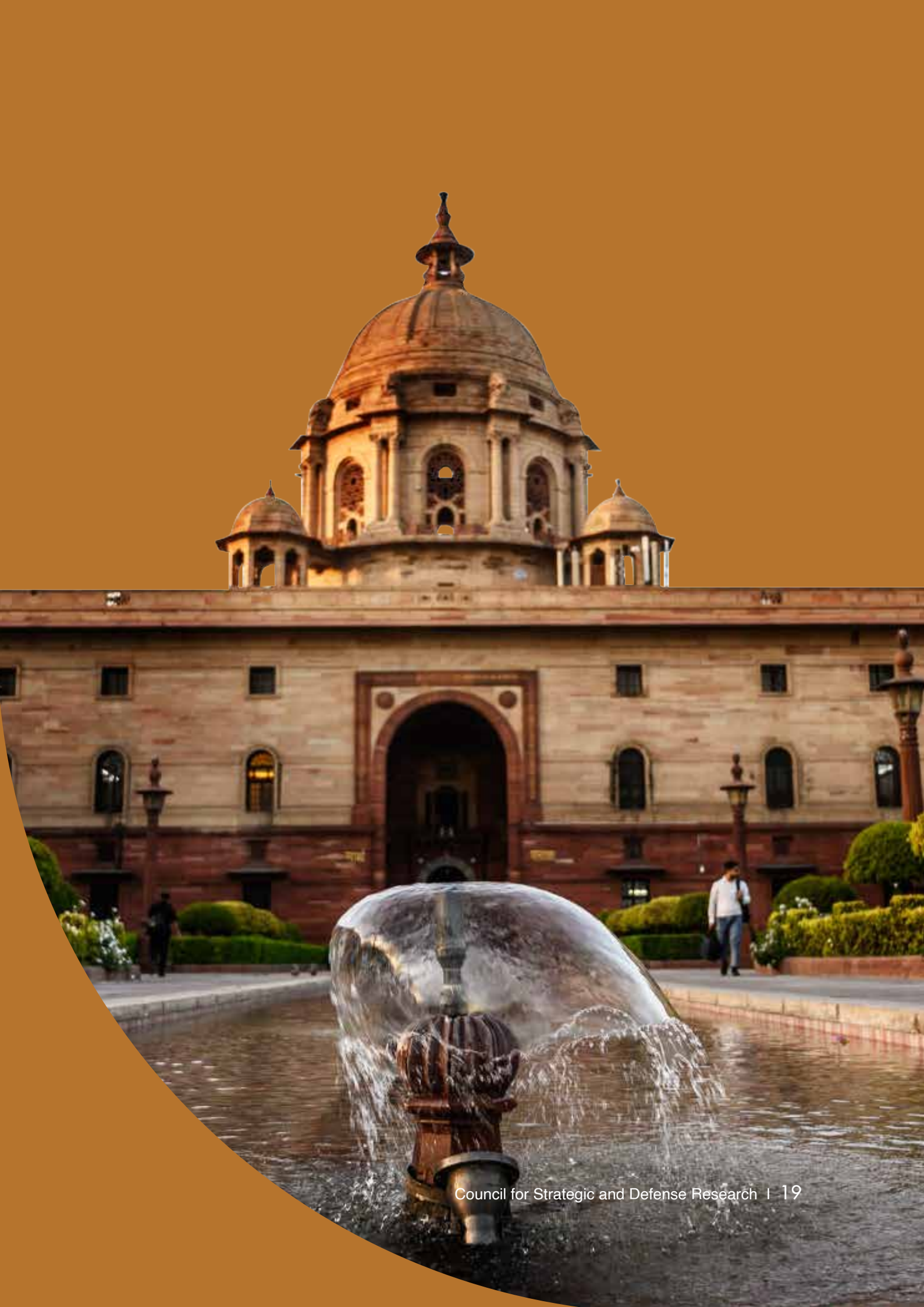
The decade has seen India recalibrate its diplomacy to emphasize greater personalization, assertiveness, risk-taking, and diversification of sources of influence.

India's assertiveness, widely popular domestically, was evident in how it defended its position against Western criticisms regarding Russia's invasion of Ukraine. India is also much less accepting of international scrutiny in matters seen as wholly domestic, such as human rights and characterizations of democratic backsliding. Additionally, India is only beginning to engage

the much celebrated (and influential) diaspora community more systematically and as a political asset to help achieve Indian foreign policy objectives. The diaspora's enthusiastic support for the large-scale and high-profile 'Howdy Modi' event,² along with its apparent backing for a Trump victory in the 2020 elections,³ emerges as a new development not without risks. As Indian foreign policy turns nimbler, adaptive, and outcome-seeking, PM Modi has increasingly chosen a personalized approach to managing contradictions in bilateral relations as well as international politics. The PM's set of informal meetings with both President Xi Jinping and President Putin in the period 2018-2020 are noteworthy. At the same time, such an approach also forms a substantive part of India's multilateral summit diplomacy – from G20 to the PM's approach to regions such as Central Asia and Pacific Island states. In the Middle East, such an approach has also been credited for an improvement in relations with key Gulf states as well as in helping secure the release of retired naval personnel arrested over allegations of espionage.

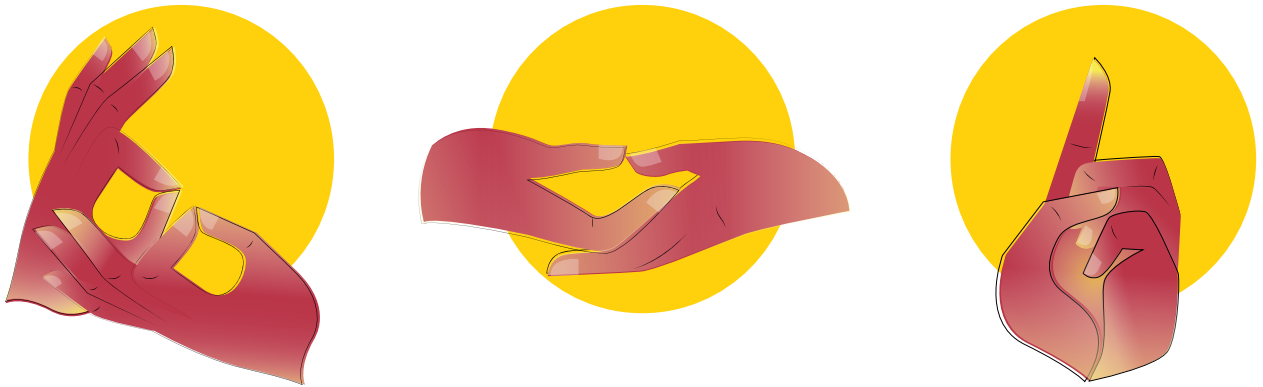
With the induction of a new coalition government in New Delhi, Indian foreign policy may see newer elements and adaptations. However, recognizing and appreciating the scale and nature of India's decade of transitions will remain vital to anticipating such adaptations or pivots. The new government's emphasis on 'continuity' indicates confidence in the current trajectory of Indian Foreign Policy. Simultaneously, however, Delhi is also aware that global peace and stability will be severely tested in the coming years and that India will have to remain open to the prospect of unprecedented challenges as well as opportunities.

“The decade has seen India recalibrate its diplomacy to emphasize greater personalization, assertiveness, risk-taking, and diversification of sources of influence.”



India & the Great Powers





India's relations with the great powers have seen a marked shift. In the period following the end of the Cold War, India had focused on improving ties with all great powers. This effort was aided by the fact that the great powers themselves were largely at peace with each other. The resurgence of revisionism in China and Russia as well as the return of great power politics has defined the gamut of challenges that India faces in its great power diplomacy. The intensification of India's strategic rivalry with China over this period has further exacerbated the challenge. Almost in response, India's relations with the United States, a more distant great power, have matured and gained greater significance. However, India's ties with Russia, its longest-standing strategic ally, have relatively declined. Competition, cooperation, and conflict among these three great powers have created challenges and opportunities for India to manage its relationships. The broad outline of the nature of India's engagement with the great powers has been relatively stable however. As External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar had once lucidly described India's primary foreign policy task as, "engaging America, managing China, reassuring Russia, cultivating Europe, and drawing in Japan".

India - United States

Entering 2014, India was optimistic about forging closer and more strategic relations with the U.S. President Obama's landmark Pivot to Asia approach, which was welcomed in Delhi as a necessary corrective to U.S. over-investment in Middle Eastern conflicts.⁴ Both defense and trade ties had only begun to take off and accelerate, and people-to-people ties ensured a degree of mutual care and understanding. By then, the two democracies had seen successive political leaders believe and invest in the relationship and with the support of a robust bipartisan consensus in each.

The U.S. also played a significant role in the India-Pakistan conflictual dyad, as Delhi and Islamabad factored in U.S. mediation in any future acute military crisis. India also supported the U.S. role in Afghanistan through significant aid and assistance to the Afghan government.⁵ As the U.S.-led rules-based order in Asia began to be challenged at the edges through Chinese coercive diplomacy, Delhi found ways to express its preference for the status quo rather than resorting to radical changes based on unilateral military means. In essence, the U.S. was irreplaceably important to India's China policy, a role all the more reinforced by Russia's drift to camp China after the invasion of Crimea in 2014. At the same time, the U.S. was seen as a key partner in India's quest to access latest technologies and modernize its armed forces. With the relative decline of anti-U.S. constituencies such as the Communist Parties in the Indian polity and disenchantment with Cold War era doctrines of non-alignment, U.S-India relations were expected to undergo radical transformations.

Shifts

Defense relations

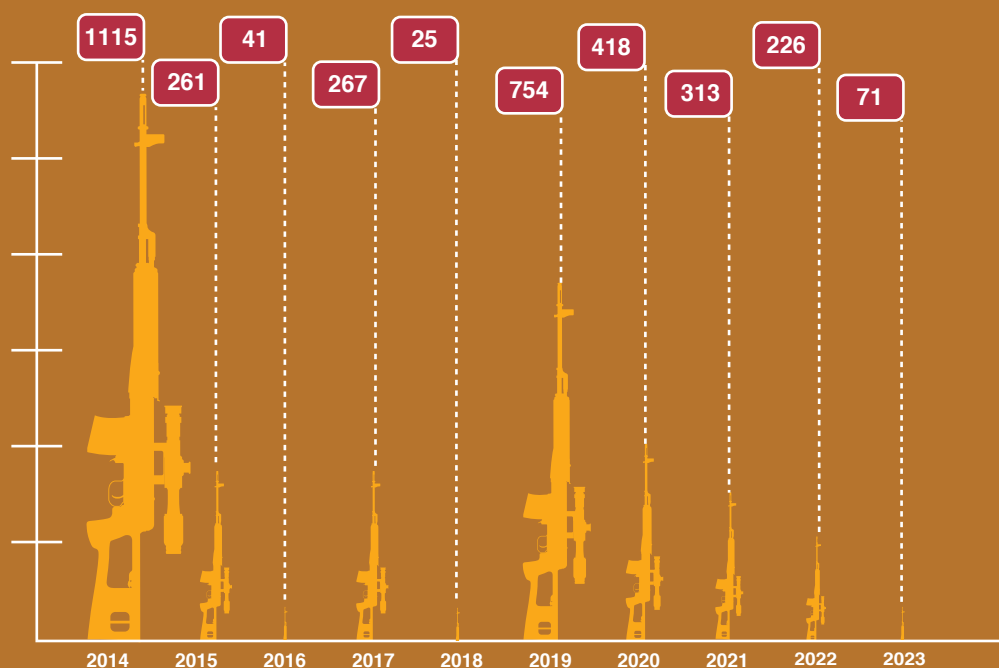
The rapid enhancement of comprehensive defense ties between the two countries marks a significant shift in relations, covering joint military exercises, defense sales, co-production, systems integration, three foundational agreements covering logistics, surveillance, secure communications, and U.S. exports of sensitive equipment. The agreements signaled a newfound confidence within the Indian government and the political system to engage in practical defense cooperation with the U.S., without concerns of either side becoming a proxy of the other.

Moreover, ever since the Ukraine war, the defense relationship has embarked on a new trajectory – towards fostering greater cooperation between the two military industries aimed at creating military supply chain resilience (155mm artillery shells and ship repair agreements⁶), as well as helping Indian military industry take off towards higher levels of production, modernization, exports, and indigenization.

“Moreover, ever since the Ukraine war, the defense relationship has embarked on a new trajectory – towards fostering greater cooperation between the two military industries aimed at creating military supply chain resilience as well as helping Indian military industry take off towards higher levels of production, modernization, exports, and indigenization.”

India-US Defense Trade⁷

Indian Arms Imports in Millions (of TIV)



Business ties

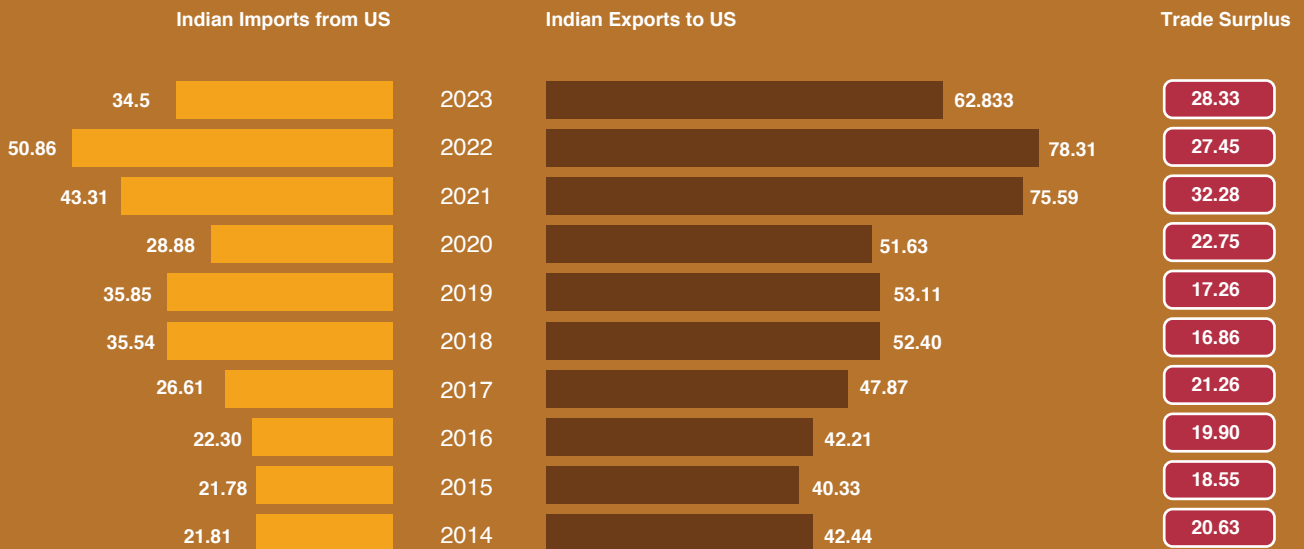
U.S.-India business ties have improved in these ten years. In 2013, U.S. companies invested a mere USD 478 million in India. This increased exponentially to USD 13,800 million by 2021. The bilateral relationship is a rare instance of India enjoying a trade surplus with an advanced economy – with close to USD 20 billion trade surplus in 2023.⁸ As U.S. businesses look for opportunities beyond China, India has emerged as an alternative. This trend is illustrated by recent big-ticket investments by U.S. corporations such as Micron and Apple setting up assembly and production units in India.

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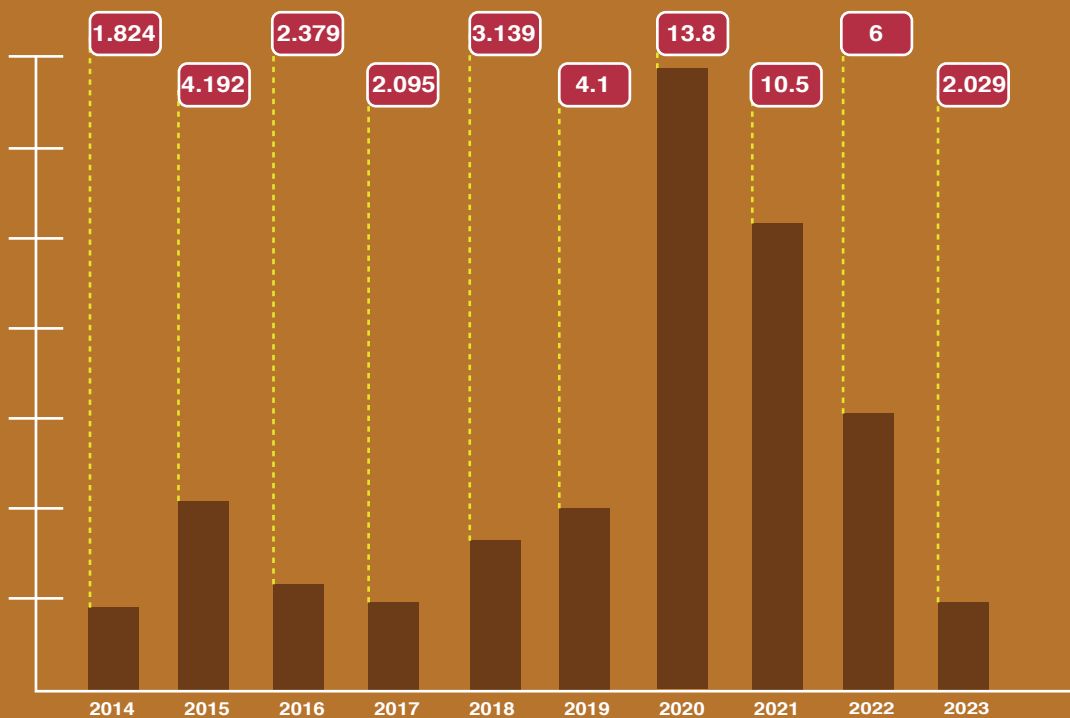
India-US Trade⁹

In US\$ Billion



US FDI Equity Inflow to India¹⁰

In US\$ Billion



Accelerations

Summits and contacts

The ten-year period also saw continued momentum, as well as acceleration in terms of dialogue frameworks, summits, official visits as well as the designation of India as a 'Major Defence Partner' by the U.S. PM Modi had the rare privilege of addressing the joint session of the U.S. Congress twice.¹¹ Establishing high-level institutional mechanisms such as the 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue enhanced the scope and frequency of political and strategic dialogue.¹² The flurry of visits by U.S. officials in 2023 in a G20 year demonstrated this acceleration in ties.

Crisis partnership

The two countries accelerated cooperation across various international developments and concerns. This featured cooperation over China's BRI program, North Korea's nuclear weapons policy, stabilizing Afghanistan, conflicts in Gaza and Ukraine, and concrete cooperation during the COVID-19 global epidemic. Despite significant divergence between both countries regarding Russia's invasion of Ukraine, it is noteworthy how both sides contained the spillover effects of their disagreement and managed to counter certain negative consequences of the conflict cooperatively. This entailed cooperation on Russian oil exports, global food security, and nuclear safety and building a favorable consensus during G20 summits. The ten-year period also saw India adopt a much more favorable attitude towards supporting a greater strategic and diplomatic role in South Asia. India's support of the MCC project in Nepal and a U.S.-Maldives defense agreement in 2020 attests to the same.¹³

“The ten-year period also saw India adopt a much more favorable attitude towards supporting a greater strategic and diplomatic role in South Asia. India's support of the MCC project in Nepal and a U.S.-Maldives defense agreement in 2020 attests to the same.”

Adaptations

Trade disagreements

Despite major progress in business ties, the ten-year period also saw greater emergence of trade disputes between a more protectionist U.S. and a still developing India. President Trump termed India a “tariff king” and the two sides emerged as primary adversaries over a range of trade issues at the WTO.¹⁴

Political values and disagreements

Despite growing much closer than before, relations have also, at times, been strained by political disagreements. Concerns in the U.S. over perceived democratic backsliding and the erosion of human rights in India have made political engagement a delicate affair in recent years.¹⁵ This has also led to calls for a less values-based and more practical form of bilateral ties in both countries.

Strategic autonomy and pragmatism

The relationship appears amid re-conceptualization due to fundamental shifts in the international order and a more challenging security environment for both countries. This has resulted in a drive towards a more modest set of strategic ambitions and expectations. The Quad’s inability to generate sufficient momentum in recent years marks this trend. Washington has a new realism over its expectations of India’s ‘assistance’ in various conflict scenarios in the Indo-Pacific, including in the Taiwan straits. Similarly, China’s growing assertiveness at the LAC has led Delhi to re-assess U.S. will and ability to help secure India’s core security interests vis-à-vis China. As the U.S. focuses on the maritime domain and India is drawn toward its land frontier, the strategic partnership has had to adapt to new conditions. Such conditions have led India to constantly negotiate its terms of engagement with the U.S. and towards an arrangement that emphasizes alignment instead of alliance, leaving significant room for Delhi’s freedom of action.

