



## **A Review Study of India’s Foreign Policies in South Asia with Focus on Nepal and Bangladesh**

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### **Abstract**

India's foreign policy has always been pivotal in regards to its South Asian neighbors, particularly Nepal and Bangladesh. India's relationships with both of these nations go back quite a way, and they've had their ups and downs throughout the years. India's foreign policy have seen significant shifts since 2014. Secondary sources such as scholarly journals, government documents, and policy papers were analyzed qualitatively to form the basis of this study. Strategic and economic objectives, regional security concerns, and historical and cultural linkages are all seen to play a role in India's foreign policy towards Nepal and Bangladesh. The study's authors believe that, to strengthen bilateral ties and enhance regional stability, India should take a more nuanced and balanced stance toward its neighbors.

**Objective:** The purpose of this article is to investigate the elements that have shaped India's foreign policy toward Nepal and Bangladesh. Additionally, developments from 2014 to 2022 will be dissected and studied.

**Keywords:** India, Foreign Policies, Nepal, Bangladesh, South Asia

### **Introduction**

Concerns about India's foreign policy toward its South Asian neighbors have persisted for a long time. India's foreign policy towards its neighbors is impacted by a number of variables, including the country's strategic and economic interests, regional security concerns, and historical and cultural links to the area. India's longstanding bilateral connections include those with its South Asian neighbors Nepal and Bangladesh. To the north, India has Nepal, and to the east, it has a lengthy land border with Bangladesh. There have been many ups and downs in India's foreign policy regarding these two nations.

The goal of this study is to examine India's foreign policy toward Nepal and Bangladesh and to determine what variables have shaped those policies. Secondary sources such scholarly journals, government documents, and policy papers will be used in the study. The study will also look at how India's foreign policy has changed through time in respect to these two nations, as well as the historical backdrop of India's ties with them. By the end of the study, the main problems and potential solutions for India's strained ties with Nepal and Bangladesh will be laid forth.

### **Historical Context of India’s Relations with Nepal and Bangladesh**



Traditional cultural, economic, and political links connect India to its neighbors Nepal and Bangladesh. Nepal's cultural and religious traditions have been profoundly impacted by India from ancient times. Having been a British colony till 1947, Nepal and India developed diplomatic ties following the latter's independence. India had a pivotal role in Nepal's early growth, and the two countries' relations were marked by collaboration and close links.

Nepal's ties with India were tense as the country pursued a more autonomous foreign policy in the late 1950s and early 1960s. The conflict began when Nepal made efforts to diversify its international contacts and lessen its economic reliance on India. Having established diplomatic ties with China in 1969, Nepal's relationship with India became even more tense. Nepal's relationship with India has worsened since the country proclaimed itself a constitutional monarchy in 1975.

However, prior to achieving independence in 1971, Bangladesh was a part of Pakistan. The two nations have close ties because to India's important participation in Bangladesh's freedom. However, India's ties with Bangladesh have been rocky at best throughout the years due to disagreements over illegal immigration, territorial claims, and shared water resources, among other things.

### **India's Foreign Policy towards Nepal**

Strategic and economic objectives, regional security concerns, and historical and cultural linkages have all played roles in shaping India's foreign policy towards Nepal. India's security depends heavily on Nepal, its northern neighbor. Both nations have extensive borders with one another and are deeply intertwined culturally and economically. For its economic growth, Nepal is totally reliant on India. There are growing worries about the security situation in the area as rebels travel via Nepal on their way to and from the northeastern part of India. China's rising economic and geopolitical involvement with Nepal in recent years has alarmed India, which sees it as a threat to its hegemonic position in South Asia. India's foreign policy with Nepal has been shaped in large part by the Nepalese diaspora in India.

India's attitude to Nepal abroad has changed over time, becoming more sophisticated and balanced. India has taken a firm stance of non-intervention in Nepal's domestic affairs, acknowledging the significance of Nepal's sovereignty and territorial integrity. India has been actively fostering a more welcoming environment for Nepalese tourists and striving to increase trade and tourism between the two nations. The India and Nepal Transit Treaty and the India and Nepal Friendship Treaty are only two of the accords that have contributed to solidify the already close connections between the two nations.

There are a number of problems that have plagued ties between India and Nepal, such as border conflicts, economic imbalances, and fears of Indian meddling in Nepal's internal affairs. The Kalapani region is at the center of a decades-long border dispute between the two nations. Nepal is troubled by India's trade surplus, which contributes to a larger trade imbalance. During the political crisis in Nepal in 2015–16, there were also worries of Indian meddling.



Some Significant changes in the current years (2014 to 2022):

1. Nepal-India relations: After Nepal's new Constitution was ratified and implemented in 2015, India placed a blockade at the Nepal-India border, which negatively affected ties between the two countries. As a result, tensions rose between the two countries, and Nepal looked to China for help. However, India has been making efforts to build relations with Nepal ever since, and in 2018, Prime Minister Modi visited Nepal and announced various development projects. Several agreements, notably one concerning the improvement of inland waterways, have subsequently been struck between the two nations.
2. Nepal-India-China relations: China's influence in Nepal's politics has been growing, creating rivalry for India. Massive Chinese investment has gone into Nepalese infrastructure projects, such as the building of a railway line that would eventually link Nepal and Tibet. India is now worried that China may exert too much influence in Nepal because of this. India has responded by taking moves to improve relations with Nepal, including stepping up aid for the country's economic and social growth.
3. Border security: India has been working to tighten security along its borders with Nepal and other countries. To better coordinate efforts to combat transnational crime, India and Nepal signed a memorandum of understanding on cooperation in border monitoring in 2018. India has also been building up its border infrastructure, such as roads and fence.

