



Foreign Policy of India

For Prelims: United Nation Security Council (UNSC), United Nations General Assembly (UNGA), International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), Human Rights Commission

For Mains: Current Challenges in India's Foreign Policy and way forward

Why in News?

On the geopolitical and diplomatic stage, 2022 was a difficult year, especially following Russia's invasion of Ukraine.

How did India handle the Ukraine Crisis?

- **Following Non-Alignment Policy:**
 - The war in Ukraine saw the government spell out its [version of “non-alignment”](#), as it sought to keep a balance in the growing polarisation between the U.S. and the [European Union](#) on one side, and Russia on the other.
 - On one side the Indian **Prime Minister made his discomfort with the war clear directly to Russian President Vladimir Putin with the words “This era is not for war”** and on the other hand **refused to accept western sanctions, growing military and oil trade with Russia**, and seeking [rupee-based payment mechanisms](#) to facilitate them.
- **Refusing to Vote on the Resolution:**
 - Most significantly, in more than a dozen resolutions at the [United Nation Security Council \(UNSC\)](#), [United Nations General Assembly \(UNGA\)](#), [International Atomic Energy Agency \(IAEA\)](#), [Human Rights Commission](#), and other multilateral platforms seeking to censure Russia for the invasion and humanitarian crisis, **India chose to abstain.**
 - The Indian Foreign Policy said that India's policy was guided by its national interests, telling those who expected India to take sides, “Tough luck if our policies do not meet your expectations”.

What were the Other Highlights in Foreign Policy in 2022?

- **Returning to Free Trade Agreements (FTAs):**
 - In 2022, **India returned to FTAs**, after a break of several years when India had called for a review of all [FTAs](#), scrapped all Bilateral Investment Treaties (BITs) and walked out of the 15-nation Asian [Regional Comprehensive Economic Partnership \(RCEP\)](#).
 - In 2022, **India signed trade agreements with the UAE** and **Australia**, and hopes to progress on talks with the EU, [Gulf Cooperation Council](#) and Canada for others.
- **Joining US led IPEF:**
 - India also joined the [U.S.-led Indo-Pacific Economic Forum \(IPEF\)](#), although it later decided to stay out of trade talks.

What about Ties with Neighbours?

- **Sri Lanka:**
 - India's foreign policy was marked by **economic assistance to Sri Lanka in the midst of its collapse.**
- **Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal:**
 - Foreign policy of India is marked by **regional trade and energy agreements with Bangladesh, Bhutan, and Nepal** that could see a South Asian energy grid emerge.
- **Central Asian countries:**
 - India has also strengthened ties with **Central Asian countries** on connectivity.
 - India has restarted efforts to revive the much-delayed **Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline project.**
 - India also discussed the best use of the **International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC).**
 - Steps have also been taken to operationalize the **Chabahar port** in Iran which can provide a secure, viable and unhindered access to the sea for the Central Asian countries.
 - In addition, the **Ashgabat Agreement** on International Transport and Transit Corridor (ITTC) was discussed to enhance connectivity between India and Central Asian countries.
- **Afghanistan and Myanmar:**
 - The government kept channels open with repressive regimes like Afghanistan's Taliban and the Myanmar Junta, opening a "technical mission" in Kabul and sending the foreign secretary to Myanmar to discuss border cooperation.
 - Earlier in December, 2022 **India abstained on a UNSC vote calling for Myanmar to end violence and release political prisoners.**
- **Iran and Pakistan:**
 - With Iran too, where protests against the killing of an activist have brought thousands onto the streets, India has steered clear of any criticism.
 - However, ties with Pakistan remain flat, with a big showdown at the UN in December, 2022 between the foreign ministers of the two nations.

What Progress has been made in the LAC-China Standoff?

- Despite a visit to Delhi by China's Foreign Minister and disengagement at some stand-off points, tensions at the **Line of Actual Control** remained high, and an unsuccessful Chinese PLA attempt to take Indian posts at Yangtse in Arunachal Pradesh ended the year, signaling more violent clashes in 2023.
- In spite of the fraught state of relations, India is due to host the Chinese President twice in 2023, at the **G-20** and **SCO summits**, opening up the possibility for talks to end the standoff.

What are the Current Challenges in India's Foreign Policy?

- **Pakistan-China Strategic Nexus:**
 - The most formidable threat **India faces today is from the Pakistan-China strategic nexus that seeks to change the status quo** at the contested borders and undermine India's strategic security.
 - China's aggressive actions since May 2020 to change the status quo at the Line of Actual Control have severely damaged Sino-Indian relations.
- **China's Expansion:**
 - For India, **the issue of how to balance China's forays into South Asia** and the **Indian Ocean region** is another concern.
 - Under the rubric of China's much touted **Belt and Road Initiative (BRI)**, it is developing **China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)** in Pakistan (through the Indian territory in the Pakistan-occupied Kashmir), building China-Nepal Economic Corridor, China-Myanmar Economic Corridor and dual use infrastructure in the littorals of the Indian Ocean.
- **Balancing Big Power Relations:**
 - India's strategic autonomy **precludes New Delhi to join any military alliance or**

strategic partnership that is inimical to another country or group of countries.

- Traditionally, the **West has perceived India closer to the Soviet Union / Russia.** These perceptions are accentuated with India actively participating in SCO, **BRICS** and **Russia-India-China (RIC) forum.**
- For India to balance an assertive China, it has to rely on external balancing in the Indo-Pacific to overcome the security dilemmas posed by the Pakistan-China hybrid threats.
- India's participation in **QUAD**, signing of foundational agreements with US, Japan, France, UK and Indonesia should be seen from that perspective.
- **Refugee Crisis:** In spite of not being a party to the **1951 Refugee Convention** and its 1967 Protocol, **India has been one of the largest recipients of refugees in the world.**
 - The challenge here is to **balance protection of human rights and national interest.** As the Rohingya crisis unfolds, there is still a lot that India can do to facilitate the finding of long-term solutions.
 - These actions will be key in determining India's regional and global standing on human rights.

Way Forward

- India **should look forward to creating an external environment which is conducive for an inclusive development of India** so that the benefits of growth can reach the poorest of the poor in the country.
 - And ensure that India's voice is heard on global forums and that India is able to influence world opinion on issues of global dimensions such as **terrorism, climate change, disarmament, reforms of institutions of global governance.**
- As rightly said by Mahatma Gandhi, **politics without principles and ethics would be disastrous. India should move towards collective development with an ethical persuasion** reclaiming its moral leadership in the world at large.
- As we live in a dynamic world, **India's foreign policy is therefore geared up to be proactive, flexible, and pragmatic** in order to respond quickly to changing situations.

UPSC Civil Services Examination Previous Year Question (PYQ)

Q. At the international level, bilateral relations between most nations are governed on the policy of promoting one's own national interest without any regard for the interest of other nations. This leads to conflicts and tension between nations. How can ethical consideration help resolve such tensions? Discuss with specific examples. **(2015)**

Q. In respect of India-Sri Lanka relations, discuss how domestic factors influence foreign policy. **(2013)**

Q. 'The long-sustained image of India as a leader of the oppressed and marginalised nations has disappeared on account of its new found role in the emerging global order.' Elaborate. **(2019)**

Source: TH