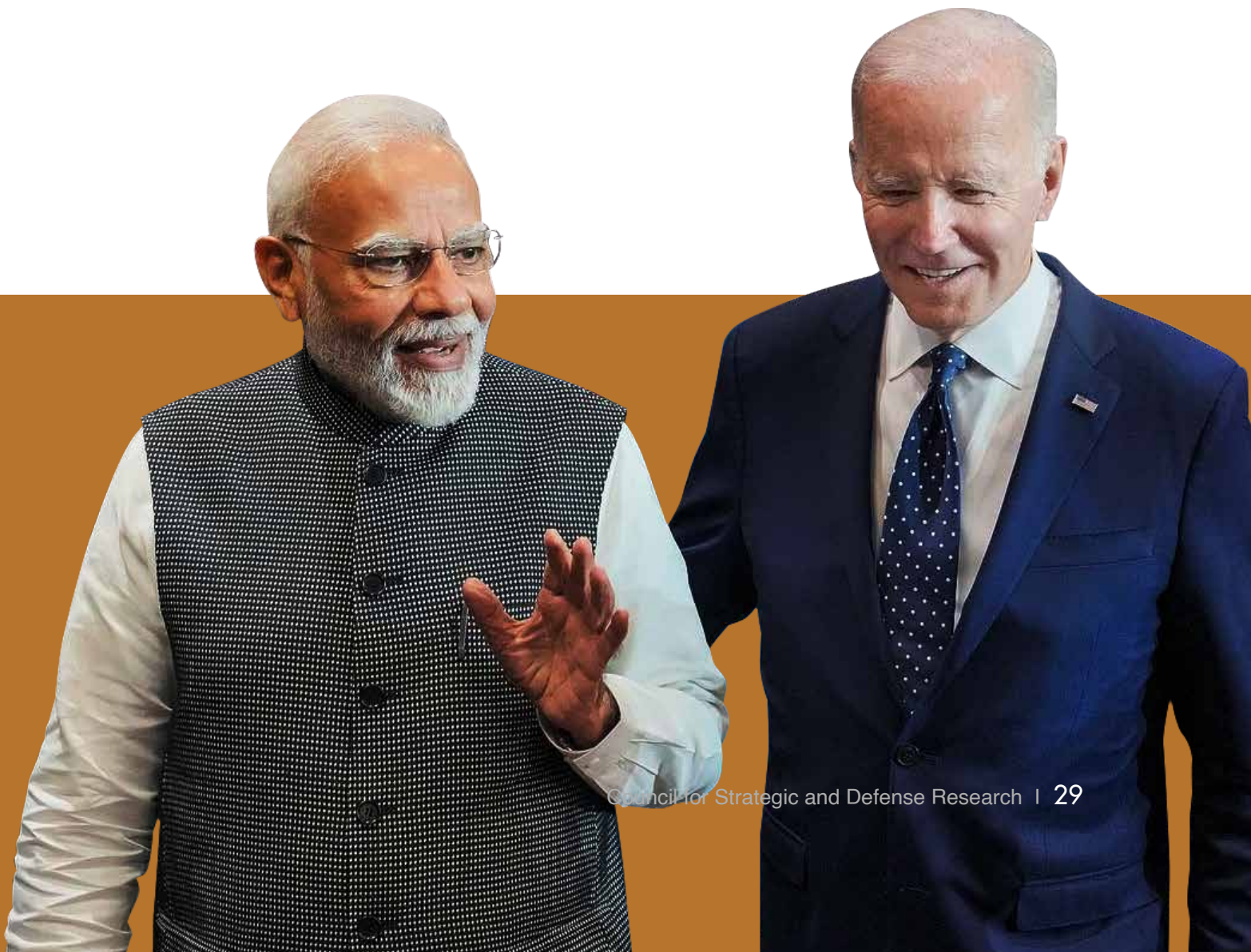
“Washington has a new realism over its expectations of India’s ‘assistance’ in various conflict scenarios in the Indo-Pacific, including in the Taiwan straits. Similarly, China’s growing assertiveness at the LAC has led Delhi to re-assess U.S. will and ability to help secure India’s core security interests vis-à-vis China.”

Conclusion

The ten-year period has seen remarkable shifts in the global order. It has brought about greater global fragmentation and conflicts, de-globalization, the rise of protectionist tendencies, China’s rise in the international system, and greater contestation of the liberal rules-based international order. Such systemic shifts also entail more re-alignments within polities (including both in India and the U.S.) towards greater self-reliance. The India-U.S. relationship has been affected by such shifts (negatively, at times) but has mostly been able to adapt quickly to work on common agendas. In that sense, relations remain fraught in certain areas but also vibrant and dynamic. One essential manifestation of this trend has been the adjustment toward emphasizing a more pragmatic and interest-based form of engagement. In the future, relations will likely continue to grow, especially in the defense and business sectors. India will continue to see the U.S. as an essential ingredient in its efforts toward achieving economic and technological development and military self-sufficiency. The U.S. will continue to see India as a valuable strategic partner in world politics and an alternative to China. Despite numerous changes and occasional disappointments, the relationship between India and the U.S. has been propelled by a fundamental logic of power balance, making it beneficial.

“In that sense, relations remain fraught in certain areas but also vibrant and dynamic. One essential manifestation of this trend has been the adjustment toward emphasizing a more pragmatic and interest-based form of engagement.”

The possibility of a Trump presidency starting in January 2025 will likely impact the bilateral trajectory. All things remaining constant, a Trump presidency will be less critical of India's relations with Russia or even less attentive to India's democratic and human rights credentials. At the same time, India also anticipates a much more unpredictable Trump 2.0. New Delhi will re-assess relations based on Trump's early approach towards China and the administration's approach towards trade disagreements with India.



India - China

Entering 2014, India's primary objective vis-à-vis China remained the management of its rapid rise and its newfound assertiveness in Asia and at the LAC. The 2013 Depsang stand-off, when India had to roll back Chinese encroachment in a strategic area through politico-military assertiveness, hovered over relations between the two countries. China had just announced its mammoth BRI, sparking Indian concerns regarding strategic encirclement by China through what is often termed as China's 'string of Pearls' strategy.

China's increasing influence in South Asia was widely noted in India, but the region was still viewed primarily as an area of Indian presence and connections. At the same time, the bilateral relationship had enough sources of comfort and cooperation in areas such as mutual trade and investment opportunities, diplomatic cooperation in multilateral forums as fellow developing and rising countries, and common concerns over terrorism. India, for instance, sought to benefit from Chinese investments in the growing infrastructure sector and leverage them to stabilize oscillations in the relationship. The belief that both countries had recently chosen 'strong leaders' had led to even expectations of a radical breakthrough in border negotiations. India's External Affairs Minister suggested the possibility of an 'out of the box solution' within her first year.¹⁶ Beyond opportunities for new approaches, significant concerns remained, such as China's steadily growing relations with Pakistan and China's concerns over India's growing relationship with the US and Japan.

Shifts

Strategic assertiveness

Despite the search for trust-building and improved relations, India undertook a wide range of measures (military and diplomatic) aimed at balancing China. In the military domain, India underwent a transition from 'defensive dissuasion' to 'persuasive deterrence' based on the idea that India must retain quid pro quo options in a conflict contingency that is initiated by a militarily advantaged China. To counter China's geopolitical projects—whether CPEC that goes through Indian territory in Pakistan Occupied Kashmir (PoK) or strategic access to ports in the IOR—India made investments in the Chabahar project in Iran as well as explored its connectivity routes such as the Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (with Japan), the INSTC and the Chennai-Vladivostok Maritime Corridor, and the Kaladan Multi-Modal Transit Transport Project.

To signal to Beijing that India also has options in Beijing's strategic neighborhood, India sought to initiate new forms of engagement with Central Asian countries, Mongolia, and Southeast Asian states such as Vietnam, Philippines, and Indonesia.

India's support for, and participation, in the Indo-Pacific framework and Quad formed an additional layer of networking to manage China's rise. At the LAC,

expedited infrastructure connectivity projects and forward-deployed tanks and armor enabled a new form of confidence that, in turn, was on display during the Doklam standoff in 2017.¹⁷



“To signal to Beijing that India also has options in Beijing’s strategic neighborhood, India sought to initiate new forms of engagement with Central Asian countries, Mongolia, and Southeast Asian states such as Vietnam, Philippines, and Indonesia.”

Informal talks and understanding

Greater confidence, in turn, allowed India to undertake bold political initiatives vis-à-vis China. The Wuhan¹⁸ and the Mamallapuram¹⁹ informal summits were India’s attempts to forge a more stable bilateral and leadership-led consensus between the two countries. Both summits saw overt displays of attempts at improving relations, trust-building, and emphasizing shared interests over historical conflicts. The assumption was that India’s display of ‘strength’ had created strong incentives for China to engage India more seriously and seek to restore greater stability in relations, especially at the LAC.

Galwan and the new normal

Chinese military actions in the spring of 2020 radically intensified the conflictual aspects of the relationship while freezing and reversing cooperation. As such, the crisis also undercut the previous two shifts. India undertook a diplomatic approach of avoiding ‘normal relations’ until the status quo ante is restored at the border, withering institutionalized informal talks.

Chinese actions also doubted the efficiency and rationale of India's greater assertive posture in the years leading up to 2020, given that deterrence had failed. At the same time, the crisis has clarified China's long-term intentions towards India. However, greater clarity has also come about at a time when the threat itself has magnified incredibly, making responses to the same more complicated than earlier.

Accelerations

Military reforms and industrial base

The ongoing crisis with China has made India undertake a fresh review of its military capability and preparedness. This has led to significant reforms, including efforts towards achieving theaterisation of the services.²⁰ Other measures include a greater push towards infrastructure development near the border, the corporatization of Ordnance Factory Boards for more efficient defense equipment production,²¹ military imports of advanced jet engines and drones,²² and reform of the DRDO to curb project costs and delays.²³

India has also emphasized force rationalization – diverting personnel and divisions from the Pakistan front to the China front.²⁴ Additionally, India has created industrial defense corridors and a regulatory and infrastructural ecosystem for an indigenous-oriented military-industrial complex.

“The ongoing crisis with China has made India undertake a fresh review of its military capability and preparedness. This has led to significant reforms, including efforts towards achieving theaterisation of the services.”

External partnerships

Although India's external relations encompass more than just its concerns about China, these concerns have accelerated India's cooperation with 'like-minded partners'. This is reflected in the growth and increasing profile of the Quad as a facilitator of public goods; India's participation in the Indo-Pacific Economic Forum (IPEF);²⁵ the US-India iCET,²⁶ as well as more complex military exercises with a range of partners, especially in strategic domains such as anti-submarine warfare.²⁷

Adaptations

Assessments

Before 2020, India viewed its bilateral relationship with China as largely manageable, with limited prospects for conflict. However, since 2020, India has become less optimistic about managing these relations. Given the collapse of institutional arrangements for conflict prevention and China's ongoing pattern of military development and deployment at the LAC, India now considers deterring China (or even reaching an acceptable Modus Vivendi) radically more demanding. This has resulted in India deciding to expedite infrastructure projects, increase deployments, and undertake significant defense reforms. However, India has still not significantly increased its defense spending.²⁸

Maritime and external orientation

Before 2020, India increasingly focused on the maritime domain, including greater contributions to the rules-based order in the Indo-Pacific. However, the crisis has shifted India's attention to more immediate problems and threats in the continental domain.

Threshold for crisis

Given the acute crisis at the LAC, India's threshold for tolerance of Chinese actions in other domains has increased. This applies to China's foray into Maldives, the deployment of spy ships near Indian waters during missile tests,²⁹ the construction of settlements in Bhutan, the expansion of Hambantota port in Sri Lanka, and the improvement of strategic and military relations with Pakistan. The breakdown in normal relations has enabled each side to undertake initiatives (infrastructure expansion included) that would have raised prohibitive diplomatic costs in previous years.

“Given the acute crisis at the LAC, India's threshold for tolerance of Chinese actions in other domains has increased.”

Conclusion

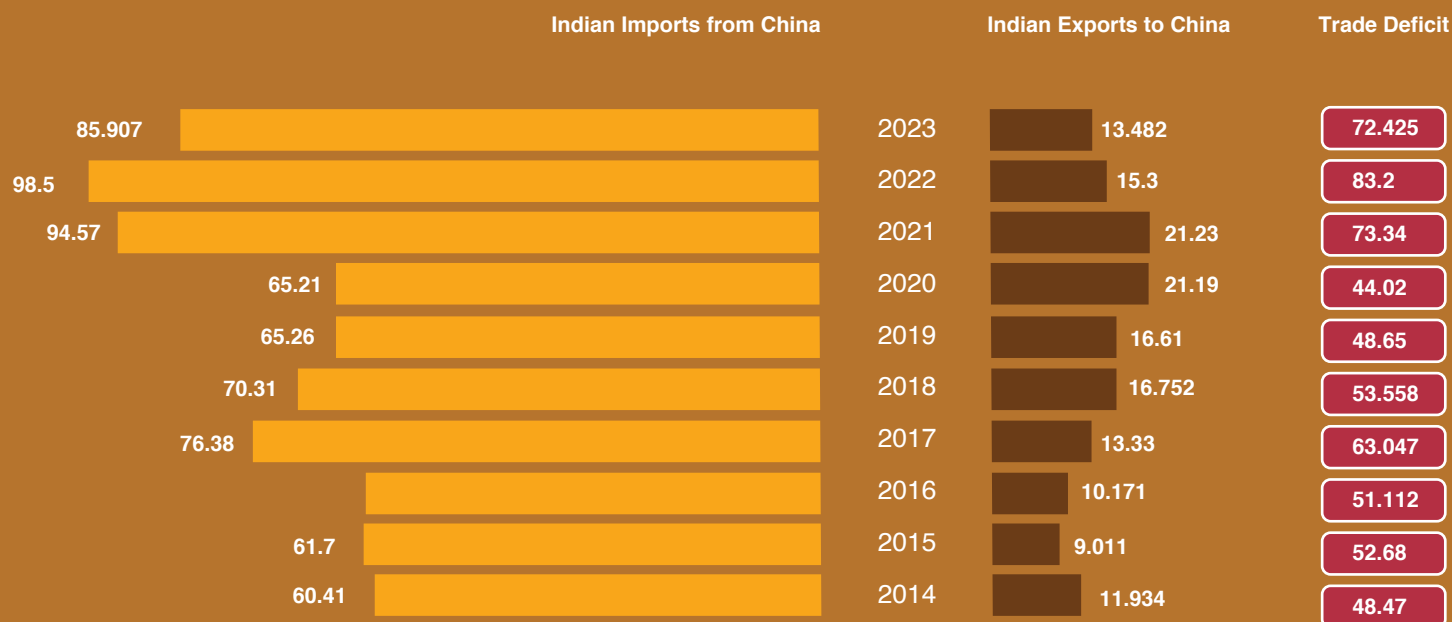
China's actions in Spring 2020 were unanticipated and a significant surprise for India. The new situation at the border has undermined the previous approach. Since then, India has focused on persuading China through various measures to restore the prior status quo and normalize bilateral relations. From a long-term perspective, the stand-off has also compelled India to seriously review its defense preparedness with a greater focus on indigenized defense production. India's desire to cooperate with China at international forums has also significantly changed. Delhi no longer sees China as a valuable partner in climate negotiations; disagreements over the future trajectory and present agenda of organizations (such as SCO and BRICS) have meant that the two sides are more adversaries than partners in such organizations.³⁰

“Delhi no longer sees China as a valuable partner in climate negotiations; disagreements over the future trajectory and present agenda of organizations (such as SCO and BRICS) have meant that the two sides are more adversaries than partners in such organizations.”

However, India's level of defense spending has continued along traditional lines and has not increased radically. Even as India's defense relations with the U.S. have rapidly changed in the last two years, the 2020 crisis has not significantly shifted India's foreign policy doctrine of strategic autonomy. The stand-off coincides with an increasing drive towards becoming an independent pole in the international system. Moreover, India has learned from the Ukraine war to focus on self-reliance in military affairs and foreign policy.

India-China Trade³¹

In US\$ Billion



Another continuity has been in the bilateral trade relationship. Given India's continuing dependency on Chinese imports in key sectors, India is understandably not keen on decoupling from China. Hence, in Delhi's view, some firewall between strategic and economic relations is both necessary and inevitable. However, the dependency on Chinese imports does not prevent India from reducing risk in key and emerging sectors such as telecommunications, solar modules, and electric vehicles.



India - Russia

Entering 2014, India still valued its strategic partnership with Russia for various reasons, including defense trade and Russia's role in helping India achieve greater diplomatic flexibility in international politics. Sharing overlapping concerns towards a unipolar world order in the late 1990s, both sides sought to build greater cooperation on international issues.³²

However, over the last decade or so, New Delhi has begun preparing for a potential decline in bilateral relations due to structural factors. These factors relate to declining overall bilateral trade, limited people-to-people ties, dissatisfaction with the quality and scale of the defense trade, and increasing strategic divergence on the question of China's rise and India's growing relations with the U.S.

This shift was particularly evident in India's decision to diversify its defense equipment imports in 2013. New Delhi sought a Russia that would gradually improve relations with the West and undertake an Asian policy to maintain balance and equilibrium—primarily in the face of a rising China. It sought Russia's cooperation in advanced tech sectors such as space, nuclear energy, and science and technology. Additionally, India aimed for a defense relationship with Russia beyond mere government-to-government trade, emphasizing partnership, joint research, and co-production.

Russia was also essential in India's vision of multipolarity and strategic autonomy – allowing India a geopolitical sweet spot that could be relied upon to drive better bargains in international politics. India also sought to prevent Russia from forming closer relations with rivals China and Pakistan.

Shifts

Reshaping defense ties

The India-Russia defense relationship has historically been a significant and crucial aspect of their bilateral ties. Several advantages have strengthened this relationship, including familiarity, cost-effectiveness, flexibility, and aligned procurement processes. Joint projects—such as the Brahmos cruise missile,³³ the upgradation of heavy platforms, and the procurement of strategic systems like the S-400³⁴—had further strengthened the defense relationship. Despite this, India's satisfaction has declined over the years due to excessive dependency on a single source, concerns over the quality of weapons, and cost/time

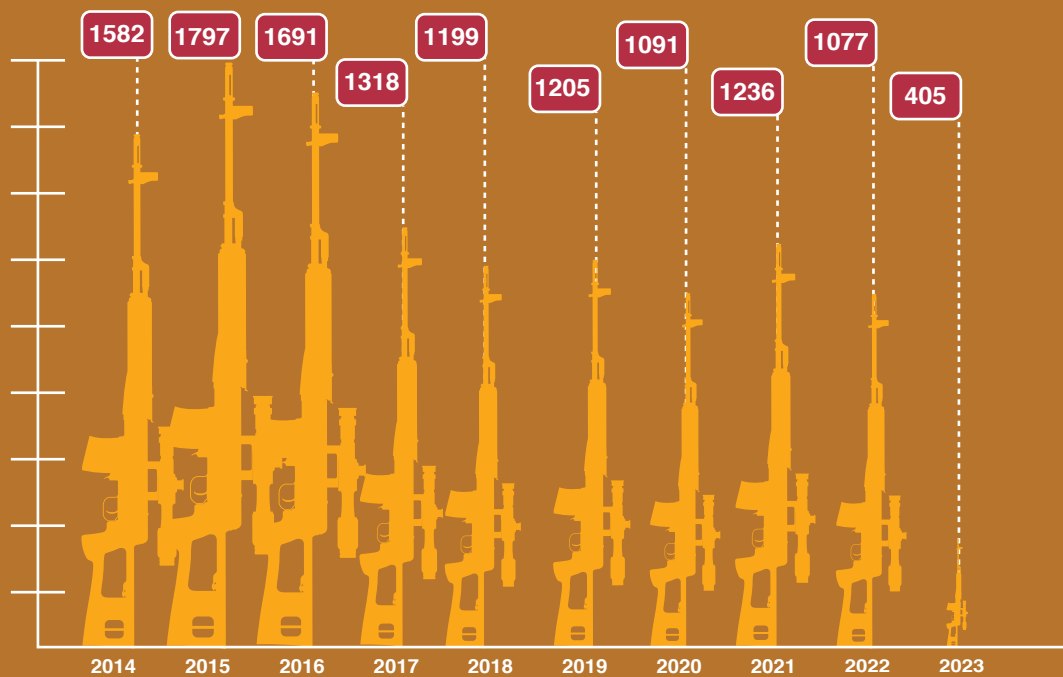
overruns. With India's growing ties with the West, new suppliers (such as France, the US, Israel, and South Korea) have provided India with alternative options. Russia's war against Ukraine in February 2022 has further accentuated India's dissatisfaction as Russian supplies have become more unreliable.³⁵ Consequently, India has canceled a series of agreements with Russia, representing a significant shift in defense and bilateral relations.³⁶

“India's satisfaction has declined over the years due to excessive dependency on a single source, concerns over the quality of weapons, and cost/time overruns. With India's growing ties with the West, new suppliers (such as France, the US, Israel, and South Korea) have provided India with alternative options.”



India-Russia Defense Trade³⁷

Indian Arms Imports in Millions (of TIV³⁸)



Strategic Divergence

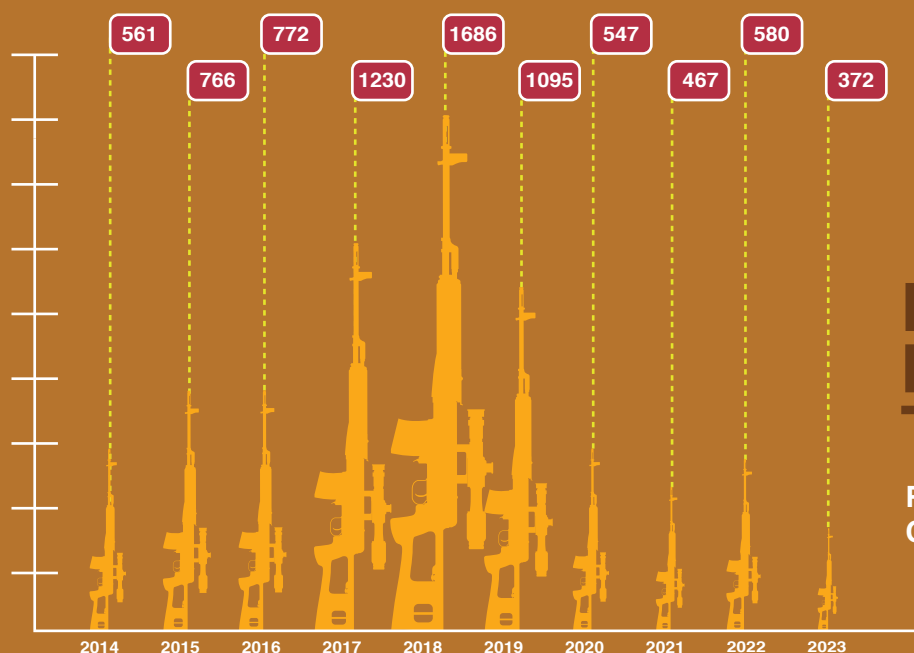
Despite not being traditional allies, Russia's relationship with China has grown remarkably over the last ten years. This is represented by Russia's tacit support for China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), criticism of both the Quad and the Indo-Pacific, greater dependence on trade with China, complex joint military exercises, sale of advanced Russian military equipment to China, and cooperation in sensitive strategic sectors such as ballistic missile defense and a related missile warning system.³⁹ As Russia has chosen to bandwagon with China's rise, India has become less hopeful of Moscow performing its great power-balancing imperative in Asia. The simultaneous development of greater India-China rivalry and greater Russia-China cooperation has impacted strategic ties between Russia and India.

