

## MODI 3.0: INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY AND IMPLICATIONS FOR PAKISTAN

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*(Views expressed in the brief are those of the author, and do not represent those of ISSI)*



**India, being the most populous country and so-called ‘largest democracy’ in terms of numbers, recently concluded its longest electoral exercise spanning over 46 days (April 19 - June 4, 2024). Failing to secure a clear majority, the Bhartiya Janata Party (BJP) formed a coalition government as part of the National Democratic Alliance (NDA). Mr. Narendra Modi took oath as India’s Prime Minister for the third consecutive term on June 9, 2024. There are obvious questions about how India’s foreign policy would fare in ‘Modi 3.0.’**

Evidently, Mr. Modi has preferred continuity over change. This is reflected in the retention of key members of his cabinet -- including Amit Shah as Home Minister, Rajnath Singh as Defence Minister, Ajit Doval as National Security Advisor, and Dr. S. Jaishankar as External Affairs Minister. With this, he apparently seeks to sustain efforts aimed at enhancing India’s close relationships with major global powers – particularly the U.S. and Russia.

For this to happen, India most would likely continue with its foreign policy concepts of ‘strategic autonomy’ and ‘multi-alignment.’ In recent years, these policy strands also obliged India to walk a tightrope. This raises the point as to how will India navigate the old pressure points during Mr. Modi’s third term. Will New Delhi recalibrate to address them; or would India continue with its standard global approach? Lastly, how India’s foreign policy approach towards global powers would impact Pakistan also demands a critical analysis.

## Partnerships under ‘Multi-alignment’

Mr. Modi’s approach towards global partnerships would largely remain unchanged; rather it would likely be further invigorated. This is because deepening its ties with *all* major powers has served India’s strategic, economic and political interests during PM Modi’s previous two terms. Therefore, India will continue to align its foreign policy in a manner that fortifies its bilateral and multilateral partnerships with major powers like the U.S. and Russia.

Efforts to deepen engagement with major powers buttresses Mr. Modi’s desire for India’s enhanced global role, which was evident from his election manifestoe and his first visit abroad to the G7 meeting in Italy. New Delhi would move to fortify ties with major powers by pursuing both ‘mini-lateralism’ and ‘multi- alignment,’ which would continue to be the driving force of its foreign policy. Under this, India would intensify cooperation with the U.S. through QUAD and I2U2, and with Russia through BRICS and SCO. India would continue to ‘ride on two boats at the same time’ and seek to balance ties with both the U.S. and Russia.

However, in return, such an ambition would make it difficult to maintain neutrality under India’s so-called ‘strategic autonomy.’ India’s desire for an enhanced global role would come at the cost of neutrality as neutrality on critical issues cannot ensure the trust of all partners. Moreover, as the tensions and mistrust between the U.S. and Russia are growing, the global environment is becoming highly contested and polarized. Under such circumstances, space for ‘fence-sitting’ is reducing. Due to this, maintaining the delicate balance and satisfying the demands of both global powers simultaneously would be increasingly challenging.

### Indo-Russia Ties Flourish<sup>1</sup>

Throughout Modi’s second term, New Delhi resisted Washington’s pressure to distance itself from Moscow. In actual fact, India forced the West to accommodate New Delhi’s interests when it came to Indo-Russia relations, especially on the Ukraine conflict. This was evident from the Joint Communiqué of the G20 Summit, hosted by India in 2023, that only evaluated the human cost of the Russia-Ukraine conflict and failed to condemn or halt the ongoing conflict. In his third term, Mr. Modi would not recalibrate ties with Russia because of Washington; rather it is more likely that he would increase engagement with President Putin, which was somewhat scaled down ever since the Russia-Ukraine conflict commenced in February 2022.

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<sup>1</sup> By Paul Sonne and Anupreeta Das, “Modi’s Moscow Visit Showcases a Less Isolated Putin, Angering Ukraine,”

PM Modi's visit to Moscow from July 8-9, 2024, for the 22<sup>nd</sup> annual India-Russia Summit demonstrates continuous efforts to enhance this Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership. However, the Indo-Russia Summit did not produce any tangible outcomes in defence procurements, which could be due to the impact of ongoing conflict. Even the remaining two out of five batteries of S-400, which were expected to be delivered by the end of 2024, are now rescheduled for delivery in 2026<sup>2</sup> - a delay of two years.

Rather the focus of the Modi-Putin Summit was more on economic cooperation extending till 2030 which aims to eliminate non-tariff/tariff barriers; enhance industrial cooperation in transport engineering, metallurgy and chemical industry; Chennai-Vladivostok (Eastern Maritime) Corridor and the International North-South Transport Corridor (INSTC); and lastly energy trade that grew significantly during the Russia-Ukraine conflict.<sup>3</sup>

This Summit would not be the last visit of Mr. Modi to Russia in 2024. He is expected to visit Russia for the BRICS Summit in October 2024 as well. This makes it two visits within a span of 3-4 months, showcasing enhanced engagement with Russia. India would uphold its multi-alignment policy to actively engage with both Russia and the West at the same time.

This is also evident from PM Modi's upcoming visit (from August 21 to 23, 2024) to Ukraine, almost a month after he met with President Putin which received significant criticism from the West. Nevertheless, it also demonstrates that India is struggling to navigate a multi-alignment minefield, where one contentious mishap can raise the stakes significantly for India.

### **Risk-filled Indo-U.S. Partnership Endures**

The momentum of the Indo-U.S. strategic partnership under PM Modi 3.0 would continue, with new phases of arms sales and agreements; however, the relationship risks becoming more transactional given that India takes U.S. partnership for granted; its ongoing global assassination drive;<sup>4</sup> and its push for a multipolar world that undermines U.S. hegemony.