### **India's Foreign Policy towards Bangladesh**

Strategic and economic interests, regional security concerns, and historical and cultural linkages are only few of the reasons that have informed India's foreign policy towards Bangladesh. The easternmost country that borders India is Bangladesh, and the two nations have a lengthy shared land border. India's 'Act East' strategy prioritizes expanding the country's ties to Southeast Asia, and Bangladesh is a vital partner in this effort.

Illegal immigration, border conflicts, and water sharing are just a few of the problems that have plagued ties between India and Bangladesh. India is concerned about the high rate of illegal immigration from Bangladesh, hence it has taken many measures to curb this problem. Long a source of tension between the two nations, the exchange of enclaves in 2015 marked the end of their border dispute. The two nations have been unable to settle their differences over the use of the Teesta River's water despite extensive negotiations.

Security concerns in the area have also impacted India's foreign policy towards Bangladesh. Several terrorist organizations are active in Bangladesh, making the nation a target for terrorist attacks. India and Bangladesh have been collaborating extensively to find solutions to this problem, and in 2017 they even signed a bilateral pact on security cooperation.

Economic considerations have also played a role in shaping India's foreign policy toward Bangladesh. India has taken many steps to increase trade and investment with Bangladesh in order to fortify the country's already-solid economic connections to the Southeast Asian nation. India



and Bangladesh have signed various agreements to strengthen their economic connections, notably the India-Bangladesh Coastal Shipping Agreement and the India-Bangladesh Trade Agreement.

Some significant changes in the current years (2014-2022)

1. Bangladesh-India relations: The level of cooperation between Bangladesh and India has increased dramatically in recent years. The Land Boundary Agreement ended a decades-long border dispute when Prime Minister Modi visited Bangladesh in 2015. Other agreements, such as one on military cooperation and another on the improvement of the port of Chittagong, have also been struck between the two nations. India has provided substantial financial and technical help to Bangladesh for a wide range of development initiatives.
2. Bangladesh-India-China relations: Increased Chinese involvement in Bangladesh has included funding for infrastructure projects like the Padma Bridge. Because of this, many in India are worried about China expanding its influence in Bangladesh. But India has been taking steps to offset this, including stepping up its economic and development ties with Bangladesh.

**Some other significant changes from 2014 to 2022 in India’s Foreign policies towards South Asian countries:**

1. Regional connectivity: India's foreign policy in South Asia have mostly focused on expanding the region's interconnected infrastructure. India launched the South Asian Satellite in 2015 with the aim of enhancing regional connectivity and communication. India has been attempting to improve transportation links with its neighbors, such as Nepal and Bangladesh, by means of the land, the sea, and the air. In addition, India has been a driving force behind the formation of BIMSTEC, the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation, a regional association of nations in South Asia and Southeast Asia.
2. Multilateralism: India's foreign policy in the South Asian region have been characterized by an emphasis on multilateralism. This includes the country's membership in regional organizations like the Bay of Bengal Initiative for Multi-Sectoral Technical and Economic Cooperation (BIMSTEC). India has been trying to improve commerce, investment, and communication with these nations. To further regional cooperation and stability, India has been actively interacting with other regional powers including Japan and the United States.
3. People-to-people contacts: People-to-people ties between India and its South Asian neighbors have been a priority. Supporting international travel, cultural interactions, and academic exchanges are all part of this mission. In addition, students from these nations have been able to get scholarships to attend institutions in India.



## Conclusion

Concern has long been warranted over India's foreign policy toward its South Asian neighbors, notably Nepal and Bangladesh. India's foreign policy towards its neighbors is impacted by a number of variables, including the country's strategic and economic interests, regional security concerns, and historical and cultural links to the area. Over time, India's foreign policy toward Nepal and Bangladesh has shifted, becoming more complex and well-rounded.

Border conflicts, commercial disparities, and suspicions of Indian meddling in Nepal and Bangladesh's internal affairs are just a few of the problems that have plagued India's relations with these two countries. Nonetheless, India has maintained a policy of non-interference in its domestic affairs in order to protect its own sovereignty and territorial integrity. India has been seeking to increase trade and cultural exchange with both nations.

India's position in the area has been more precarious in recent years, especially as China's influence has grown. India's regional security has come under scrutiny as a result of China's growing economic and geopolitical ties to its neighbors. In order to meet this issue, India has been implementing its 'Act East' strategy, which involves increasing its ties to its neighbors and its involvement in Southeast Asia.

Overall, India's foreign policy towards Nepal and Bangladesh has been impacted by strategic and economic objectives, regional security concerns, and historical and cultural linkages. India has established a policy of non-interference in other countries' internal affairs because of the value it places on other nations' right to self-determination and territorial integrity. India has been seeking to increase trade and cultural exchange with both nations. However, there are still a number of problems that need to be addressed before India and its South Asian neighbors can have a lasting and robust relationship.

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