“As Russia has chosen to bandwagon with China’s rise, India has become less hopeful of Moscow performing its great power-balancing imperative in Asia.”

This cooperation has been increasingly manifesting in non-western multilateral groupings such as the SCO and BRICS, where the agenda is increasingly being set by China and, more often than not, with Russian acquiescence. This has caused significant concern in India. In part, it explains reports of PM Modi being likely to skip the upcoming SCO summit in Astana in July 2024. This is in contrast to the power balance in 2016-17 when Russia sought greater balance within the SCO by inviting India to become a member. Moscow and Beijing had, after all, managed to achieve a great degree of coordination during the G20 proceedings for

much of 2023 and, in the process, threatening the prospect of a final communique.⁴⁰

In this context, India is likely to be more wary of even Russian ‘soft mediation’ in the ongoing India-China stand-off as there is a growing perception of Russia lacking empathy for India’s position and concerns surrounding the crisis. Over the past decade, Russia’s interest in cultivating close defense and strategic ties with Pakistan has occasionally caused concerns in Delhi.



Russia-China Defense Trade⁴¹

Russian Arms Exports to China in Millions of (TIV)

“In this context, India is likely to be more wary of even Russian ‘soft mediation’ in the ongoing India-China stand-off as there is a growing perception of Russia lacking empathy for India’s position and concerns surrounding the crisis.”

Accelerations

Political and diplomatic ties

Despite growing divergences in the strategic and defense aspects, the relationship has shown great survivability and continued relevance.⁴² Russia’s support of India’s candidature at the SCO, India’s position towards the Russia-Ukraine war, and related oil imports, represent resilient political and official ties.⁴³ Surprisingly, Russia’s traditional and historical support for India’s positions during the Cold War has re-emerged as a source of strength and closeness in bilateral ties. Despite its closer relations with China, India’s approach to Moscow has been one of strategic patience

and understanding. Hence, India’s response to growing Sino-Russian ties has been to keep ‘options’ available for Russia. Such offers, in turn, are expected to allow Russia to resist deeper dependence on Beijing.⁴⁴ India’s eventual handling of the G20 Presidency and its ability to deliver an outcome acceptable to Russia represents the high value India still places on the political relationship. In recent years, Russian praise for India’s political leadership also attests to the reliance upon political ties to prevent further drifts in relations.

“Despite its closer relations with China, India’s approach to Moscow has been one of strategic patience and understanding. Hence, India’s response to growing Sino-Russian ties has been to keep ‘options’ available for Russia.”

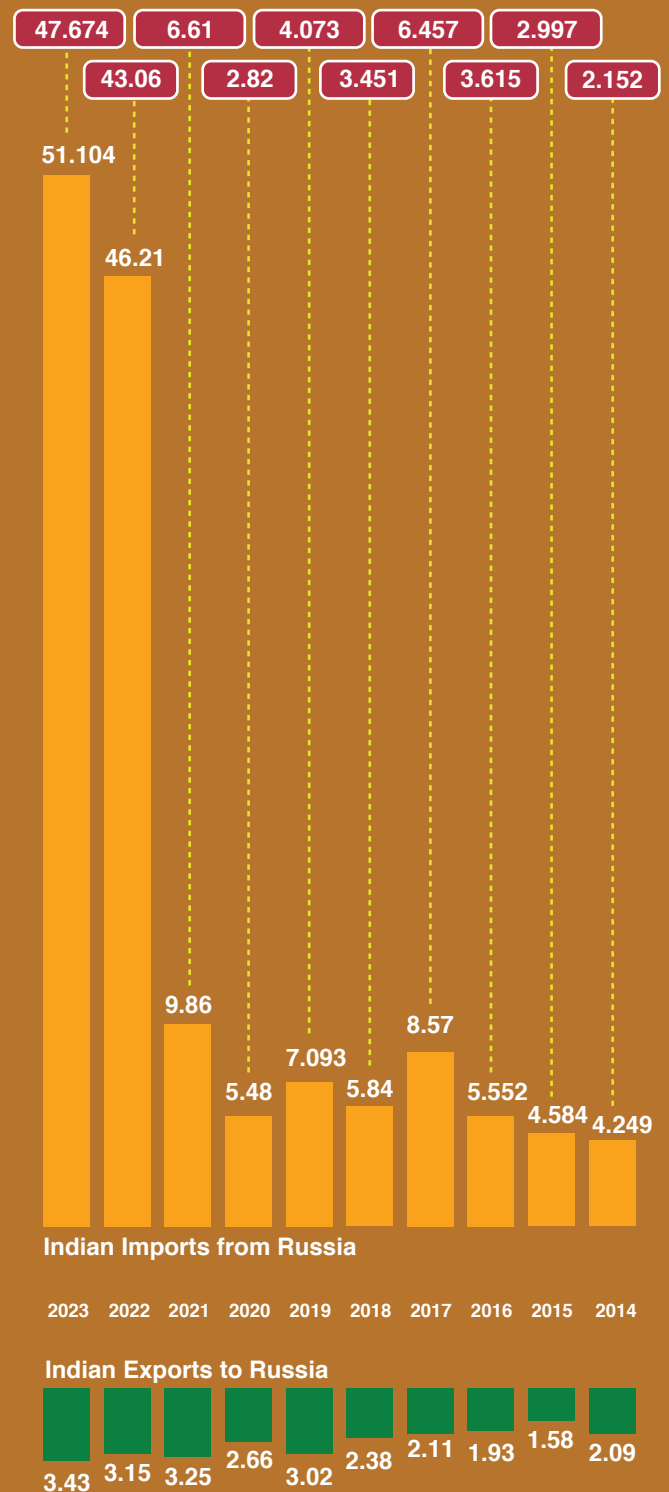
Pragmatic cooperation

At least until 2022, India and Russia had found innovative forms of cooperation and mutual benefit. The U.S.–India civilian nuclear agreement had, after all, primarily served to benefit Russian companies as they have been able to win contracts to build Indian nuclear reactors. Energy relations also received a fillip over this period as Russian companies bought 49% stakes in an Indian energy firm (Essar),⁴⁵ and Indian companies won contracts to exploit oil blocs in Siberia.⁴⁶ India became a key participant in the Annual East Asian Forum (Vladivostok summit), through which Moscow sought to offset sovereignty-threatening dependency on Chinese investments and labor in Russia’s Far East.⁴⁷ Recent agreements to place oil trade on a more permanent footing attest to this ability to achieve quick and consequential cooperation despite challenges and strains.

India-Russia Trade

In US\$ Billion⁴⁸

Trade Deficit



Adaptations

Connectivity

Concerned over shrinking trade exchanges, investments, and people-to-people ties, India and Russia sought to embark on various connectivity projects to revive exchanges and relations. For instance, the Chennai-Vladivostok trade corridor, the INSTC, cooperation in Central Asia and the Russian Far East, and greater Russian support for Indian presence and influence in the Arctic region.⁴⁹ Except for marginal progress in certain areas, such endeavors have not yet lived up to their potential, and the prospect of significant growth appears bleak.

Multipolarity

India and Russia had various converging interests in multilateral institutions such as BRICS and SCO. Regarding the former, both powers sought to utilize the organization to achieve common outcomes outside Western frameworks while ensuring greater intra-group balance. However, in recent years, Russia's approach has shifted towards adopting a more anti-western posture within the two organizations while also bandwagoning with China's vision of

the future of the organizations. This has brought greater divergences between Russia and India, as Delhi is unwilling to be dragged under Chinese leadership and into a confrontation with the West. This will likely become an ever-greater source of divergence in the coming years unless the two sides adapt to the new circumstances differently.

Conclusion

The level of continuity has changed in India-Russia relations. The defense and strategic basis of the relations have suffered greatly over the last decade. However, it is still insufficient to dissuade India from pursuing improved relations based on negative gains and positive tactical opportunities. The Ukraine war represents a black swan event in bilateral ties, accelerating longer-term trends toward diversification. Even as New Delhi will expect less and less benefit from the relationship, it will remain eager as ever to maintain positive ties and constantly explore new areas of cooperation, even if it comes at the cost of some frustration to the West. An outright Russian victory in the ongoing war could represent yet another black swan event, having the potential to bolster defense and strategic ties.

“The level of continuity has changed in India-Russia relations. The defense and strategic basis of the relations have suffered greatly over the last decade. However, it is still insufficient to dissuade India from pursuing improved relations based on negative gains and positive tactical opportunities.”



India - Europe

One of the major shifts in India's foreign policy in the decade since 2014 has been the conscious elevation of Europe, including the United Kingdom, to a higher strategic profile. As often framed by External Affairs Minister Subrahmanyam Jaishankar, India's great power strategy is about "engaging America, managing China, reassuring Russia, cultivating Europe, and drawing in Japan". This higher profile for Europe has been long overdue. Although Europe has historically been a major economic partner and its major states like Britain, Germany, and France are important interlocutors in the West and beyond, its collective strategic profile in India's international relations remained low. To India, Europe represented the epicenter of the 'End of history' with its overwhelming focus on economic integration instead of power politics and geopolitical competition.

The situation did not change after the Cold War, despite India's reorientation of its foreign policy and Europe's quest to emerge as a major geopolitical actor in the world. India's focus on restructuring its economy, rearranging its great power relations, and reorganizing its regional ties did not have the bandwidth to focus on Europe's strategic potential. Europe, on the other hand, was preoccupied with its integration, and when it looked east, China loomed large. The tectonic shifts in great power relations have compelled India and Europe to reconnect. India has welcomed Europe's increasing forays into the Indo-Pacific, while Brussels' classification of China as a 'systemic rival' has opened greater opportunities for geo-economic convergence.⁵⁰ Europe, meanwhile, increasingly sees India as a source of economic balance in Asia and an alternative market (to China) for European exports. Whereas Europe enables India to diversify its defense imports, India has the potential to help Europe diversify its foreign trade. In this process, both sides enhance each other's leverage vis-à-vis other powers and also infuse greater flexibility within an increasingly bifurcating world order.

Reshaping defense ties










































When the Narendra Modi government took charge in May 2014, its European relations were caught in a logjam, thanks to the collapse of the free trade talks, absence of annual summits, and a major dispute with Italy, a key European power over the arrest of its marines in a case of shooting at Indian nationals off the coast of Kerala in

early 2012.⁵¹ During its first term, the Modi government decisively resolved the issue. Italy, which was blocking engagement with India in 2014, became a major partner for India by the end of Modi's second term. The bonhomie between Mr. Modi and his Italian counterpart, Ms Giorgia Meloni, has been celebrated in social media as "melodi".⁵²

The transformation of Delhi's bilateral relations with Rome has been emblematic of the more expansive and purposeful Indian engagement with Europe. This was reflected in the intensity of high-level engagement between India and Europe. During his tenure as PM since 2014, Modi traveled 27 times to Europe and received 37 European heads of state and government. Since he became foreign minister in 2019, Jaishankar traveled to Europe 29 times and received 36 of his European counterparts in Delhi. The focus on resolving long-standing irritants with vital bilateral partners coupled with sustained high-level engagement saw unprecedented forward movement in India's relations with Europe in various areas, including the economic and security domains.



Military Exercises with European partners⁵³

	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
UK  Total 20	1 	1  1  1 	1 	1  1 	2  1 
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	1 		2  2 	1  4 	
FRANCE  Total 25	1 	1 	1 	1 	2  1  1 
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
	1  1 	2 	1  1  3 	1  5  1  1 	
GERMANY  Total 7					1 
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
			1 	4  1 	
ITALY  Total 3					
	2019	2020	2021	2022	2023
			1 	2 	

-  Airforce
-  Army
-  Navy
-  Multilateral

However, the steady expansion of the bilateral engagement did not mean the absence of significant differences. This divergence has become sharper in the wake of the Russian invasion of Ukraine in February 2022. Many European leaders have been strongly critical of India's reluctance to criticize Moscow's aggression, Delhi's unwillingness to stand up to the territorial sovereignty of Ukraine, and its readiness to purchase large quantities of oil from Russia at a time when the West was trying to isolate Moscow in the global economy.⁵⁴ India has been wary of Europe's insouciance towards Beijing's expansionism in Asia and China's assertiveness towards its neighbors. Sitting where they are, India and Europe unsurprisingly have a different appreciation of the challenges presented by Russia and China. Managing this divergence in the days ahead would be a significant task for both sides.

“India has been wary of Europe’s insouciance towards Beijing’s expansionism in Asia and China’s assertiveness towards its neighbors. Sitting where they are, India and Europe unsurprisingly have a different appreciation of the challenges presented by Russia and China. Managing this divergence in the days ahead would be a significant task for both sides.”

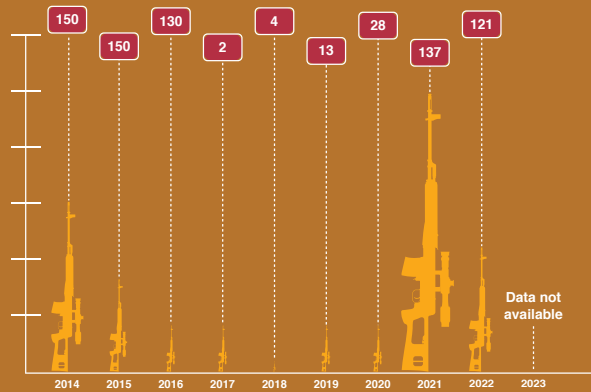
Accelerations

Political and diplomatic

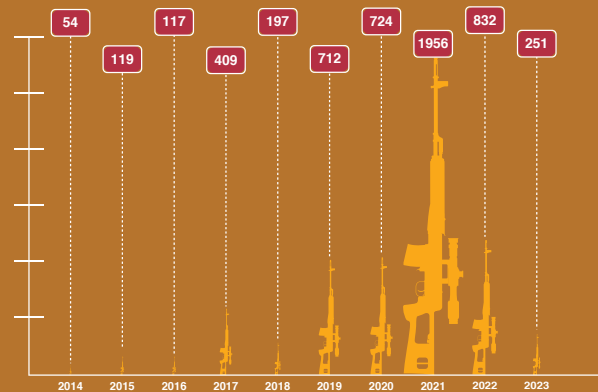
The acceleration of bilateral ties is visible in three broad domains—geopolitical, economic, and technological. On the geopolitical front, India discarded its historic hesitations in working with “Colonial European Powers” in shaping regional security. As it seeks to cope with the structural changes in the Asian balance of power driven by China's rise, Delhi is now

ready to engage with the European powers in a different post-colonial perspective on regional security. In opposition to China's slogan of ‘Asia for Asians’, Delhi has on various occasions emphasized its vision of a more inclusive regional order and one that sees roles for former colonial powers as well as the U.S.⁵⁵

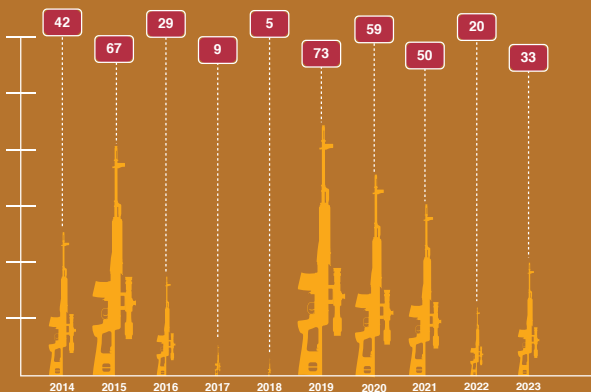
Indian Arms Imports from Europe in Millions (of TIV)⁵⁶



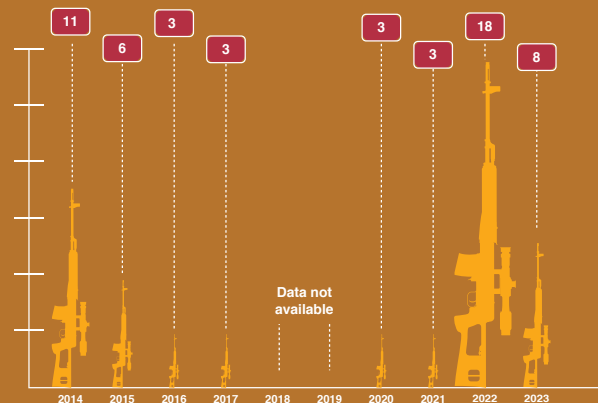
UK



FRANCE



GERMANY



ITALY

Defense MoUs, Agreements, Dialogues, and Meetings⁵⁸

COUNTRY	UK		FRANCE		GERMANY		ITALY	
	2014-18	2019-22	2014-18	2019-22	2014-18	2019-22	2014-18	2019-22
MoUs and Agreements	1	3	2	1	0	2	1	0
Dialogues and Meetings	18	8	19 ^{+ 27 rounds of strategic dialogue}	6	13	1	3	4

This is also reflected in the transformation of India's relations with France and Britain under Modi. France is arguably the most trusted partner India has today in the West. It is less prone to meddling in India's internal affairs, more open to supporting India on its security issues, and liberal in transferring advanced military technologies. Meanwhile, Germany has emerged as a significant defense partner in its own right, on top of already being India's largest trade partner.⁵⁷ The last decade has seen India increase its engagement with the EU and its security institutions on regional security, counterterrorism, and the Indo-Pacific. In a significant development, Delhi has overcome the long-standing political irritation with its former colonial rulers in London and is now actively building a strategic partnership with the UK.

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India has significantly strengthened its relationship with Germany. The Comprehensive Partnership on Migration and Mobility has facilitated more accessible travel for research, study, and work, enhancing people-to-people connections.⁵⁹ Germany's assistance in renewable energy includes plans for a green hydrogen center in India, underscoring their commitment to sustainable energy solutions. Defense cooperation has also deepened, with discussions on constructing advanced diesel-electric submarines.⁶⁰ Nine key agreements were signed during the 6th Indo-German Inter-Governmental Consultations (IGC) in 2023.⁶¹ The Green and Sustainable Development Partnership is notable, with Germany committing 10 billion euros in development aid until 2030.⁶² Other agreements cover joint programs in third countries and specialized training for Indian executives, emphasizing comprehensive development and strategic collaboration. Initiatives like the Joint Declaration on Forest Landscape Restoration and the Indo-German Green Hydrogen Task Force highlight a strong focus on climate action.⁶³ These agreements and initiatives reflect a multi-faceted partnership, positioning India and Germany as key collaborators in addressing global challenges and fostering mutual growth.

On the economic front, India and the EU have managed to resume trade talks in 2022 after Brussels suspended the same in 2013. India signed a trade and investment agreement with EFTA in March 2024 that showcases the possibilities for reimagining the economic ties between India and Europe.⁶⁴

An India-EU FTA will perhaps be the most significant development in relations. However, there still remain wide gaps in the positions and preferences of each side – in part explained by contrasting socio-developmental conditions in both societies. . India would prefer a more 'shallow' and sequential approach – centering on services, goods, and mobility for Indian professionals and investments. On the other hand, Europe has adopted a much more ambitious 'deep' approach based on aligning policies on investments, competition, and intellectual property rights.

“An India-EU FTA will perhaps be the most significant development in relations. However, there still remain wide gaps in the positions and preferences of each side – in part explained by contrasting socio-developmental conditions in both societies.”

Europe's strong interest in exporting automobiles to India is being blocked by high tariff rates of 60-100%, as a result of industry concerns.

On the technological front, India and the EU have set up a Trade and Technology Council highlighting the possibilities for European cooperation with the expanding Indian technology sector. Cooperation on green transition has become a significant new domain of collaboration even as linking environmental concerns to trade threatens to pose new problems to bilateral economic cooperation.

Adaptations

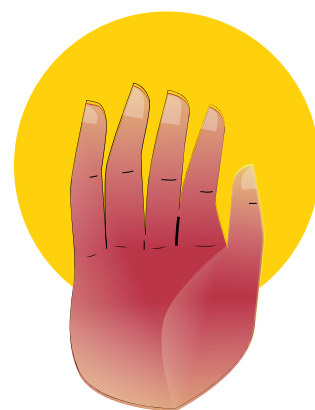
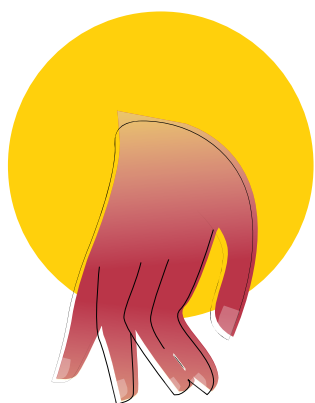
As Europe faces a demographic challenge, India has begun to figure in its quest to acquire talent within the legal migration framework. The "Migration and Mobility" agreements India has signed with a few European countries such as Germany express this.⁶⁵ Connectivity has emerged at the top of India's agenda with Europe with the signing of an agreement in 2023 to develop the India-Middle East-Europe Corridor with the support of the US and the Gulf monarchies.⁶⁶ India is now aware that Europe is a continent of regions. Even as it learns the art of engaging Brussels, Delhi has stepped up its outreach to the Nordics and Baltics, the Visegrad Group, and the EuroMed region.

