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EVALUATING THE STRATEGIC AND TRANSFORMATIVE ROLE OF RAJIV GANDHI IN SHAPING MODERN INDIAN FOREIGN POLICY

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ABSTRACT

Rajiv Gandhi's tenure as Prime Minister of India from 1984 to 1989 represented a significant transitional phase in the evolution of Indian foreign policy. At a time when the international political environment was witnessing major transformations due to the decline of the Cold War, technological advancements, globalization, and changing regional dynamics, Rajiv Gandhi introduced a pragmatic and modernization-oriented approach to diplomacy. While maintaining India's traditional commitment to non-alignment and strategic autonomy, he emphasized technological cooperation, economic modernization, regional stability, and constructive engagement with major global powers. His initiatives toward improving relations with the United States and China, strengthening ties with the Soviet Union, promoting regional cooperation through SAARC, advocating nuclear disarmament, and asserting India's strategic role in South Asia contributed significantly to the development of modern Indian foreign policy. However, some of his decisions, particularly the deployment of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) in Sri Lanka, generated criticism and highlighted the challenges of regional interventionism. This research paper critically evaluates Rajiv Gandhi's strategic and transformative role in shaping modern Indian foreign policy by analyzing his diplomatic vision, achievements, limitations, and long-term impact on India's international relations.

Keywords

Rajiv Gandhi, Indian Foreign Policy, Strategic Autonomy, Non-Alignment, Modern Diplomacy, SAARC, Indo-US Relations, Indo-China Relations, Nuclear Disarmament, Regional Cooperation, IPKF, Operation Cactus, South Asian Politics, Globalization, International Relations.

I. INTRODUCTION

Foreign policy plays a central role in defining a nation's identity, security, and position in the international system. Since independence in 1947, India's foreign policy has evolved through different phases under the leadership of successive Prime Ministers. Leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru, Lal Bahadur Shastri, and Indira Gandhi shaped India's diplomatic identity through principles like non-alignment, anti-colonialism, strategic autonomy, and peaceful coexistence. However, by the mid-1980s, the international political environment had begun to change significantly. The Cold War was gradually weakening, technological revolutions were transforming global economies, and regional security concerns were becoming increasingly complex. In this context, Rajiv Gandhi emerged as a young and modern political leader determined to redefine India's foreign policy according to contemporary global realities.

Rajiv Gandhi became Prime Minister of India in 1984 following the assassination of Indira Gandhi. As the youngest Prime Minister in Indian history, he represented a generational shift in Indian politics and diplomacy. Unlike earlier leaders whose worldviews were influenced primarily by anti-colonial struggles and Cold War ideological divisions, Rajiv Gandhi emphasized modernization, technology, scientific advancement, economic growth, and global engagement. He recognized that India's future role in world affairs depended not only on political ideology but also on technological progress, economic development, and strategic flexibility.

Rajiv Gandhi's foreign policy sought to balance continuity with transformation. He maintained India's commitment to non-alignment and strategic independence while simultaneously pursuing improved relations with both Western and socialist powers. He believed that India should engage constructively with all major countries without compromising national sovereignty or independent decision-making. His diplomatic initiatives reflected pragmatism rather than rigid ideological alignment.

One of the most significant aspects of Rajiv Gandhi's foreign policy was his effort to

modernize India's external relations through technological and economic cooperation. He promoted closer ties with the United States in areas such as science, technology, education, and trade while preserving India's strategic partnership with the Soviet Union. His historic visit to China in 1988 marked a turning point in Sino-Indian relations after decades of hostility following the 1962 war. He also emphasized regional cooperation in South Asia through SAARC and sought to establish India as a responsible regional power.

At the same time, Rajiv Gandhi adopted an active regional security policy. India's intervention in Sri Lanka through the Indo-Sri Lanka Accord and the deployment of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) demonstrated India's willingness to shape regional outcomes. Although controversial, these actions reflected India's growing strategic confidence. In contrast, Operation Cactus in the Maldives successfully established India's role as a regional security provider capable of responding rapidly to crises.

Rajiv Gandhi also played an important role in global peace initiatives. His advocacy of nuclear disarmament through the Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan at the United Nations demonstrated India's commitment to peaceful international cooperation and global security. Through these initiatives, Rajiv Gandhi attempted to position India as both a regional leader and a responsible global actor.

The significance of Rajiv Gandhi's contribution lies in the fact that many elements of contemporary Indian foreign policy—including strategic flexibility, economic diplomacy, technological cooperation, regional activism, and engagement with major powers—can be traced back to the foundations laid during his tenure. This research paper critically evaluates Rajiv Gandhi's strategic and transformative role in shaping modern Indian foreign policy by examining his diplomatic vision, major initiatives, achievements, failures, and long-term impact.