Nevertheless, India would remain in the U.S.'s good books due to its growing economy, global clout, and perceived role as a so-called 'net security provider' within the 'Indo-Pacific' construct.

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<sup>2</sup> Inder Singh Bisht, "Russia Delays S-400 Air Defense System Delivery to India by 2 Years," *The Defense Post*, March 21, 2024, <https://www.thedefensepost.com/2024/03/21/russia-s-400-system-india/>

<sup>3</sup> Ministry of External Affairs India Press Release, Joint Statement following the 22nd India-Russia Annual Summit, July 9, 2024, <https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/37940/Joint+Statement+following+the+22nd+IndiaRussia+Annual+Summit>

<sup>4</sup> Michael Kugelman, "The West Eyes India's Transnational Repression," *Foreign Policy*, June 20, 2024, <https://foreignpolicy.com/2024/06/20/india-west-transnational-repression-sikh-separatist/>

Regardless of Washington's disappointments, it remains unlikely that the U.S. would reverse its 'Comprehensive Global and Strategic Partnership' with India. This is also due to Washington's priority to build India as a 'bulwark' against China and enhance its presence in the Indian and Pacific Oceans. And, therefore, the likelihood of U.S. curtailing its arms exports to India remains low.<sup>5</sup>

For the past five years, the Indo-U.S. relationship has blossomed into a 'Comprehensive Global and Strategic Partnership' as illustrated by the joint statement after PM Modi's visit to the U.S. in June 2023 that resulted in reinforcing the Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology (iCET) and allowing India access to U.S. technology including satellites, semi-conductors, 5G/6G, Quantum technology, AI applications, MQ-9B General Atomic Drones and most importantly jet engine manufacturing capabilities. India would likely seek to cash this opportunity to meet its requirements of technology and investment<sup>6</sup> for its military modernization to enhance global influence and portfolio.

In return for the U.S.'s extended support, India would neither come off the fence to give up 'strategic autonomy' nor would it give any guarantee to the U.S. to counter China, not only because of its inferior military capacity but also because this could distress Indo-Russia ties, which remains a priority for India. On the other hand, if the U.S. ignores India, it risks diluting the U.S. global influence – especially due to India's growing clout and its historic partnership with Russia as well as India's role in supporting alternative non-western groupings like BRICS.

Therefore, this growing partnership will co-exist with a conundrum.

### **Implications for Pakistan**

At the global level, India has been attempting to 'isolate' Pakistan; however, Pakistan maintains robust support at the international forums. Just a recent reflection of it is Pakistan's diplomatic success during the voting process of the UN General Assembly (UNGA) for the UNSC non-permanent member (term 2025-26). Pakistan secured 182 out of 193 votes from members of the UNGA. This demonstrates Pakistan's respectable standing at the international forums, which remains unaffected by India's attempts.

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<sup>5</sup> Matt Berg, "Biden's awkward week with India draws scrutiny — and possible solutions," *Politico*, June 18, 2024, <https://www.politico.com/news/2024/06/18/bidens-india-scrutiny-possible-solutions-00164012>

<sup>6</sup> Prabir De, "India's foreign policy priorities under Modi 3.0," *The Economic Times*, June 8, 2024, [https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/opinion/et-commentary/indias-foreign-policy-priorities-under-modi-3-0/articleshow/110823738.cms?utm\\_source=contentofinterest&utm\\_medium=text&utm\\_campaign=cppst](https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/opinion/et-commentary/indias-foreign-policy-priorities-under-modi-3-0/articleshow/110823738.cms?utm_source=contentofinterest&utm_medium=text&utm_campaign=cppst)

However, as India enhances its global footprint through global partnerships under its multi-alignment policy, it would embolden new Delhi to pursue a more aggressive posture towards Pakistan:

1. India's enhanced ties with the major powers – especially the West – would increase its influence at international financial institutions including the IMF, World Bank, and FATF, and could influence Pakistan's GSP+ status.
2. India would likely be more inflexible and harden its stance on outstanding issues with Pakistan, particularly regarding the core dispute of Jammu and Kashmir.
3. India's belligerence could be channeled into other bilateral matters such as trade and non-traditional security issues, leading India to adopt a more assertive behaviour even on aspects considered as 'low-hanging fruits.'
4. India could seek more favourable political and diplomatic stance of the U.S. and Russia in South Asia, particularly for 'preemptive' security doctrine that India has adopted post-Balakot incident. Such measures would be detrimental to regional peace and stability.

## Conclusion

To conclude, India will continue to propagate 'strategic autonomy' and 'multi-alignment' in its foreign policy.<sup>7</sup> Modi 3.0 would aggressively pursue the agenda of putting India on the list of major powers. For this, under its 'multi-alignment policy' for a multipolar world, India would strengthen its partnerships with major powers – the U.S. and Russia as well as at several multilateral forums hosted by the two major powers, often opposing each other. While neither Washington nor Moscow will shut the door on New Delhi, India's own policy of 'strategic autonomy' could make it difficult to ensure a balanced approach as the U.S has greater expectations of India which it is unlikely to measure up to. To address India's growing strategic and political clout among major powers, Islamabad must ensure that its legitimate security concerns are persuasively conveyed to these countries through all diplomatic means necessary to demand from India to be reasonable on issues of peace and stability in the region.

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<sup>7</sup> Rahul Roy-Chaudhury and Sofiya Azad, "The Modi 3.0 coalition government: challenges and priorities," *International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS)*, June 18, 2024, <https://www.iiss.org/online-analysis/online-analysis/2024/06/the-modi-3.0-coalition-government-challenges-and-priorities>