Conclusion

Translating India's ambitious new agenda with Europe into concrete outcomes will require much hard bureaucratic work from both sides. Reducing the differences in the great power dynamic between the US, Russia, and China will need considerable political sagacity and diplomatic skill. Yet, amid the rapidly changing geopolitical landscape, Europe has begun to figure more prominently in India's calculus on multipolarity and strategic autonomy. That, in turn, creates multiple new openings for Europe in India.

“Yet, amid the rapidly changing geopolitical landscape, Europe has begun to figure more prominently in India's calculus on multipolarity and strategic autonomy. That, in turn, creates multiple new openings for Europe in India.”

India and the Regions





India-South Asia

Heading into 2014, India had found itself in the throes of various structural shifts mainly outside its control. The primary geopolitical shift was the ongoing acceleration of Chinese influence in South Asia. This led to heightened concerns in Delhi and increased bargaining power and leverage in South Asian capitals. The region was also experiencing a societal shift towards a more aspirational and more globally connected middle class. More people in South Asia sought opportunities to build connections beyond India, whether in education, politics, art, or tourism. Finally, as populist nationalism began to replace post-colonial identities in many countries, it led to mass politics in South Asia that posed challenges to Indian foreign policy. Rising nationalist sentiments in Bangladesh, Maldives, and Nepal also increasingly benefit political parties that position themselves as wary of India.

Finally, the continuing lack of integration in South Asian markets represents the primary economic structural challenge for the region's inter-dependent growth, with India as its primary driver. China, in turn, has been a beneficiary of both rising nationalism and limited integration in the economic domain. However, India's launch of the 'Neighborhood First' strategy in 2014 raised great hopes for a more involved and engaged India. This approach saw its first manifestation when the new PM chose neighboring Bhutan as his first destination for an official visit.

Shifts

Maritime South Asia

Over the last decade, India's efforts to limit Chinese strategic advantage have increasingly focused on the maritime domain. This has included vigorous diplomacy with Bangladesh and Myanmar to secure India's participation in port projects such as Sittwe, Chattogram, and Mongla. India was also a strategic beneficiary of Dhaka's decision to scrap the Sonadia Port project with China in favor of the Matarbari Port with Japan.⁶⁷ India's successful efforts to convince Sri Lanka to impose a moratorium on Chinese research vessels docking in Sri Lankan ports have also been notable and follow a similar pattern.⁶⁸

Diversified partners and pragmatism

In various strategic initiatives mentioned above, India has ably cooperated with like-minded partners (especially the U.S. and Japan) to secure positive outcomes. This marks a key shift from an earlier period whereby India would resist any foreign influence in the region. India has supported a U.S. Millennium Challenge Corporation (MCC) project in Nepal to construct power transmission lines and also worked closely with Japan (in Sri Lanka and Bangladesh) to offset Chinese inroads into critical strategic sectors. This has also extended to Russia; Delhi partnered with Moscow to establish Bangladesh's first-ever nuclear power plant.⁶⁹

“India has ably cooperated with like-minded partners (especially the U.S. and Japan) to secure positive outcomes. This marks a key shift from an earlier period whereby India would resist any foreign influence in the region.”



Accelerations

India as a regional first responder

India has sought to credibly present itself as the region's first responder in Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR). This was displayed after the Nepal earthquake of 2015, the Maldives water crisis of 2014, the Sri Lankan financial crisis of 2023, and during the pandemic. Through its rescue and relief operations, India has aimed to show its neighbors that they can rely on India during acute crisis periods, demonstrating that India's care and concern extends beyond its borders.

Connectivity and economic linkages

India aimed to foster greater connectivity and market linkages in the region over the period. This has consisted of the first cross-border pipeline with Bangladesh, greater road and rail connectivity with Nepal, and of late, with Bhutan. Also, in a first, India has worked with regional partners towards a tripartite hydropower sharing agreement – allowing Nepal to sell surplus hydropower to Bangladesh through India.⁷⁰ The three countries are also close to finalizing a landmark BBIN Motor Vehicles Act for enhancing flow of goods and people.⁷¹

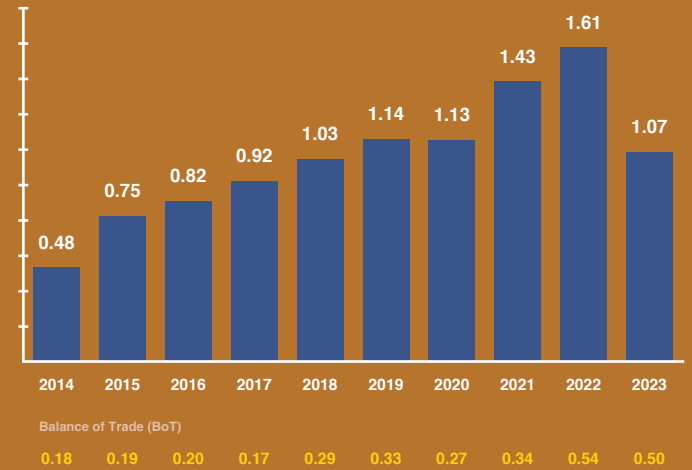
India-South Asia Total Trade

In US\$ Billion⁷²

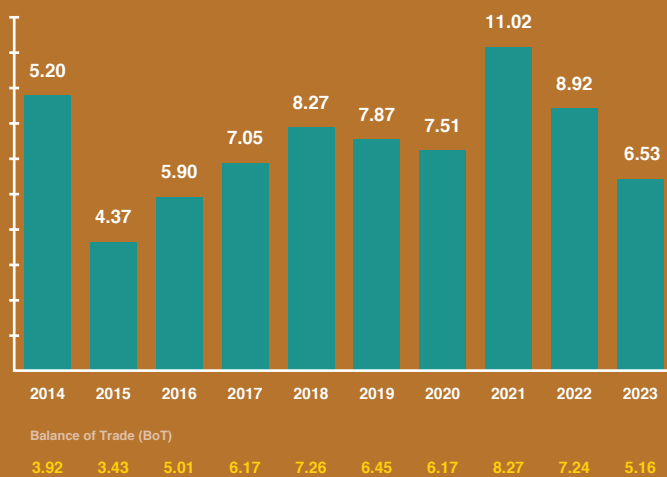
Bangladesh



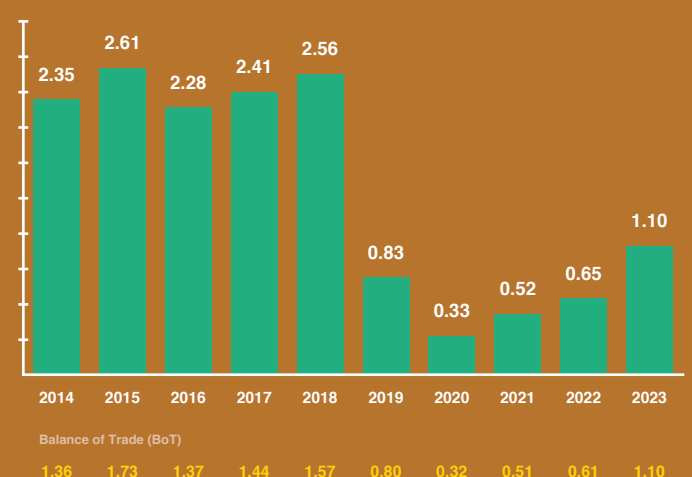
Bhutan



Nepal



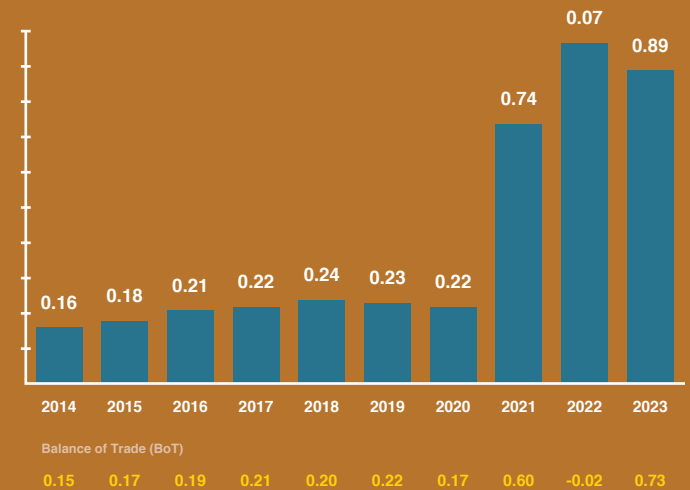
Pakistan



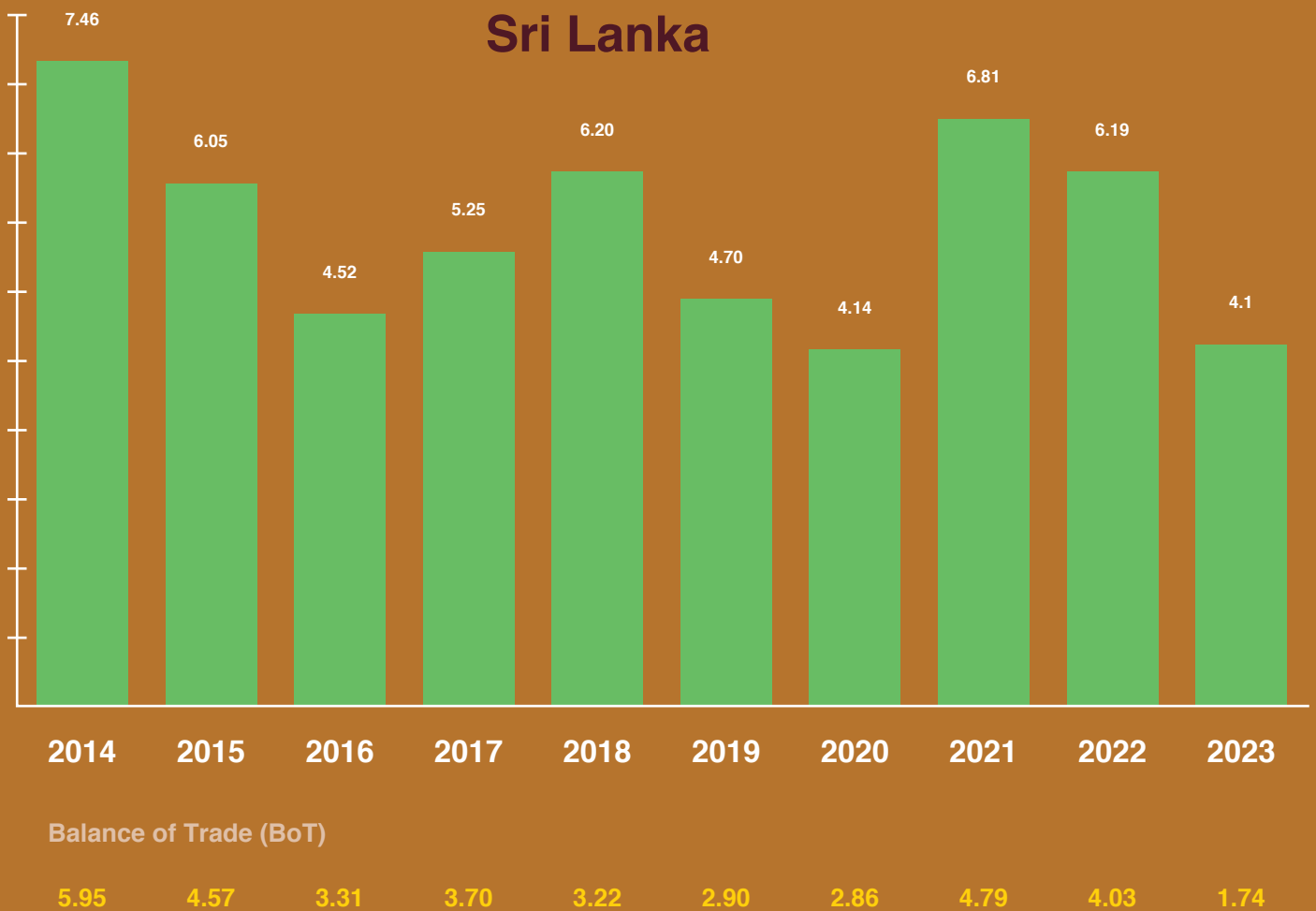
Afghanistan



Maldives



Sri Lanka



Adaptations

Establishing red lines

India has adapted to greater and more legitimate Chinese economic presence and influence in the region while also seeking to offset its strategic spillovers on India's core security interests. This has led to India seeking to draw reasonable red lines vis-à-vis strategic cooperation. With Myanmar, India has sought clarifications over Chinese military presence in the strategic Coco islands and persuaded Sri Lanka to adopt greater caution in letting in Chinese research vessels.⁷³ New Delhi will seek to

establish similar upper limits as Maldives embarks on military cooperation with China. Perhaps most crucially, India will be interested in ensuring that Bhutan's ongoing border negotiations with China consider Indian security interests. At the same time, dissuading partners from entering into potentially destabilizing arrangements with China has increasingly entailed India making advantageous offers in an increasingly flexible manner.

Diversifying engagement channels

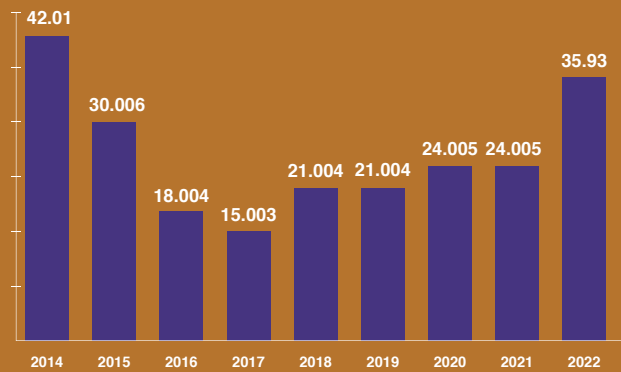
New Delhi has sought to expand and diversify its relationships with various political constituents within South Asian countries. Such a process is aimed at helping India better absorb shifts in electoral outcomes to ensure greater resiliency in bilateral relations. In Nepal and Sri Lanka, this has meant improving ties with parties often seen as India-wary. However, such expansion has been harder to achieve in Bangladesh and Maldives due to the entrenched positions of certain political parties. In both Myanmar and Afghanistan, India is beginning to engage with the Taliban and Ethnic Armed Organizations to safeguard existing projects and interests, despite non-recognition.

“New Delhi has sought to expand and diversify its relationships with various political constituents within South Asian countries. Such a process is aimed at helping India better absorb shifts in electoral outcomes to ensure greater resiliency in bilateral relations.”

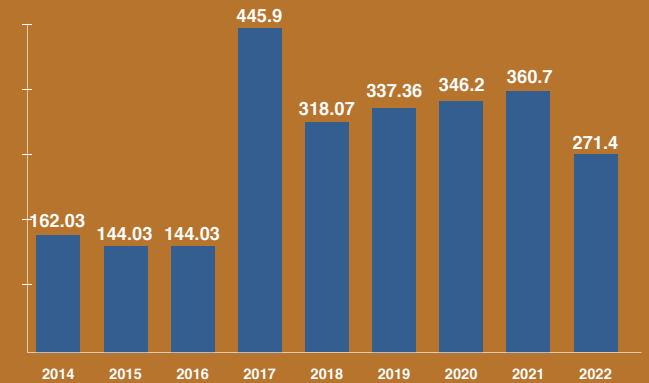
Indian Developmental Aid to South Asian Countries⁷⁴

In US\$ Million

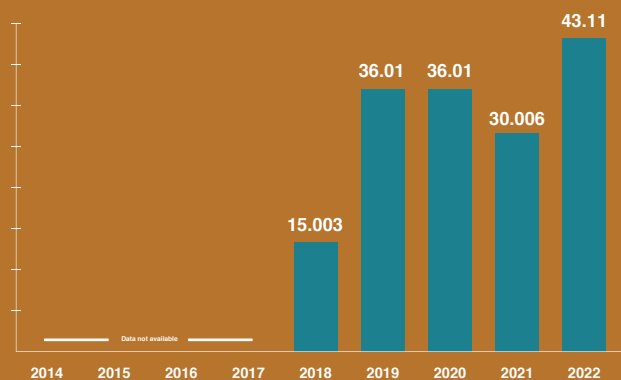
Bangladesh



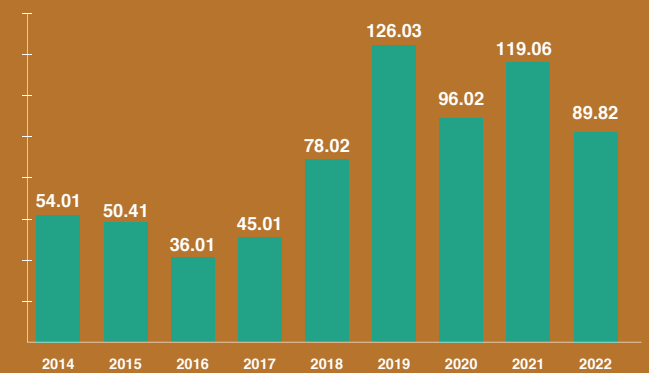
Bhutan



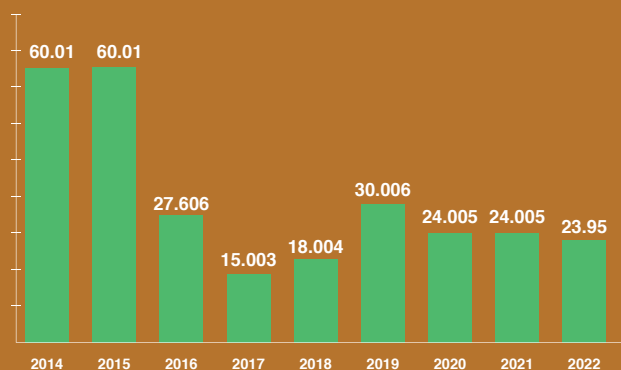
Maldives



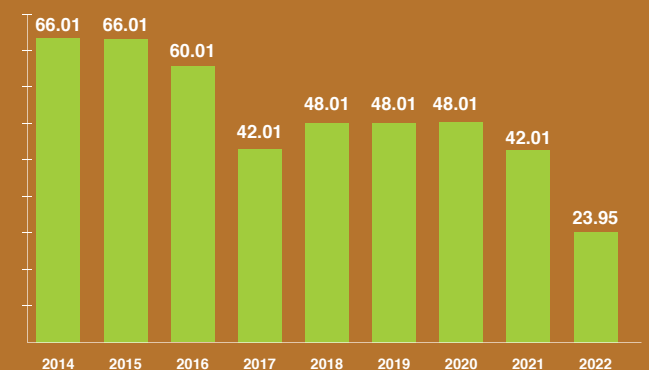
Nepal



Sri Lanka













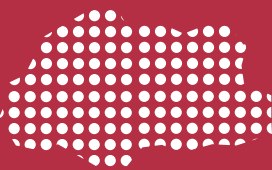






































Afghanistan



Defense Exercise with South Asian Countries⁷⁵

-  Airforce
-  Army
-  Navy
-  Multilateral

	2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
BANGLADESH 	1 	1 	1 	1 	2  1 
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	
		1 		4  1 	
PAKISTAN 					
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	
				1 	
BHUTAN 					1 
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	
MALDIVES 	1  1 (Trilateral)	1  & Marine corps	1  1 (Trilateral)	1 	1  1  1 (Trilateral)
	2019-20	2020-21	2021-22	2022-23	
			1  1  1 (Trilateral)	1 	

NEPAL		2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
		1 	1 	1 	2 	2  1 
		1 		1 	1  1 	
SRI LANKA		2014-15	2015-16	2016-17	2017-18	2018-19
		1  1 	1 	1  1 (Trilateral)	1  1 	2  1 
		2  1 	1 	1  1 (Trilateral)	3 	

-  Airforce
-  Army
-  Navy
-  Multilateral

Conclusion

In South Asia, the Indian government’s challenge has been to maintain its position as the pivot state in the region, bolster regional institutions such as BIMSTEC, enhance linkages, and make efforts towards constructing cross-border connectivity. India has successfully presented itself as the first responder in the region. However, there remain strong pain points vis-à-vis each country in the region. India’s inability to come to a final solution over water-sharing (Teesta) with Bangladesh has been a latent source of grievance in Dhaka. Despite strong efforts in fostering connectivity and trade through projects and initiatives, the more pervasive sources of connectivity remain in the domain of regulations about tariffs, customs, etc. In that sense, India might have to take its role as the main driver of the region more seriously and redouble efforts towards removing cross-border trade and integration.