II. INDIA–UNITED STATES RELATIONS

The development of India–United States relations during the tenure of Rajiv Gandhi represented a major turning point in the evolution of modern Indian foreign policy. Rajiv Gandhi's approach toward the United States reflected his broader vision of modernization, technological advancement, economic development, and pragmatic diplomacy. When he assumed office as Prime Minister in 1984, Indo-US relations were characterized by mutual suspicion and strategic differences rooted in Cold War politics. Since India's independence,

relations between the two democracies had experienced fluctuations due to differing ideological orientations and geopolitical interests. India's commitment to non-alignment often conflicted with the United States' Cold War alliance system, while India's close strategic and defense relationship with the Soviet Union created distrust in Washington. Simultaneously, the United States maintained close military and political ties with Pakistan, especially during the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan in the 1980s, which India viewed as a serious security concern. Additionally, disagreements over nuclear policy, economic regulations, and regional strategic priorities contributed to tensions between the two countries during the 1970s and early 1980s. In this challenging international environment, Rajiv Gandhi recognized that India needed to redefine its relationship with the United States in order to adapt to changing global realities and support India's modernization goals.

Rajiv Gandhi represented a new generation of Indian leadership that was less influenced by anti-colonial ideological politics and more focused on science, technology, innovation, and global engagement. He understood that the United States was not only a global superpower but also a leader in technological development, industrial innovation, education, and economic growth. Therefore, he believed that constructive engagement with the United States could significantly contribute to India's modernization process. Unlike earlier phases of Indian diplomacy, which often emphasized ideological differences, Rajiv Gandhi adopted a pragmatic and balanced approach toward Washington. He attempted to reduce mistrust and establish cooperation in areas such as telecommunications, computers, scientific research, education, trade, and industrial modernization. His diplomatic efforts reflected a broader transformation in Indian foreign policy from rigid ideological positioning toward practical engagement based on national interests and development objectives.

A landmark moment in Indo-US relations during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure was his official visit to the United States in 1985. The visit symbolized a fresh beginning in bilateral relations and demonstrated Rajiv Gandhi's willingness to strengthen ties with the West without compromising India's strategic autonomy. During the visit, Rajiv Gandhi met US President Ronald Reagan and discussed various international and bilateral issues, including regional security, economic cooperation, technology transfer, and global peace. Rajiv Gandhi's youthful leadership style, modern outlook, and emphasis on technological progress created a positive impression among American political leaders, business communities, and media organizations. He projected India as a democratic and modernizing nation seeking cooperation rather than confrontation. His speeches emphasized India's commitment to

democracy, peace, development, and scientific advancement, which improved India's image in the United States and helped create a more constructive diplomatic atmosphere.

One of the most important aspects of Indo-US relations under Rajiv Gandhi was cooperation in science and technology. Rajiv Gandhi strongly believed that technological modernization was essential for India's future development and international competitiveness. Consequently, he encouraged collaboration with the United States in areas such as information technology, electronics, telecommunications, aviation, education, and computer science. During his tenure, India began expanding the use of computers and digital technologies, and the United States emerged as an important partner in this transformation. Academic exchanges, scientific collaborations, and educational partnerships increased during this period. Rajiv Gandhi's policies reflected the understanding that technology and innovation would play a crucial role in shaping India's future economic and strategic capabilities. His initiatives in this area laid the foundation for the later growth of India's information technology sector and the emergence of strong people-to-people connections between India and the United States.

Economic cooperation between India and the United States also witnessed gradual improvement during Rajiv Gandhi's period. Although India still maintained a mixed economy with substantial government control and regulatory restrictions, Rajiv Gandhi introduced limited economic reforms aimed at improving efficiency, encouraging modernization, and increasing international cooperation. These measures created new opportunities for trade and investment relations between the two countries. American businesses and multinational corporations showed increasing interest in India's market potential and technological sectors. Rajiv Gandhi's emphasis on industrial modernization and economic openness signaled the beginning of a gradual shift in India's economic diplomacy that later accelerated during the economic liberalization of the 1990s. While Indo-US economic relations during his tenure did not expand dramatically due to existing structural constraints, Rajiv Gandhi succeeded in initiating a process of economic engagement that contributed to stronger bilateral ties in subsequent decades.

