



## Covid-19 & India's Foreign Policy

This article is based on [“A COVID blot on India’s foreign policy canvas”](#) which was published in The Hindu on 05/05/2021. It talks about the impact of covid-19 on India's foreign policy.

The second wave of Covid-19 and its agonising consequences has prompted India to accept foreign aid after a gap of 17 years. This is bound to have far-reaching strategic implications for India.

As a direct consequence of the pandemic, India’s claim to regional primacy and leadership may take a major hit. These in turn will impact the content and conduct of India’s foreign policy in the years to come.

### Impact of Covid-19 on India's Foreign Policy

- **Regional Primacy:** India’s traditional primacy in the region was built on a mix of material aid, political influence and historical ties.
  - Now, India’s political influence is steadily declining, its ability to materially help the neighbourhood will shrink in the wake of Covid-19, and its historical ties alone may not maintain India’s regional hegemony.
- **Chinese Intrusion into India’s Strategic Space:** China, due to its chequebook diplomacy has been already pushing India in its strategic space i.e. Indian subcontinent.
  - The second wave of Covid-19 has quickened this process, as India’s ability to stand up to China stands vastly diminished today: in material power, in terms of balance of power considerations, and political will.
- **Affecting India’s Engagement With Quad:** Covid-19, will prevent any ambitious military spending or modernisation plans and limit the country’s attention on global diplomacy and regional geopolitics.
  - With reduced military spending and lesser diplomatic attention to regional geopolitics, India’s ability to project power and contribute to the growth of the Quad will be uncertain.
- **Affecting Diplomacy in Indo-Pacific:** India is pivotal to the Indo-Pacific project, but with India’s inability to take a lead role and China wooing smaller states in the region will eventually turn the balance of power in China’s favor.
- **Economics Affecting Geo-politics:** Covid-19 has led to a general economic distress, a fall in foreign direct investment and industrial production, and a rise in unemployment will also limit India’s strategic ambitions.
  - Post-Covid-19, Indian foreign policy is therefore likely to be a holding operation.
- **US-China Relations:** With the rise of China and India’s Covid-19-related troubles could prompt the US to normalise relations with China.
- **India-China Relations:** Other potential impact of COVID-19’s devastating return and the damage it has done would be that India might be forced to be more conciliatory towards China.
- **India-US Relations:** A post-COVID-19 India might find it harder to resist demands of a closer military relationship with the U.S.

## Way Forward: New Opportunities

- **Reinvigoration of SAARC:** Covid-19 will also open up new regional opportunities for cooperation especially under the ambit of SAARC, an initiative that already saw some small beginnings during the first wave of the pandemic.
- **Focusing on Regional Health Multilateralism:** India might do well to get the region's collective focus on 'regional health multilateralism' to promote mutual assistance and joint action on health emergencies such as this.
  - Classical geopolitics should be brought on par with health diplomacy, environmental concerns and regional connectivity in South Asia.

## Conclusion

As the diplomatic bandwidth for expansive foreign policy goals would be limited, in post-Covid-19, Indian foreign policy is unlikely to be business as usual. However, Covid-19 may have opened precisely such an opportunity to the world's least integrated region.

### ***Drishti Mains Question***

Discuss the impact of Covid-19 pandemic on Indian foreign policy.

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