India–Middle East

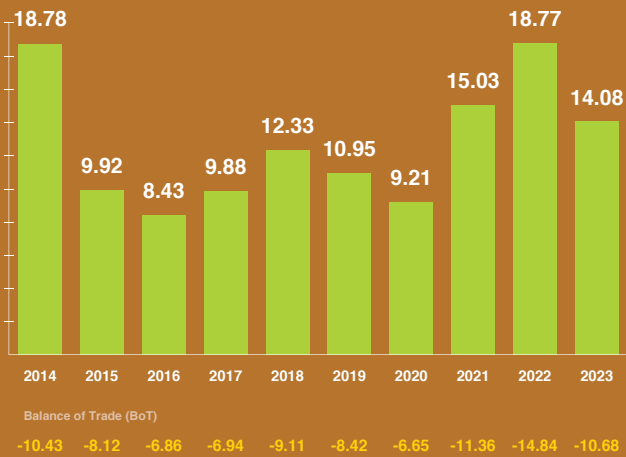
Between 2014 and 2024, Middle East underwent an extended period of immense instability due to the effects of the Arab Spring and the scourge of the Islamic State in the Levant 2014 and 2019; a brief period of unprecedented stability due to the Abraham Accords with the hope of the peace sustaining, and increased economic engagement between Israel and Arab states; and finally a reversion to instability due to Hamas' October 7th terror attack on Israel and Tel Aviv's disproportionate response in Gaza that has killed over 33,000 (at the time of writing). Amidst these, other developments, including a blockade of Qatar by other Arab states and the short-lived nuclear deal between Iran and the United States, meant that uncertainty dangled over the Middle East across the decade. Across this tumultuous period, India's Middle East policy has remained largely stable, focusing on minimizing disruptions to existing relationships during crises and maximizing gains during windows of stability.⁷⁶



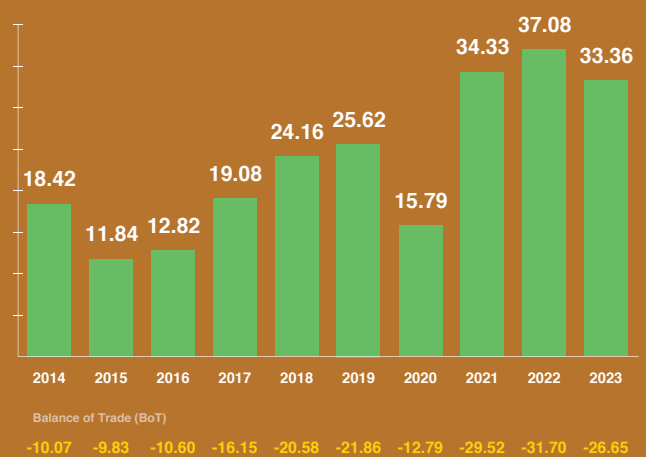
India-Middle East Total Trade

In US\$ Billion⁷⁷

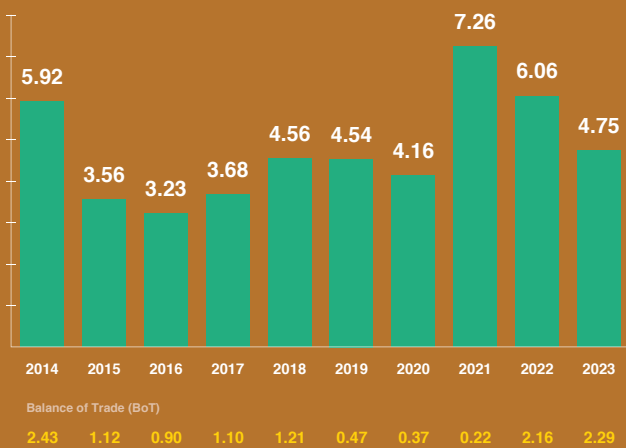
Qatar



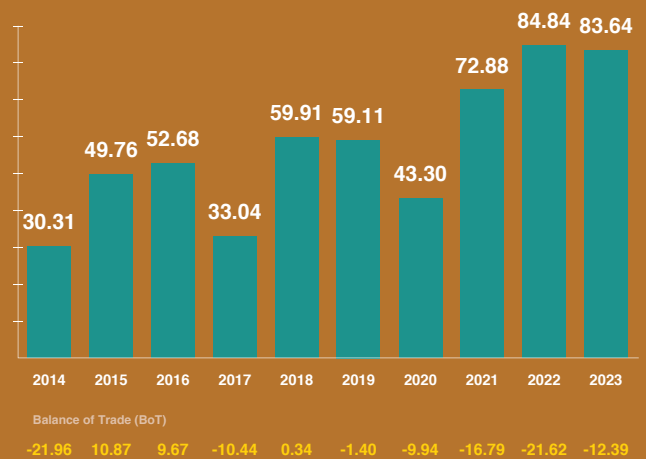
Iraq



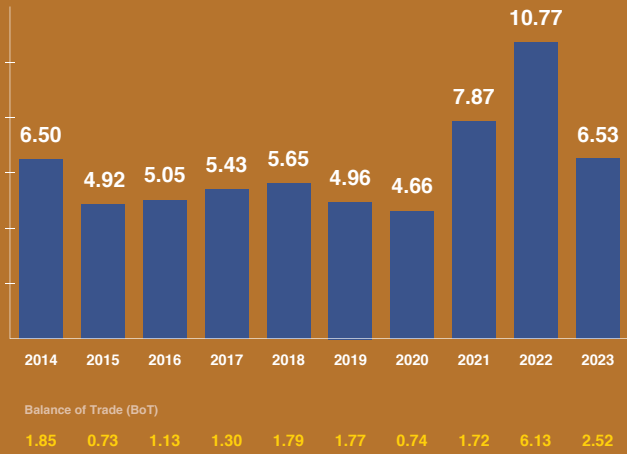
Egypt



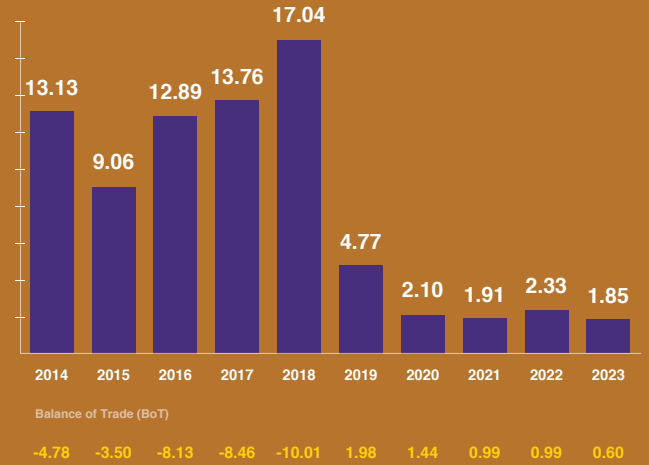
UAE



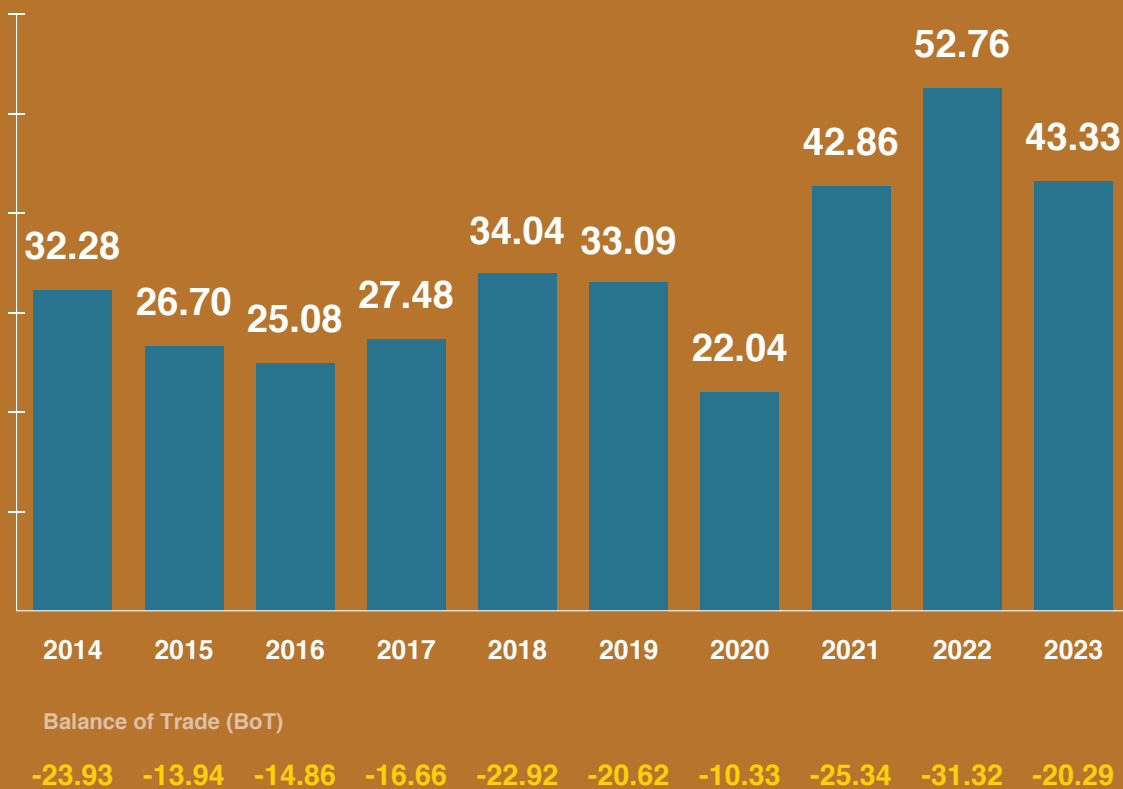
Israel



Iran



Saudi Arabia



Shifts

The most significant change in the last decade is the expansion of India's ties with Gulf states, which allows India to balance its engagements with the region through increasing engagement with Israel and Iran (although to varying levels, with India-Gulf Arab trade far outweighing that with Iran). While India enhanced its engagement with the Arab world on the one hand, it utilized the goodwill generated to risk increased engagement with Israel on the other. This largely succeeded, especially between 2015 and 2023; before visiting Palestine, PM Modi became the first Indian PM to visit Israel in 2017, with Benjamin Netanyahu reciprocating in 2018.⁷⁸ The growth in ties was reflected in the significant jumps in India's export figures to Israel (up to USD 5.5 billion for petroleum products by 2023). However, the defense partnership has flourished between India and Israel, with the latter having emerged by 2023 as the third largest exporter of defense equipment to India, after Russia and France.⁷⁹ It is both India's deepening relationship with Israel, as well as the tepid initial reactions by Arab states to Israel's war in Gaza, that allowed India to carve space for itself to express solidarity with Israel, using the distinctness of terrorism as a global security challenge.

“It is both India's deepening relationship with Israel, as well as the tepid initial reactions by Arab states to Israel's war in Gaza, that allowed India to carve space for itself to express solidarity with Israel, using the distinctness of terrorism as a global security challenge.”

Accelerations

India-Israel

Between 2014 and 2024, India consistently voted against Israel in key resolutions of the UNGA on the Israel-Palestine issue. While it abstained on resolutions on the Russia-Ukraine war to balance its historic relationship with Russia with its increased ties with the West, it avoided such balancing between Arab interests and Israel, at least at the UN. Moreover, despite an initial burst of pro-Israel energy (symbolized by PM Modi's tweet expressing solidarity with Israel after the October 7th attacks), India has reverted to its position of strongly advocating for the two-state solution to the Israel-Palestine question after having distinguished its stance on terrorism from the political issue. Given that Israel has been moving away from the two-state conception, India's proactive advocacy for the template proves the continuing institutional drivers of India's Middle East policy.

India-Arab ties

During PM Modi's two terms, India's engagement with the Arab world increased substantially despite the Middle East's many crises. Between 2014 and 2024, PM Modi visited the UAE seven times—among the highest number of visits to any country; and in his first term alone, he visited most states in the Middle East. Presenting India as a natural partner for the Arab drive to diversify its economic partnerships away from oil, the Indian government has signed various agreements with Arab states across sectors, particularly infrastructure development. Besides the already significant remittance-based ties India shares with the Gulf, newfound mutual interests in joint economic endeavors have catalyzed a deeper and broader relationship between New Delhi and Arab capitals, spanning from Muscat to Riyadh. Hence, by the time the Abraham Accords ushered in a new era of unprecedented political and economic engagement between multiple Arab states and Israel, India was poised to exploit the salient changes in the region positively.

Adaptations

Even as India increased engagement with all states, it maintained its historic relationship with Iran - the vocal outlier to the Abraham Accords. While the Chabahar Port's joint development steadily progressed under both terms of PM Modi, fresh challenges emerged with increasing Chinese interest in the port. Even as Tehran's relationship with Washington deteriorated due to President Trump's unilateral withdrawal from the Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, India attempted to garner waivers to purchase Iranian oil; New Delhi finally conceded to the strictness of the CAATSA sanctions and cut off Iranian oil.⁸⁰ However, India arguably compensated for this by engaging with Iran on other fronts, especially concerning the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC), allowing India to bypass Pakistan. In essence, India managed to keep its relationship with Iran in a separate silo, even as it balanced Arab and Israeli interests across the Persian Gulf.

Moreover, a gradual convergence of the strategic outlooks of India and the US in the Middle East allowed India to initiate and actively develop newer, grander initiatives that would cut across historic geopolitical fault lines and enhance global connectivity. While the I2U2 sought to consolidate the economic gains of the Abraham Accords and grant India more agency in the region, the IMEC acts not only as a connectivity project but as a pillar of India's grand strategy. Additionally, while India's relations

with Gulf states developed rapidly on both the political and economic sides, strategic dimensions began to be added by 2023, with India and Saudi Arabia conducting their first military exercises in early 2024.⁸¹ Additionally, while India leveraged the growing Arab desire to diversify and normalize ties with Israel economically, it was quick to recognize the drastic loss in momentum in this direction due to Israel's increasingly unpopular campaign in Gaza.

“Moreover, a gradual convergence of the strategic outlooks of India and the US in the Middle East allowed India to initiate and actively develop newer, grander initiatives that would cut across historic geopolitical fault lines and enhance global connectivity.”

On one hand, India's willingness to identify with Israel on terrorism, send workers to Israel under a government-to-government agreement, and even explosives (reportedly) amidst the war in Gaza, reflects the new depths of bilateral ties. On the other hand, EAM Jaishankar vociferously reiterated India's traditional support for Palestinian sovereignty and the two-state solution across multilateral forums, even as Netanyahu publicly distanced himself from it and the death toll in Gaza grew. Additionally, beyond the UN, India also adapted to an increased Middle Eastern presence in an expanded BRICS – it catered to Arab interests further by supporting the grouping's increasingly fiercer criticism of Israel as the latter's bombardment of Gaza continued.

Further, India's balanced reactions to Iran's and Israel's exchange of strikes on each other's territory (expressing concern, condemning neither, calling for de-escalation) showed that India's key adaptation has been letting its bilateral relationships with Iran and Israel operate in their siloes, even in the face of unprecedented direct and overt hostilities between the two. In any case, India was helped by ambivalent Arab reactions to the exchange, showing that for Sunni Arab states, Iran continues to be a point of some discomfort despite recent rapprochements and that Israel is now viewed as less of a threat than it was historically.

“India’s balanced reactions to Iran’s and Israel’s exchange of strikes on each other’s territory (expressing concern, condemning neither, calling for de-escalation) showed that India’s key adaptation has been letting its bilateral relationships with Iran and Israel operate in their siloes”

Conclusion

During the 2014-2019 period, the many painstaking visits—made by the Indian Prime Minister to almost all significant Arab capitals—reflected India’s optimistic exploration for new partnerships with Arab states at a time when the multiple crises in both the Gulf and the Levant were still potent (The Islamic State would only be defeated in 2019; Saudi Arabia’s war in Yemen against Iran-backed Houthis was raging with renewed intensity; the Qatar diplomatic crisis was only beginning; Riyadh and Tehran shared no diplomatic ties; and Israel conducted multiple raids in the West Bank). The success of India’s outreach to Arab capitals even amidst such crises (with PM Modi receiving numerous state awards from Arab states and even succeeding in inaugurating the UAE’s first Hindu temple) arguably generated greater confidence for expanded partnerships when the region was calmer.⁸² Essentially, India found comfort in dealing with both Israel as well as the Sunni moderate regimes in the Middle East.

Given the lessons that India drew from its engagement with Arab states in PM Modi’s first term, the period of stability that defined the 2020-2023 period provided optimal space for an expansion of ties across geo-political lines (Saudi Arabia’s war in Yemen winding down; the Islamic State having been defeated; Iran gradually normalizing ties with historic rivals despite increasing tensions with the United States; and both Syria and Qatar being welcomed back into the Arab fold). This allowed India to capitalize on the new peace in the Middle East significantly, establish new multilateral arrangements, and aspire towards grand connectivity projects. More importantly, India believes in the momentum of the stability that defined the Middle East before October 7th, 2023, despite the escalation of the conflict in the region. Given Israel’s unrelenting campaign in Gaza (with Hamas continuing to hold Israeli hostages) and fresh state-on-state conflict between Iran and Israel with unprecedented modes of warfare deployed by either side, regional conflict has further intensified. However, while this intensification of conflict increases the region’s challenges, this same intensity would (rather counter-intuitively) necessitate permanent solutions to older disputes, given the high cost being paid by all states for side-lining the legacy question of Israel and Palestine. Hence, it is precisely this that India is pushing for, with every statement of firm support for the two-state solution.

India – Indo-Pacific

Over the past decade, the Indo-Pacific has emerged as a theatre of geo-economic and geo-political competition, driven by China's rise and the effects of globalization. Today, the region is viewed as a new economic powerhouse as well as the first line of defense against China. Even traditional pacifist states like Japan have transformed their policies through a USD 320 billion plan to increase their defense and missile strike capabilities.⁸³ Others, like Australia, have leaned on partners like the US and the UK to access nuclear propulsion for a new class of submarines and other strategic technologies through the AUKUS.⁸⁴ Smaller states such as Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia have increasingly sought to improve their maritime defense capabilities. Amongst all this, ASEAN has attempted to stay relevant, promote its central role in the region, and adapt to the changing nature of competition. Other states, like Thailand and Vietnam, have benefited from global de-risking efforts vis-à-vis China and have opened their manufacturing ecosystems to emerge as viable alternatives. Yet, other smaller Pacific Island states like Samoa, Fiji, and Papua New Guinea have been caught up in a whirlwind of offers and assistance from China, Australia, the US, and Japan. Overall, the region, for most of the last decade, has been a hotbed of diplomatic, maritime, and military competition between China and the West.

India jumped into the fray hesitantly with its reticent participation in the Quad. However, India's engagement gained acceleration, albeit somewhat unstructured, following Chinese aggression along its borders in 2020. Given its limited capabilities compared to China, the vastness of the region, and the diversity of the region's issues, India has found it challenging to develop a cohesive Indo-Pacific policy. Yet, India is the right candidate to engage effectively with the Indo-Pacific due to its historical connections with the region, its democratic credentials, and its growing economy.

“Given its limited capabilities compared to China, the vastness of the region, and the diversity of the region's issues, India has found it challenging to develop a cohesive Indo-Pacific policy. Yet, India is the right candidate to engage effectively with the Indo-Pacific due to its historical connections with the region, its democratic credentials, and its growing economy.”



Shifts

Shifts in India's engagement with the Indo-Pacific indicate a willingness to carve out a unique role, build relationships with all actors, export successful industrial achievements, and foster diplomatic dialogue with three maritime democracies in the Quad: Japan, the US, and Australia.

Participation in the Quad is a significant shift in India's approach to the region. Reinvigorated in 2017 through late Japanese PM Abe's efforts and encouraged by the Trump and Biden administrations, this diplomatic dialogue has emerged as a significant mechanism for improving cooperation on regional issues. India has been in lockstep with its Quad partners, providing public goods to the region. This process of building diplomatic habits of mind has resulted in improved bilateral ties with each Quad partner and greater multilateral cooperation in specific domains such as maritime security. India's slow but sure participation in the Quad indicates its acceptance of the Indo-Pacific construct and ability to expand

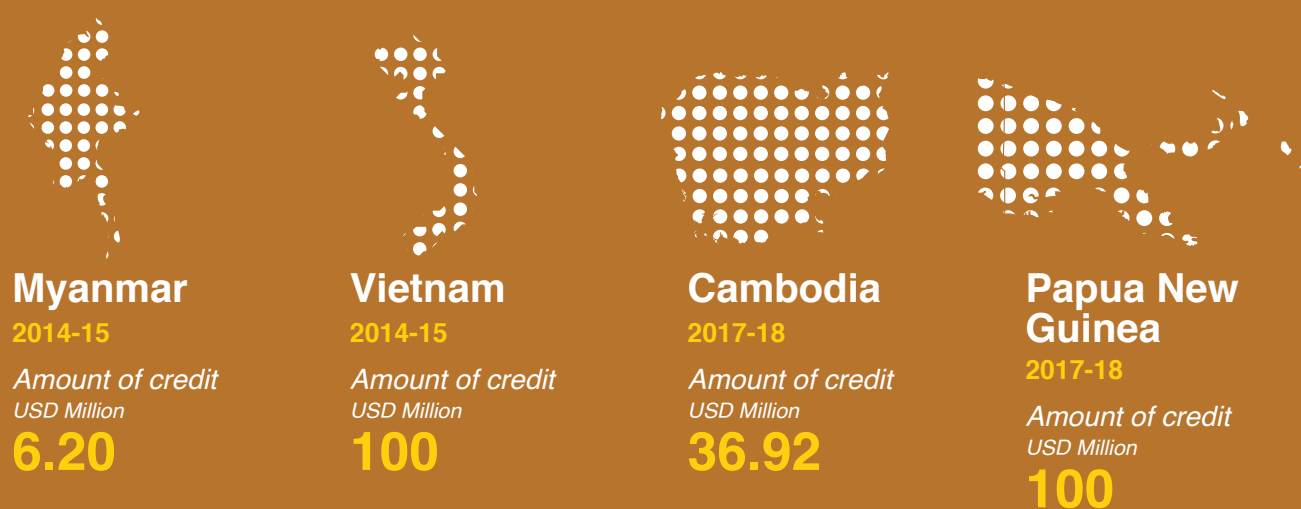
its maritime imaginations beyond the IOR. Other Quad partners have accepted the pace at which this shift has happened in India. Important Quad initiatives such as the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) indicate the balance India prefers – indirect capacity building to respond to Chinese naval activity while providing public goods associated with maritime trade, HADR, etc.⁸⁵ In this way, India has been successful in joining the Quad while keeping it a non-militarized entity.

India's engagement with the Quad signifies another challenge that India has been able to navigate. The Quad and other recent minilaterals – the AUKUS, Squad, etc., have been viewed as U.S.-led initiatives undermining ASEAN centrality. However, India has balanced perceptions of its participation in the Quad while continuing to increase its engagement with the ASEAN.

“Important Quad initiatives such as the Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness (IPMDA) indicate the balance India prefers – indirect capacity building to respond to Chinese naval activity while providing public goods associated with maritime trade, HADR, etc.”

In the IOR, India has attempted to regain its leading position, which China has been challenging by strengthening its naval presence and political influence and enhancing its bilateral relations with smaller states. In November 2019, PM Modi introduced the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI) to leverage regional cooperation architecture and mechanisms.⁸⁶ Another significant shift has been India's effort to broaden its involvement beyond the IOP by establishing the Forum for India-Pacific Islands Cooperation (FIPIC) in 2014, which includes India and 14 Pacific Island states.⁸⁷ Through this forum, India has provided grant-in-aid, concessional Lines of Credit, and opportunities for technical knowledge exchange, particularly in sectors like renewable energy, agriculture, IT, healthcare, and disaster risk reduction.

Lines of Credit to Southeast Asian and Oceania Countries⁸⁸ In US\$ Billion













































While India's capability of single-handedly restraining China's growing influence may be limited, India's efforts in the region have been to question the nature and intent of China's initiatives. By providing diplomatic and limited material support to bilateral and multilateral initiatives, India has been trying to present the region with an alternative to China.

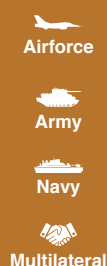
“While India's capability of single-handedly restraining China's growing influence may be limited, India's efforts in the region have been to question the nature and intent of China's initiatives.”




































Accelerations





Prior to 2014, the Indian Navy had emerged as a credible first responder to crises in the Indo-Pacific. Its involvement in the Tsunami Core Group, formed after the devastating 2004 tsunami, had carved out this new role. Since 2014, the Indian Navy has enhanced its interoperability with the American, Japanese, and Australian navies through regular exercises, improving its ability to respond to traditional and non-traditional threats in the region.⁸⁹

Military Exercises with Southeast Asian Countries⁹⁰

INDONESIA 	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
	1  1 	1  1 	1  2 	2 	2  2 
	2019	2020	2021	2022	
	1  1 	1 	3 	5 	
PHILIPPINES 	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
					1 
	2019	2020	2021	2022	
			1 	3 	
SINGAPORE 	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
	1  1 	1 	1 	2 	2  1 
	2019	2020	2021	2022	
	1  1  1  (Trilateral)	1  1  (Trilateral)	1  1 	5 	
MYANMAR 	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
		1 	1 		3  3 
	2019	2020	2021	2022	
	1 			2 	



	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
CAMBODIA 					
	2019	2020	2021	2022	
	1 			1 	
THAILAND 	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
	1 	1  1 	2  2 	1  1  1  (counterterrorism)	1  1  2 
	2019	2020	2021	2022	
	1  1  1 	1  1  (Trilateral)	1  2 	1  1 	
VIETNAM 	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
		1 FTX			1 
	2019	2020	2021	2022	
				1  2 	
MALAYSIA 	2014	2015	2016	2017	2018
	1 		1 	1 	2  2 
	2019	2020	2021	2022	
	1 			1 	1  6  1  1 

 Airforce
 Army
 Navy
 Multilateral

Over the last decade, the Indian Navy increased its presence in the Indo-Pacific through joint exercises and port calls with Southeast Asian states. This included a goodwill visit to the Philippines in 2023 and exercises in the South China Sea with navies from Vietnam, the Philippines, Malaysia, Australia, Indonesia, and ASEAN.⁹¹ In addition, the navy has continued to increase the regularity of exercises under the Quad framework. During the border clashes with the PLA, the Indian navy positioned one warship in the South China Sea. However, this acceleration has not led India to conduct freedom of navigation operations or joint patrols, either alone or with other navies, in the South China Sea.

MoUs, Agreements, Dialogues, and Meetings (Defense) with Southeast Asian Countries⁹²

COUNTRY	INDONESIA		PHILIPPINES		SINGAPORE		MYANMAR	
	2014-18	2019-22	2014-18	2019-22	2014-18	2019-22	2014-18	2019-22
MoUs and Agreements	1	1	1	1	4	1	2	3
Dialogues and Meetings	11	7	5	2	8	17	23	5
COUNTRY	CAMBODIA		THAILAND		VIETNAM		MALAYSIA	
	2014-18	2019-22	2014-18	2019-22	2014-18	2019-22	2014-18	2019-22
MoUs and Agreements	0	1	1	0	4	2	0	1
Dialogues and Meetings	2	0	18	5	12	13	5	3

The Indian Navy's shift from structured annual naval visits to 'mission-based deployments' in 2017 indicates this accelerating trend. Other developments indicative of this shift include enhancing MDA capabilities and signing key MDA and/or logistics agreements with nations such as the US, France, Japan, Sri Lanka, and Maldives, and improving maritime security infrastructure, including the development of new bases in the northern Andaman Islands and Lakshadweep Islands.

India has also expanded its maritime security role on its western seaboard by actively participating in anti-piracy and HADR operations. Operation Sankalp, launched in 2019 to protect vital sea lines of

communication (SLOCs), has been yielding results.⁹³ In addition, the Indian Navy has increased its operations in response to naval activity and exercises by Chinese and Pakistani navies. The inauguration of a new base in Lakshadweep's Minicoy in 2023 further indicates India's intent to retain its naval edge in the Western Indian Ocean.⁹⁴ To support these activities through improved communications and intelligence exchange with like-minded partners, the Indian Navy established the Information Fusion Centre-Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR) in 2018.⁹⁵ India also joined the US-led Combined Maritime Forces to combat piracy and respond to other maritime contingencies.

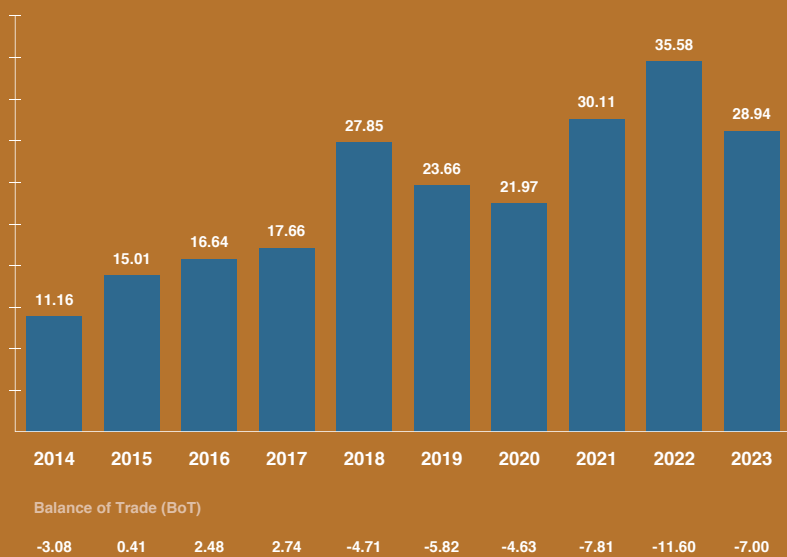
Adaptations

In 2014, India revamped its Look East Policy, seeking increased involvement with Southeast and East Asia. The new Act East Policy has meant that India's engagement expanded beyond primarily economic goals to include security and other areas. Its scope has broadened from Southeast and Northeast Asia to encompass the entire Indo-Pacific region, and the urgency and priority of its efforts have been heightened. India's growing defense diplomacy (encompassing trade and exchanges in the defense sector) with Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia indicates this shift.

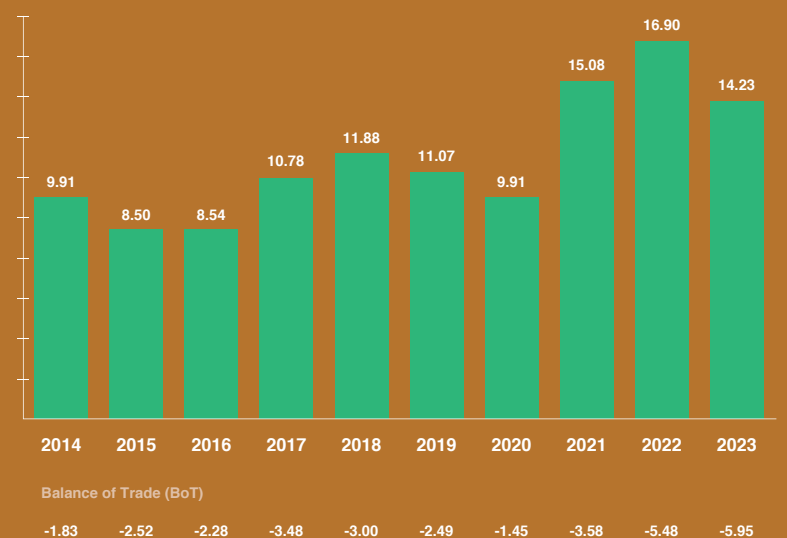
India's trade with Southeast Asian countries⁹⁶

In US\$ Billion

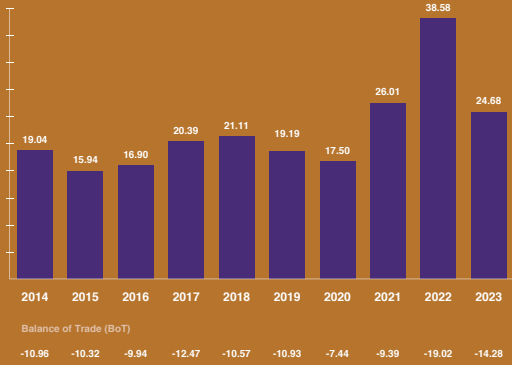
Singapore



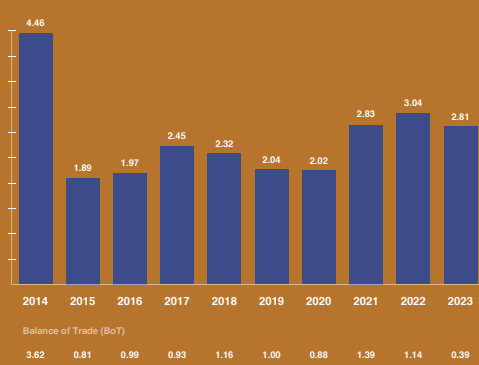
Thailand



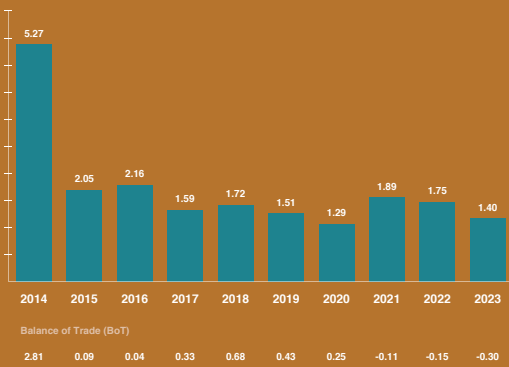
Indonesia



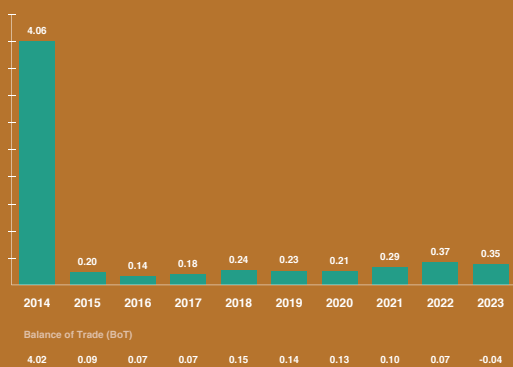
Philippines



Myanmar



Cambodia



Vietnam



Malaysia



However, India's decision to stay out of the RCEP and the Indo-Pacific Economic Framework trade pillar (IPEF) indicates its sheepishness regarding regional trade frameworks.⁹⁷ Hence, India's internal economic contingencies have continued to overshadow expectations from its Quad or ASEAN partners. Therefore, India prefers bilateral trade agreements, where it sees more space to maneuver and limited commitment traps. After all, ASEAN remains India's fourth-largest trading partner, and India has made concerted efforts to increase its trade with Australia (by signing an Economic Cooperation and Trade Agreement).⁹⁸

Conclusion

India's engagement with the Indo-Pacific in the coming years will be focused on issue and domain-based initiatives rather than a linear overall strategy. This will involve heightened involvement in the maritime domain through naval exercises, port calls, and freedom of navigation operations in the South China Sea. Efforts to enhance trade and defense ties with Australia will continue with independent and multilateral engagement with Pacific Island states. Similarly, India's defense trade/diplomacy with Southeast Asian states like Vietnam, the Philippines, and Indonesia will continue to grow. However, India's ability to emerge as a first responder to security threats and public goods needs in the region will be constrained by internal capacity and geopolitical considerations. Therefore, the success of India's policies in the region will be determined by its ability to work with like-minded partners in the West and the Indo-Pacific. Expectations from such partners in future China-led regional conflict scenarios may pressure India. As it wrestles with some of these questions (Taiwan included), it will have to make some hard choices and be ready to face their consequences.

“the success of India's policies in the region will be determined by its ability to work with like-minded partners in the West and the Indo-Pacific. Expectations from such partners in future China-led regional conflict scenarios may pressure India. As it wrestles with some of these questions (Taiwan included), it will have to make some hard choices and be ready to face their consequences.”

India and the Global South

In January and December 2023, India hosted two virtual summits titled “Voice of the Global South Summit”, chaired by Indian PM Narendra Modi, with over 120 countries in attendance.⁹⁹ These summits went beyond mere assessments of new global challenges among developing countries. Occurring in the year of India’s G20 Presidency, they served as the end of a long historical arc in Indian foreign policy: its ideological relationship with the Third World. In the ten years of the Modi-led NDA government, and especially in the last five, the words ‘Global South’ (GS) were endowed with fresh meaning, characteristic of both the tectonic shifts in the global order as well as India’s views of the world and where it placed itself. Its rise and evolution paralleled the fall of the Non-Aligned Movement in India’s hierarchy of strategic priorities. PM Modi has skipped all Summits of the Non-Aligned Movement since 2016, when he became the first Indian PM to skip a NAM Summit since Charan Singh in 1979.

Shifts

Semantic

Although the phrase, Global South, has long existed, it was prominently revived only during the second term of the Modi government. In the first, especially between 2014 and 2018, the language used was more of South-South cooperation, with less use of the Global South semantic (there is scant evidence of the term Global South in India’s official diplomatic vocabulary during this period). Arguably, such cooperation was an extension of PM Modi’s “Neighborhood First” policy, which he announced in 2014.¹⁰⁰ While India was yet to assign the Global South a more central role

in its foreign policy, by 2020, it was clear that Non-Alignment (or at least its older form) was no longer in vogue in New Delhi. By July of that year, External Affairs Minister S Jaishankar asserted that “non-alignment was a term of a particular era and geopolitical landscape. The era of great caution, the era of greater dependence on multilateralism...that era is to a certain extent behind us.”

Substance

The contemporary Global South differs from the Cold War era, at least in India's view. This difference is characterized by a de-emphasis on ideological solidarity and a prioritization of interests. These interests are articulated through non-ideological language, abandoning the historic rallying cries of the non-alignment movement rooted in resistance to capitalism and globalization. These fundamentals remain. However, they do not form the primary currency of the new Global South. Rather than resisting the world order, its new solidarity aims to maximize gains from the current order, even while advocating for greater stability.

“The contemporary Global South differs from the Cold War era, at least in India's view. This difference is characterized by a de-emphasis on ideological solidarity and a prioritization of interests.”



Accelerations

While India sought to redefine the outward orientation of the Global South and accelerate its new interest-based engagement, the perpetuation of older characteristics has continued within the grouping, even without India actively pushing for continuity. For instance, the composition of the Global South, as it stands today, remains fundamentally “anti-West”. Even as India accelerates its efforts to act as the bridge between the Global South and North and be “non-West” rather than “anti-West”, the critical mass of states that traditionally drive the GS agenda remain tilted against the West. Notwithstanding the expansion of economic ties and development-based engagement, the GS remains heavily influenced by China, the other state seeking to lead the GS. Parallel to India’s adoption of the GS semantic, China’s expanding presence in GS groupings yielded it more influence, arguably slowing down the pace of reorientation that India would ideally prefer. While this has been evident in China’s leadership of groupings such as the SCO and BRICS (where other member states are closer to each other than to India), the 2022 Russia-Ukraine war and the fresh crisis in the Middle East in late 2023 threw up considerable evidence of the misalignment between the GS and Western states on key global issues.

“Even as India accelerates its efforts to act as the bridge between the Global South and North and be “non-West” rather than “anti-West”, the critical mass of states that traditionally drive the GS agenda remain tilted against the West”

Moreover, South Africa, rather than India, has been particularly proactive in championing the Palestinian cause at international institutions (with the GS in tow).¹⁰¹ At one point, India stood alone in abstaining from supporting a ceasefire in Gaza in October 2023, while the rest of the Global South voted in favor at the UNGA.¹⁰²

India later corrected its course in December. This betrayed lingering differences in understanding the degree to which GS states are ready to sacrifice ideological solidarity at the altar of interest-based policymaking.

Adaptations

While India hinted at adopting a posture based on multi-alignment or strategic autonomy, it revamped the concept of older third-world solidarity through the Global South, gradually elevating it to center stage between 2020 and 2023. For instance, while the term 'Global South' finds three mentions in S Jaishankar's 2020 book, *The India Way*, the number jumps to twenty-nine in *Why Bharat Matters*, his second book published three years later.

For India, claiming principal representation of the Global South allowed it to navigate contemporary geopolitical churn and springboard its efforts to emerge as a leading global power. Essentially, it has been both a tactical geopolitical instrument as well as a tool of grand strategy to secure interest-based goals. The Global South then has become a powerful constituency that India had to "cultivate as it rises". However, the rhetoric that India deploys is positive rather than negative. Instead of complaining about the West's (G-7)'s role in furthering global inequality, India highlights current issues with a view of collective development. For instance, PM Modi, in March 2023, prioritized the struggles of developing countries "with unsustainable debt while trying to ensure food and energy security for their people."¹⁰³ By positioning itself as the leader or the 'voice', India seeks to "be a just and fair power as well, consolidate its position as a standard bearer of the Global South."

“For India, claiming principal representation of the Global South allowed it to navigate contemporary geopolitical churn and springboard its efforts to emerge as a leading global power. Essentially, it has been both a tactical geopolitical instrument as well as a tool of grand strategy to secure interest-based goals”

Lines of Credit to Global South¹⁰⁴ Countries (2014-15 to 2023-24)¹⁰⁵

Region - **Africa** | Total amount - **5380.47** (In US\$ Million)



Congo D.R.

No. of LoC | **3**

Amount of credit
USD Million

324.44



Congo R

No. of LoC | **4**

Amount of credit
USD Million

58.3



Cote d'Ivoire

No. of LoC | **8**

Amount of credit
USD Million

97.18



Gambia

No. of LoC | **3**

Amount of credit
USD Million

51.97



Senegal

No. of LoC | **3**

Amount of credit
USD Million

113.45



Tanzania

No. of LoC | **3**

Amount of credit
USD Million

860.53



Kenya

No. of LoC | **3**

Amount of credit
USD Million

144.95



Malawi

No. of LoC | **2**

Amount of credit
USD Million

239.18



Mauritius

No. of LoC | **4**

Amount of credit
USD Million

917.3



Seychelles

No. of LoC | **1**

Amount of credit
USD Million

10



Sierra Leone

No. of LoC | **3**

Amount of credit
USD Million

123



Zimbabwe

No. of LoC | **4**

Amount of credit
USD Million

439.5

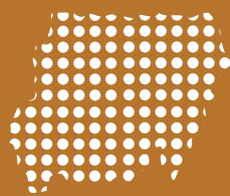


Ghana

No. of LoC | 2

Amount of credit
USD Million

180



Sudan

No. of LoC | 1

Amount of credit
USD Million

19.61



Ethiopia

No. of LoC | 6

Amount of credit
USD Million

7.68



Mozambique

No. of LoC | 3

Amount of credit
USD Million

383



Rwanda

No. of LoC | 4

Amount of credit
USD Million

347.6



Zambia

No. of LoC | 1

Amount of credit
USD Million

18



Burundi

No. of LoC | 1

Amount of credit
USD Million

161.36



Central African Republic

No. of LoC | 1

Amount of credit
USD Million

7



Chad

No. of LoC | 1

Amount of credit
USD Million

6.12



Eswatini

No. of LoC | 2

Amount of credit
USD Million

118.68



Guinea

No. of LoC | 3

Amount of credit
USD Million

210.73



Togo

No. of LoC | 1

Amount of credit
USD Million

40



Cameroon

No. of LoC | 1

Amount of credit
USD Million

0.89



EBID

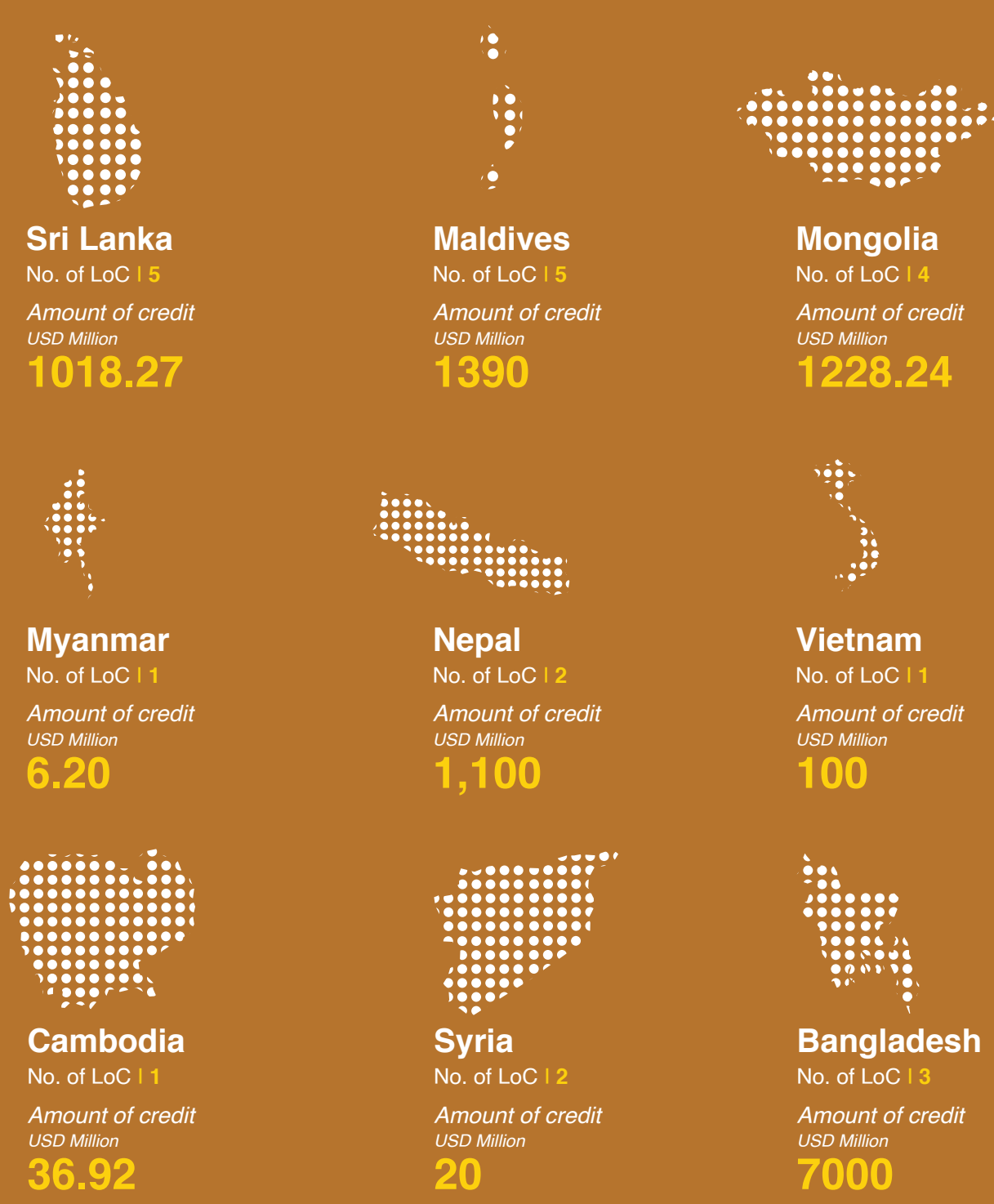
No. of LoC | 1

Amount of credit
USD Million

500

Lines of Credit to Global South Countries (2014-15 to 2023-24)

Region - **Asia** | Total amount - **11,899.63** (In US\$ Million)



Region - **Commonwealth of Independent States** |

Total amount - **448** (In US\$ Million)



Uzbekistan

No. of LoC | **1**

Amount of credit
USD Million

448

Region - **Latin American States** |

Total amount - **555.39** (In US\$ Million)



Guyana

No. of LoC | **5**

Amount of credit
USD Million

88.79

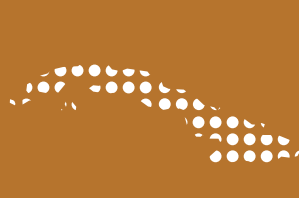


Suriname

No. of LoC | **3**

Amount of credit
USD Million

39.69



Cuba

No. of LoC | **5**

Amount of credit
USD Million

341.93



Nicaragua

No. of LoC | **4**

Amount of credit
USD Million

84.98

Region - **Oceania** |

Total amount - **100** (In US\$ Million)



Papua New Guinea

No. of LoC | **1**

Amount of credit
USD Million

100

By freshly cultivating a large collective from older existing third-world collectives, the Global South served as the hard, principled shell within which India could couch its realist, interest-based objectives as it prepared for a watershed G20 summit in New Delhi. From advocating for more inclusive economic arrangements to bringing the African Union within the G20 fold, India fronted its Global South credentials to set more equitable terms of engagement with the Global North (particularly the West) rather than adopt a protestant, resistant posture that shunned greater engagement.



Conclusion

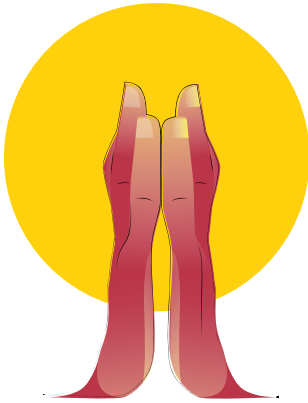
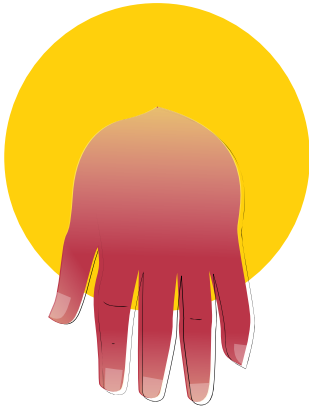
India had already begun drifting away from the NAM in the 1990s and 2000s, but its fresh deployment of the GS semantic during PM Modi's second term (2019-2024) was triggered by three key developments: the COVID-19 pandemic, India's fresh border conflict with China, and Russia's war in Ukraine.

First, the COVID-19 pandemic across 2020 and 2021 pointed to the wavering commitment of Western states to the Global South. A substantial distrust had been generated between the Global South and North, mainly due to the race to patent COVID-19 vaccines at the cost of greater access by developing states. This was readily evident in March 2021, when South Africa and India, backed by 80 developing states, sought vaccine waivers to boost production in poorer states, a bid opposed by the US, UK, EU, and Switzerland. By September 2021, GS states at the UN condemned Western governments for resisting patent waivers.

Second, China's unprovoked escalation in 2020 at the Line of Actual Control with India undid the bank of goodwill that had gradually begun to accumulate after PM Modi's summit with President Xi Jinping in Mahabalipuram.¹⁰⁶ On the contrary, it increased India's wariness of Chinese influence in multilateral organizations (in general), specifically in Global South states' groupings. In any case, China had historically sought to influence the G-77 and NAM groupings from outside without formal membership, allowing it to continue this influence in smaller regional groupings. Then, by establishing its framework for intra-Global South interaction, India sought to give itself greater space to generate credibility as the true non-partisan representative for communicating GS concerns by leveraging its increasingly strong ties with the West.

Third, notwithstanding India's strategic reasons for its fresh focus on the GS, an immediate tactical reason in 2023 was to prevent the Russia-Ukraine war from derailing India's G20 stewardship. Given the number of pre-Summit ministerial meetings that failed to reach a consensus on other issues due to differences over the Russia-Ukraine war, India needed a strong, justified, and credible diversion. This led to the first two virtual summits of the Voice of Global South. On the one hand, it gave India greater space to maneuver around geopolitical potholes generated by the Russia-Ukraine war by refocusing the actual purpose of the G20. On the other, it increased India's ability to downplay any risk from Western states, flagging India's continued purchase of cheap Russian oil as it fronted its interest-based policy. By using GS issues to forge consensus among G20 leaders, India effectively secured its own position as a Vishwamitra (a friend to the Global South) and a friend to the West.

Trade, Tech, and Defense





India's Economic Diplomacy

The retreat of globalization, arguably the most consequential economic trend of the 21st century, took shape as a response to a wide range of global challenges. Among others, trade tensions and broader geo-economic competition between great powers, heightened supply chain risks generated by geopolitical contentions or the outbreak of wars, and the promise of unprecedented growth or widespread market disruption by emerging technologies have been vital forces sustaining this trend. The WTO's influence has decreased, with its dispute settlement system proving dysfunctional for over five years. Meanwhile, the first 'global' energy crisis rages on, and economic security considerations play an increasingly dominant role in shaping trade and even industrial policy. In such a time and context, the economic diplomacy of nations such as India assumes a vital significance and faces considerable challenges.

Shifts

Over the past decade, the lingering aftermath of the global financial crisis and the Eurozone crisis, combined with the economic downturn resulting from the COVID-19 pandemic, led many governments to reconsider their economic engagements with the rest of the world. Consequently, the global economic discourse visibly shifted to incorporate deglobalization processes. Protectionism, industrial policy, and self-reliance—once anathema for trade policy thinkers in developed countries—are now at the forefront of policy approaches and discussions worldwide.

In this context, India faces a two-pronged challenge. New Delhi is committed to the vision of an Atmanirbhar Bharat

(a self-reliant India) that prioritizes the production and consumption of domestic goods over imports. This narrative sits uneasily with India's stated ambition to achieve USD 1 trillion in exports by 2030 since integrating into Global Value Chains (GVC) requires a healthy degree of openness, Foreign Direct Investments (FDI), and import competition.¹⁰⁷ Given that an import tariff or rise in protectionism is akin to an export tax, India's hard-earned lesson that export promotion and import substitution policies contradict each other looms large over its trade policy and economic agenda. Therefore, India seeks a balance.

The latest RBI bulletin (April 2024) underscored strong investment demand and positive business and consumer sentiments as key drivers of India's economic growth. This indicates that India, paradoxically, needs globalization more than ever for its export strategy to yield dividends and for its domestic markets to become efficient and competitive.¹⁰⁸

“This indicates that India, paradoxically, needs globalization more than ever for its export strategy to yield dividends and for its domestic markets to become efficient and competitive.”



Accelerations

India's economic heft has steadily risen, translating into geopolitical weight, allowing New Delhi to assume the role of an important actor on the world stage. Consequently, India has leveraged this to position itself as an alternate manufacturing destination to China and compete with other South Asian economies like Vietnam and Bangladesh. India has pursued domestic capabilities by leveraging its partnerships, most notably in the West, through technology acquisitions and transfers and adopting conceptual frameworks like leapfrogging.

At the same time, India has attempted to leverage its domestic tech economy to

position itself as a solutions provider. For instance, in recent years, New Delhi has pushed for transnational adoption of digital public infrastructures (DPI), highlighting its domestic success story. DPIs utilize ubiquitous digital technologies to connect people and devices and comprise three broad pillars: identity, payments, and data management. Even though many countries have shown interest, and DPIs carry the potential to evolve into a vital marker of India's soft power, its global proliferation is fraught with structural issues.

“India has attempted to leverage its domestic tech economy to position itself as a solutions provider. For instance, in recent years, New Delhi has pushed for transnational adoption of digital public infrastructures (DPI), highlighting its domestic success story.”

Meanwhile, the pandemic drove home the realization that import disruptions are an ever-looming prospect that cannot be ignored. Consequently, India has accelerated the process of diversifying its GVCs. While this is undoubtedly a good aim for the medium to long term, it is not without costs in the short run. India is banking on the augmentation of domestic capacity through schemes such as production-linked incentives (PLIs) that

provide performance-based financial incentives for domestic production. Until November 2023, PLI schemes have resulted in the production/sales of INR 8.61 lakh crore and generated employment (direct and indirect) for over 6.78 lakh people.¹⁰⁹ Yet, low-cost imports remain critical to India's manufacturing base. In recent years, New Delhi has struggled to reconcile a key concern: Even if Indian production and exports see an increase, they may come with a proportional increase in imports (mainly from China) in raw materials, components, and other intermediary products, thereby limiting gains.

Over the last decade, India has also sought or accelerated economic engagement outside its neighborhood. For instance, over the past decade, India has increased its credit flow to 42 African countries, now at roughly USD 12 billion (38% of all credit extended by India).¹¹⁰ In fact, India has emerged as the second-largest provider of credit to the continent after China.¹¹¹ Such LoCs and broader economic engagement have catalyzed India's leading companies to bag and execute projects across sectors in challenging markets. This, in turn, facilitates convergence between Indian business interests and strategic national objectives.¹¹²

“In recent years, New Delhi has struggled to reconcile a key concern: Even if Indian production and exports see an increase, they may come with a proportional increase in imports (mainly from China) in raw materials, components, and other intermediary products, thereby limiting gains.”

Adaptations

India has realized the significance of expanding its presence in global markets, as evidenced by flagship programs such as 'Make in India for the World'. Even as New Delhi has looked toward bilateral trade agreements to facilitate this process, India's reluctance to join Regional Trade Agreements (RTAs) implicates its seeming inability to embrace trade to its strategic advantage.

India's journey towards free trade and multilateralism has always been challenging. During and beyond the 1991 crisis, New Delhi adopted a liberal trade policy. Yet, India remained reluctant to embrace second- or third-generation trade reforms, primarily due to its experience of burgeoning trade deficits with trade agreement countries. In turn, this inevitably slowed down India's economic liberalization and participation in GVCs.

Over the last decade, India has tried to reverse its economic isolationism. New Delhi has signed four FTAs since 2021, after nine years of no agreements.¹¹³ The latest Trade and Economic Partnership Agreement (TEPA) with EFTA countries (Switzerland, Iceland, Norway, Liechtenstein), signed in March 2024, secured a binding commitment for India of USD 100 billion in investment and 1 million direct jobs over the next 15 years.¹¹⁴

Nevertheless, India's decision to exit the Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership (RCEP), mainly due to concerns over the trade deficit with China and stay out of the Comprehensive and Progressive Trans-Pacific Partnership (CPTPP), arguably due to non-consideration of New Delhi's key demands, means that India finds itself outside of both mega RTAs in its region.¹¹⁵

Similarly, even as India has always supported multilateralism in the World Trade Organisation (WTO) and elsewhere, it has avoided critical discussions on services, e-commerce, and other areas at the WTO. In doing so, it has revealed an ambivalence to deeper economic engagement.

“Over the last decade, India has tried to reverse its economic isolationism. New Delhi has signed four FTAs since 2021, after nine years of no agreements.”

Conclusion

As new models of trade diplomacy emerge, the use of tariffs has lost relative importance. Economic diplomacy has instead shifted to focus on national regulatory laws in the production and consumption of goods and services and the technical barriers associated with them. This is coupled with a growing global emphasis on compliance with quality standards, environmental laws, and social responsibility mandated by different countries, such as the EU's CBAM. In this context, Indian exporters and businesses will face new challenges. On the other hand, with several developed countries dealing with an aging population, India has an opportunity to work towards international worker mobility for its young workforce.

Finally, beyond technology gains and trade agreements, India also needs access to transport and economic corridors to enhance its economic security, create pathways to facilitate exports and seek deeper economic integration with the rest of the world.



India's Defense Posture

India's unsettled borders with China and Pakistan (in Jammu and Kashmir and Ladakh) necessitate a strong deterrent military capability. Over the last decade, developments on both borders and the government's stated focus on national security have resulted in a review of how India visualizes the use of military power in concert with diplomacy. After the 2020 standoff with China at the LAC, resolution of the issue and escalation prevention have become the predominant objective. However, this has also triggered a shift in the Indian military from dissuasive to persuasive deterrence with regard to its posture against China. In addition, the expansion of China's naval activity in the Indian Ocean Region and the further deepening of the China-Pakistan axis (both in the continental and maritime domain) has accelerated India's maritime capacity enhancement and cooperation with like-minded partners.

Shifts

Pakistan

The India-Pakistan relationship has changed significantly in the last decade. When the new government came to power in 2014, it initially attempted to stabilize the Indo-Pak relationship, as evidenced by PM Modi's visit to Lahore in 2015 and the side-line meetings in multilateral summits before the visit.¹¹⁶ However, with the Pathankot attacks right after the visit, followed by intense instability within J&K due to the Burhan Wani killings and, ultimately, the Uri attack, this appetite for diplomacy was significantly reduced.¹¹⁷

Ceasefire violations numbered in the thousands each year, with almost no significant engagement at the diplomatic level. By 2019, with the airstrikes following the Balakot terrorist attack,¹¹⁸ India's propensity to use limited force against Pakistan to deter terrorism had also increased. This proclivity notwithstanding, both states had enough incentives to agree to a fresh ceasefire by 2021 primarily due to other external threats (such as at the Line of Actual Control for India).¹¹⁹ Yet, India's response to the Pathankot and Uri terror attacks shows that India has adopted a more assertive approach against Pakistan, using ground and air power to respond to major terrorist strikes.

“India’s response to the Pathankot and Uri terror attacks shows that India has adopted a more assertive approach against Pakistan, using ground and air power to respond to major terrorist strikes”

Within Jammu & Kashmir, the Indian security establishment has improved its counter-terrorism capacities. Reaching a peak in 2018, just before the abrogation of Article 370, the number of terrorism-related killings has been on a consistent decline.¹²⁰ 2023 stands out as the year with the lowest number of such deaths over the past

decade. At the international level, the Indian government has made consistent efforts to use the global norm against terrorism to bring international focus on Pakistan’s use of proxy fighters against India.



China

Enhancing military capability along the Line of Actual Control (LAC) had commenced before 2014. These included a shift in air bases from west to east, raising two mountain divisions, a mountain strike corps, and additional forces for the northern borders by the Indian Army.¹²¹ However, there was a belief that China could be handled by politico-diplomatic means, which led to a curtailment in raising the mountain strike corps.

Despite the Chumar incident in 2014 and the extended crisis in Doklam in 2017, the belief remained that negotiated settlements were possible.¹²² A critical watershed moment in the 2014-2024 arc was the incursions in Eastern Ladakh in 2020.¹²³ The Indian government has since realigned its troops from the western borders to face China, raised additional forces, and accelerated infrastructure development. The Indian

Army's build-up of forces is now permanent, and there is unlikely to be any significant reduction, even if the two countries find a solution to the current impasse.

Therefore, the Indian military has now shifted focus to China in its war plans. This includes the identification of future frictional geographies along the LAC and in the IOR. Through joint exercises, it has also increased its efforts to work with like-minded partners such as the US, Australia, the UK, France, etc. Capacity development on cyberwarfare and threats from emerging and disruptive technologies have become a focus area, and instances of crisis intelligence sharing (such as the one seen during the Galwan crisis, where the US provided actionable satellite imagery) have increased.

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However, managing the situation at the LAC has been challenging for India. At one level, the Indian government downplays the situation, stating that no Indian territory was lost in the 2020 Chinese incursions in Eastern Ladakh. On the other hand, India insists on a return to the status quo ante as it existed before 2020. The successful management of this contradiction reflects India's approach, suggesting a desire not to escalate while remaining firm in its demands.

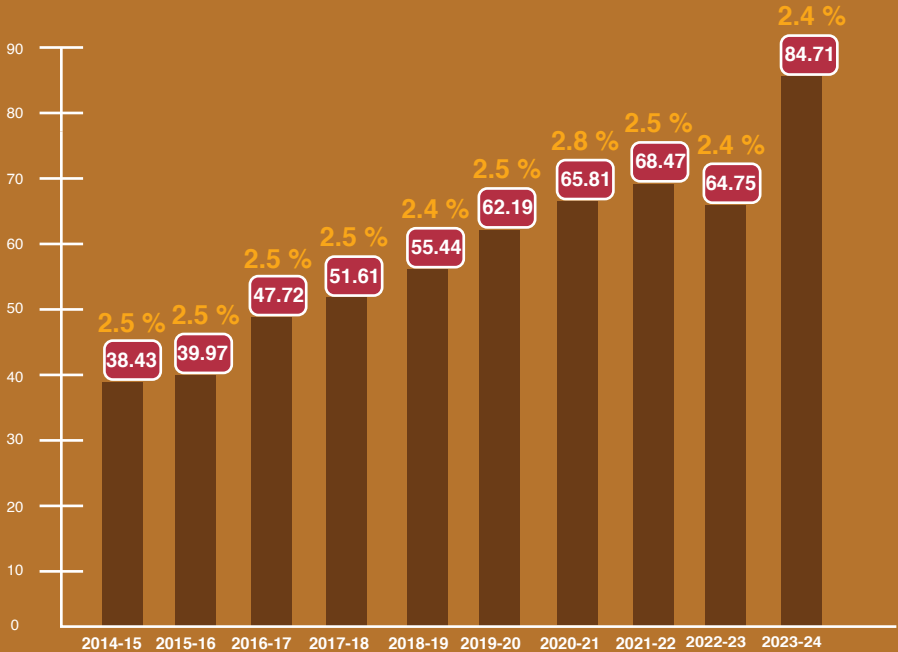
Accelerations

Defense Reforms

Since 2014, the government has undertaken several defense reforms. The Chief of Defence Staff was appointed in 2020 to bring about greater integration and jointness in the three services. The government is pushing for self-reliance in the defense industry. Between 2020 and 2023, the government notified more than 500 items that would be progressively banned for imports between December 2021 and December 2032. In the 2024 defense budget, 75% of the capital acquisition budget has been earmarked for procurement from local companies.¹²⁴

Indian Military Expenditure and % Share of GDP¹²⁵

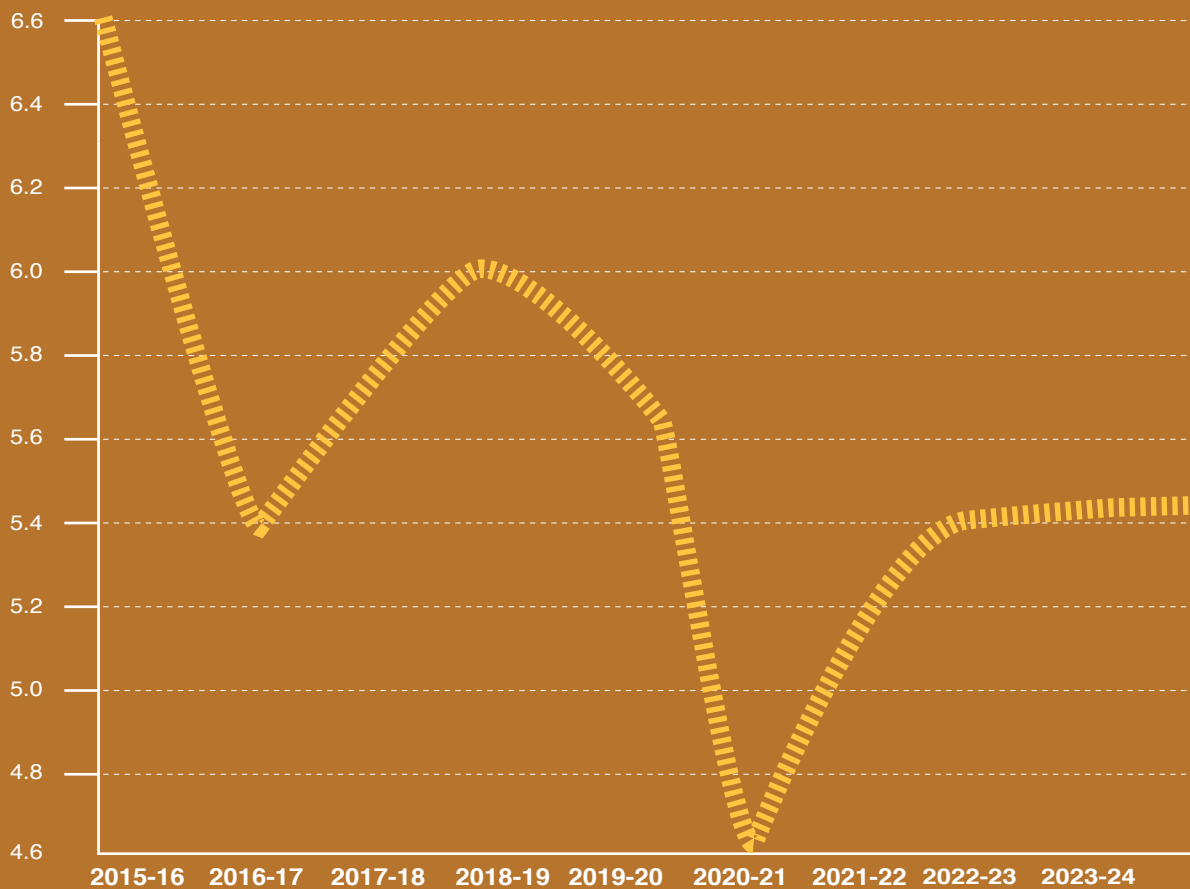
In US\$ Billion



The government also introduced the Agnipath recruitment model, under which all soldiers would be recruited for four years, after which 25% would be retained for permanent service. The scheme has seen divided opinion among military experts and political parties.¹²⁶

While military capability development is continuing, there are some key challenges. The structure of the defense budget shows that 70% of funds are going into revenue expenditure while spending on modernization is slightly above 20%. Moreover, while the push for self-reliance is essential, canceling many projects for foreign equipment that were essential for the military creates short-term capability gaps.

DRDO's % Share of Defense Budget¹²⁷



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Technology adoption in the military also suffers from a lack of funds for R&D. A December 2023 Standing Committee on Defence report on the working of the DRDO notes that out of the total allocation of INR 23,263.89 crores in 2023-24, the actual R&D budget was only INR 5,000 crores, which is 21.5% of the total DRDO budget estimates. Moreover, 25% of this amount, or INR 1,300 crores, was earmarked for the private sector.¹²⁸

The push for self-reliance in defense equipment has gained momentum that will show visible results in the coming years. In line with this momentum are initiatives like the IDEX, Indus X, corporatization of the DRDO, defense corridors, and greater industry-military fusion. However, major weapon platforms will still need to be imported over the next few years until the Indigenous defense industry matures.

Adaptations

India's immediate maritime environment has witnessed immense churn across the last decade, with significantly higher PLA Navy presence and a spike in non-traditional threats off the Gulf of Aden. This, combined with a rejuvenation of extra-regional interest in the Indo-Pacific, injected new life into arrangements such as the Quad and India's willingness to participate. The increase in New Delhi's focus on the maritime arena has been especially evident in the Indian Navy's adaptations to external churn and the internal desire to maximize gains in response. This is reflected in outlook, acquisitions, and missions.

Outlook

As the government unveiled newer and broader maritime initiatives (such as SAGAR-2015 and IPOI-2019) at the policy level, the Indian Navy (IN) reflected this proactive shift in its doctrine – expanding its primary area of interest in 2015 to include the Red Sea, the Gulf of Oman and Aden and their littoral regions. Since maritime trade corridors form significant sections of India’s new connectivity initiatives, the Navy’s role as a preferred security partner has only increased.

Procurement

As the Indian military looks to pivot away from single-source dependence on Russia, the IN seeks to be a 200-ship force by 2030 through new partnerships with Western firms. With a sustained focus on technology transfer, the Navy’s new partnerships for surface and subsurface platforms strongly focus on extended-range deployments. The Indian Air Force’s attempts to transition into an aerospace force only expand the room for newer defense partnerships.

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Missions

While the IN has scaled up its traditional presence in the IOR to counter both resurgent piracy as well as new threats to maritime security (such as the Houthis), IN warships have undertaken significant port calls both in its neighborhood as well as in Southeast Asia. Here, the IN has supplemented India’s strategic engagement with SEA states (and new defense engagements), even as it has drawn closer than ever before to the US Navy (with expanded exercises, extending to the tri-service level).

Hence, even as delays and bureaucratic hurdles continue to plague India's traditionally slow defense acquisition process, its naval and air forces have adapted to reflect India's proactive position in other areas. In early 2024, the Navy undertook its largest-ever mission-based deployment in the Indian Ocean, proving India's new and enduring maritime focus.

Conclusion

India has experienced a paradigm shift in its security policy over the last decade, catalyzed by the evolving nature of its relationships with Pakistan and China and a growing Chinese presence in the IOR. The proactive measures against Pakistan post-terrorist attacks and the recalibration of military focus towards China following border standoffs signal a more assertive stance. The push for service integration and the drive towards self-reliance in the defense industry represent significant reforms to modernize and streamline the military. The coming years will be crucial in determining the efficacy of these strategies as India continues to manage its unsettled borders and enhance its military prowess.



Tech Diplomacy in Foreign Policy

India's successful creation of an accessible, scalable, and affordable digital public infrastructure has attracted the attention of the developed world and the interest of countries in the Global South. This has given rise to the need for greater attention to tech diplomacy in India's foreign policy.

Shifts

Globally, the past decade has revealed two key trends: large-scale technological changes that are now being viewed as the Fourth Industrial Revolution; and the role of these changes in shaping the geopolitics of the 21st century. These reorientations impact India's policy choices, thereby requiring appropriate policy responses.

After independence, India managed to catch the tail end of the Third Industrial Revolution, marking the Electronics Age that had given birth to the transistor, the IC, computers, the early internet, and the worldwide web. The current revolution is best described as the Age of Digital Networks (AND). With Moore's Law squeezing billions of transistors onto an IC and plummeting computing and broadband connectivity costs, human lives and societies have become increasingly digitalized. Artificial Intelligence (AI), quantum computing, robotics, synthetic biology, nanoscience, 3-D printing, autonomous mobility, and the Internet of Things (IoT) are some of the cutting-edge technologies defining the contours of the Fourth Industrial Revolution.

The Fourth Industrial Revolution has two unique characteristics compared to earlier industrial revolutions. First, nuclear, space, and the early internet emerged from U.S. government-funded research, but the Digital Network revolution has come out of private Silicon Valley start-ups. Also, nuclear, space, sensors, radars, the internet, and GPS were created first as defense technologies and then spun off into the commercial world. This time, it is the other way around.

Second, this revolution has spawned in a post-Cold War era, an age of globalization leading to broader dissemination accompanied by global supply chains. The unipolar world of the 1990s was widely interpreted to mean that a Western-led liberal rule-based global order was there to stay. Most strategic analysts were convinced that after the breakup of the Soviet Union, Russia would be part of a democratic Europe, and an economically integrated and prosperous China would become more politically open. Though these assessments have been upended, both factors have accelerated the pace of change.

Accelerations

The volume of data exploded as human beings' and societies' physical, social, and biological lives went digital, and 'data' began to be described as the new oil. Between 2000 and 2020, the cost of data storage dropped by an order of magnitude of nine, as did the cost of data computation.¹²⁹ The power efficiency of chips went up by an order of twelve, increasing data transmission speeds. Consequently, this pace is visible in AI. In 2018, Open AI used 117 million parameters for its first large language model using generative pre-trained transformer architecture. Five years later, when it launched Chat GPT 3, the number of parameters on which it was trained went up to 176 billion, and the following year, GPT 4 was more capable with 1.7 trillion parameters.¹³⁰

New concerns were also taking shape. Governments worldwide began to worry about the winner-takes-all logic driving the digital marketplace. If China is concerned about the growth of Alibaba (China has dealt with it in its fashion), anti-trust concerns surfaced about Google, Meta, Amazon, Apple, and Microsoft.¹³¹ After ChatGPT exploded, Nvidia was added, leading to GAMMAN, an unwieldy acronym. Together, these companies dominate the mobile and compute world, data centers, search engines, and social media, and the development of platforms and foundational models.



Meanwhile, geopolitics intervened as the assumptions about China and Russia were belied, and geopolitical fractures were visible by the end of the first decade of the 21st century. The U.S.-China rivalry began shifting from competition to confrontation and has moved up a notch to containment and coercion through instruments of sanctions and export controls. Trade wars have given way to technology wars. China accuses the U.S. of seeking to block its rise, while the U.S. describes China as a “pacing challenge” and “the most consequential strategic competitor for the coming decades.”¹³² Openness and globalization are being re-interpreted as vulnerabilities. New terms like de-globalization, de-coupling, de-risking, resilient supply chains, friend-shoring, etc., reflect the attempts of governments to find policy responses.

Climate change and the need for green technologies are global challenges that offer no easy solutions. COVID-19 revived the threat of a worldwide pandemic in 2020. Multilateral institutions struggled to find rules that could provide a degree of equity in an increasingly unequal world. The development of mRNA vaccines has sparked new research and investment in synthetic biology, driven by digital networks and AI. It also made many countries aware of their dependency on China for a wide range of manufactured goods and intermediates and the vulnerability of global supply chains.

For India, 2020 provided another shock. Relations with China nosedived after the Galwan incident, and despite talks at the

highest level, no resolution has been possible. This downturn impacted ties in the tech field as the focus in bilateral relations shifted from the economic to the security prism. Huawei and ZTE were excluded from the 5G trials.¹³³ Over 200 Chinese apps (social media, entertainment, and fintech) were banned. Chinese FDI in cloud services, e-commerce, fintech, and entertainment began to be increasingly scrutinized.¹³⁴

India had planned to exploit this revolution to achieve its socio-economic aspirations. Its digital public infrastructure had been built on the synergy generated by the digital identity (Aadhar), a Unified Payments Interface (begun in 2016 and today accounts for over 13 billion monthly transactions for a value of USD 25 billion) enabled by the smartphone penetration that covers 70% of India’s population.¹³⁵ With technology being weaponized, India responded with a twofold policy: building self-reliance (Atmanirbharta) and employing tech diplomacy with reliable partners to navigate changing geopolitics.

“With technology being weaponized, India responded with a twofold policy: building self-reliance (Atmanirbharta) and employing tech diplomacy with reliable partners to navigate changing geopolitics.”

Adaptations

New measures have been adopted in the domestic sector to increase self-reliance. The defense and space sectors have traditionally been in the public sector domain. Private sector companies were involved as sub-contractors tasked with build-to-specs. This is now changing, and the private sector's role is expanding. Special schemes are being launched to incentivize small and medium-scale enterprises to engage with the government. Traditionally, government procurement is seen as cumbersome by small and medium entities, and both the Ministry of Defense and the Indian Space Research Organisation have taken steps to simplify the process.

The second step is the Production Linked Incentive scheme.¹³⁶ This scheme broadly applies to manufacturing but would benefit the tech-related manufacturing sector. Tailormade incentive schemes have also been announced for semiconductors, intended to attract potential foreign technology and investment partners.

With these domestic policy initiatives, Indian diplomacy has actively explored new partnerships with selected countries. The most ambitious is the iCET (Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies) launched in 2022 with the U.S. It covers semiconductors, AI, space, next-generation telecommunications, quantum computing, biotechnology, advanced materials, critical minerals and rare earth processing technologies, digital connectivity, and defense innovation.¹³⁷

An India-EU Trade and Technology Council was set up in 2022 with three working groups covering Strategic and Digital Technologies and Governance, Green and Clean Energy Technology, and Trade Investment and Resilient Supply Chains.¹³⁸ As part of preparing the EU for the digital age, it has established digital partnerships with Canada, Japan, Singapore, and South

Korea, each leveraging the unique strengths of these states.

In 2023, India launched an initiative with Japan on semiconductor ecosystems focusing on design, manufacture, equipment research, talent development, and resilient supply chains.¹³⁹ France has been India's long-standing strategic partner, particularly in space and defense sectors; 'Horizon 2047', issued during Prime Minister Modi's visit last year, sharpens the focus on digital technologies. The Quad, consisting of Australia, Japan, the U.S.A, and India, has set up six working groups – Climate change, critical and emerging technologies, cyber, health, space, and infrastructure, with many overlaps with various digital technologies.¹⁴⁰

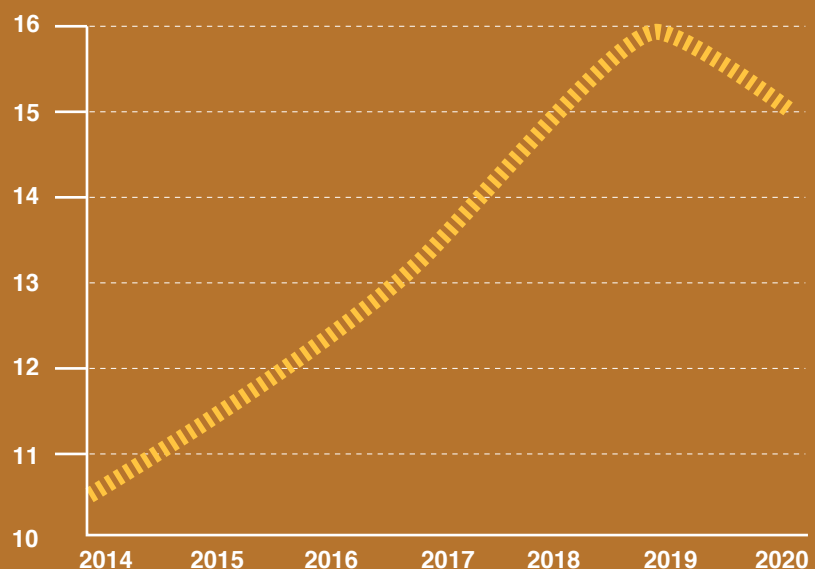
Conclusion

Clearly, Indian diplomacy is adapting to accelerating shifts. Different parts of the government are taking the lead with other partners, reflecting a lack of coherence and absence of coordination. In recent years, the Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) has established new divisions like Cyber Diplomacy, E-governance, IT, and New Emerging and Strategic Technologies.¹⁴¹ Still, these are poorly staffed and have yet to make their presence felt. Appointing a senior and qualified Tech Ambassador is necessary to pull together the different strands within MEA and provide a lead to get other government departments engaged - Electronics and IT, Commerce, Industrial Promotion, Finance, Human Resources, Defence, Space, Biotechnology, and Science and Technology, as well as business associations and research institutions.

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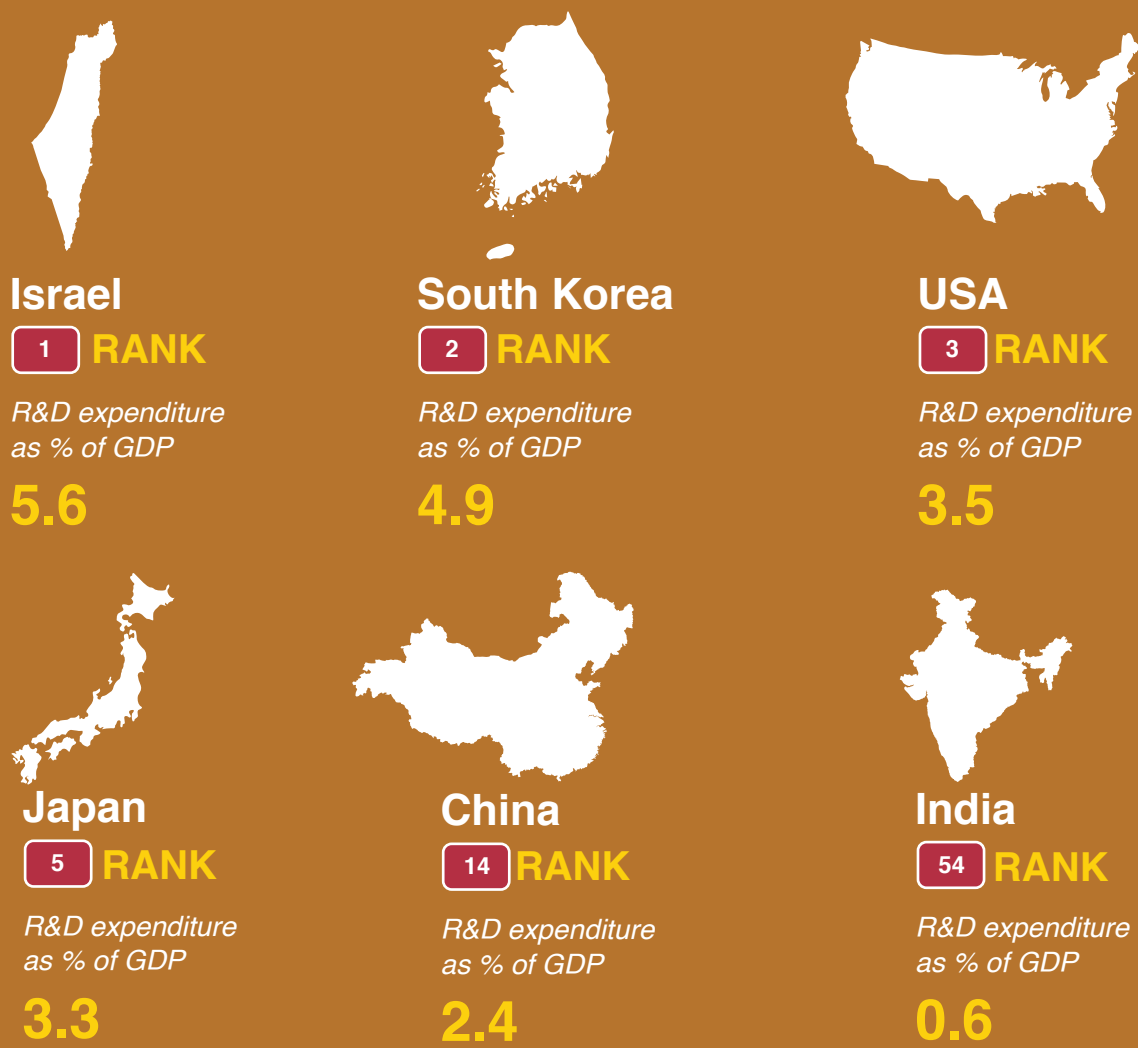
National Expenditure on Research and Development (R&D)¹⁴²

In US\$ Billion



The challenge for India is to have a holistic appreciation of the innovation ecosystem in India and then map it with the ecosystems in partner countries. Given differences in scale, composition, and governance structures, making these technology partnerships productive and mutually beneficial is a complex but necessary exercise. Also, different countries have different strengths and interests, so there cannot be a one-size-fits-all policy.

R&D expenditure as % of GDP¹⁴³



In specific tech sectors, it should be possible to identify one lead research institute for rare earths or biotechnology. For semiconductors, a mission approach will need to be adopted. In some cases, IPR could pose difficulties that must be worked around. Indian states are competing to set up industries in some tech sectors today by providing land, road, rail, air connectivity, and dedicated power incentives.

Just as our institutions and private sector would like to harness the Fourth Industrial Revolution to address India's socio-economic, health, educational, and developmental challenges, other developing countries are interested in learning from the India story. This provides a new opportunity for Indian diplomacy in the Global South.

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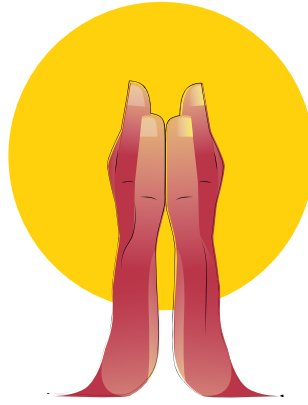
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The term "mudra," derived from Sanskrit, has several meanings including seal, mark, sign, or currency. In the context of Buddhism, it specifically refers to the hand and arm gestures that are performed during ritual practice or depicted in images of buddhas, bodhisattvas, tantric deities, and other Buddhist representations (Buswell and Lopez, The Princeton Dictionary of Buddhism, 2013). Mudras are commonly linked with visual depictions of the Buddha (or Buddharupa), and they convey different emotions and symbolism, representing the subtle expressions of the Buddha's states of realization.



Karana Mudra
Gesture with which demons are expelled.



Varada Mudra
Fulfillment of all wishes; the gesture of charity.



Dharmachakra Mudra
The gesture of teaching usually interpreted as turning the Wheel of Law.



Bhumisparsha Mudra
Touching the earth as Gautama did, to invoke the earth as witness to the truth of his words.



Tarjani Mudra
Threat, warning.



Abhaya Mudra
Gesture of reassurance, blessing, and protection.



Uttarabodhi Mudra
The gesture of supreme enlightenment.



Namaskara Mudra
Gesture of greeting, prayer and adoration.



Vitarka Mudra
Intellectual argument, discussion. The circle formed by the thumb and index finger.



Dhyana Mudra
The gesture of absolute balance, of mediation.