Despite these positive developments, several challenges continued to affect Indo-US relations during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure. One major source of tension was the United States' strategic relationship with Pakistan. During the Soviet-Afghan conflict, Pakistan became a key American ally in South Asia, receiving extensive military and financial assistance from Washington. India viewed this support with concern because it believed that American

military aid strengthened Pakistan's capability against India rather than solely addressing the Afghan situation. Rajiv Gandhi repeatedly expressed India's security concerns regarding the transfer of advanced weapons and military assistance to Pakistan. The issue of Pakistan's nuclear program also created anxiety in India, as New Delhi feared regional instability and strategic imbalance. Although Rajiv Gandhi attempted to improve Indo-US relations, these geopolitical differences continued to limit the full development of bilateral trust.

Another important issue in Indo-US relations during this period was nuclear policy. India refused to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), arguing that the treaty was discriminatory because it divided the world into nuclear and non-nuclear states without ensuring equal disarmament obligations. The United States, on the other hand, strongly supported global non-proliferation efforts and expressed concerns regarding India's nuclear capabilities following the Pokhran nuclear test of 1974. Rajiv Gandhi attempted to balance India's strategic interests with diplomatic engagement by advocating universal nuclear disarmament. His presentation of the Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan at the United Nations in 1988 demonstrated India's commitment to global peace and nuclear disarmament while simultaneously highlighting the inequities of the international nuclear system. This initiative improved India's moral standing internationally and projected Rajiv Gandhi as a leader committed to peaceful international cooperation.

The significance of Rajiv Gandhi's contribution to Indo-US relations lies in the fact that he initiated a strategic shift in India's diplomatic orientation toward greater engagement with the United States. While maintaining India's strategic autonomy and close relationship with the Soviet Union, he recognized the importance of constructive relations with the world's leading technological and economic power. His diplomacy reflected pragmatism, modernization, and flexibility, which later became defining characteristics of India's post-Cold War foreign policy. Many aspects of the strong Indo-US partnership that emerged in the twenty-first century, including cooperation in technology, education, trade, defense, and strategic dialogue, can be traced back to the foundations laid during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure.

In conclusion, India–United States relations during Rajiv Gandhi's period represented an important phase in shaping modern Indian foreign policy. Rajiv Gandhi transformed bilateral relations by emphasizing modernization, technological cooperation, economic engagement, and diplomatic dialogue. Although differences remained regarding Pakistan, nuclear policy, and regional security, his efforts significantly reduced Cold War-era mistrust and created a

more positive framework for future cooperation. His vision of pragmatic engagement with the United States played a crucial role in redefining India's international outlook and contributed to the long-term evolution of Indo-US strategic relations.

III. IMPROVEMENT IN INDO-US RELATIONS

The improvement in Indo-US relations during the tenure of Rajiv Gandhi was one of the most significant developments in the evolution of modern Indian foreign policy. Rajiv Gandhi's diplomatic approach toward the United States reflected his broader vision of modernization, technological advancement, economic development, and pragmatic international engagement. When Rajiv Gandhi assumed office as Prime Minister in 1984, relations between India and the United States were influenced by decades of mistrust, ideological differences, and Cold War geopolitical tensions. Since India's independence, both countries had maintained democratic systems and shared commitments to constitutional governance, yet their bilateral relationship had often remained distant and inconsistent. India's policy of non-alignment, combined with its close strategic relationship with the Soviet Union, created suspicion in Washington, while the United States' military and political support to Pakistan generated concerns in New Delhi regarding regional security and strategic balance. Additionally, disagreements over nuclear policy, economic regulations, and regional conflicts had limited the growth of mutual trust during the 1970s and early 1980s. Rajiv Gandhi recognized that the changing international environment required India to adopt a more flexible and forward-looking diplomatic approach toward the United States, particularly because America was emerging as a global leader in technology, scientific innovation, and economic power.

Rajiv Gandhi represented a new generation of Indian leadership that was less influenced by the ideological rigidity of the Cold War and more focused on modernization and global integration. He believed that India's future development depended on access to advanced technology, scientific cooperation, economic modernization, and stronger international partnerships. Therefore, unlike earlier phases of Indian diplomacy that emphasized ideological disagreements with Western powers, Rajiv Gandhi adopted a pragmatic approach aimed at improving bilateral relations with the United States without compromising India's strategic autonomy. His policies reflected the understanding that India could maintain independent foreign policy positions while simultaneously engaging constructively with major global powers. This balanced approach became a defining feature of his foreign policy and later influenced India's post-Cold War diplomacy.

A major turning point in Indo-US relations during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure was his official visit to the United States in 1985. The visit symbolized a new beginning in bilateral diplomacy and demonstrated Rajiv Gandhi's commitment to reducing mistrust between the two nations. During the visit, Rajiv Gandhi met US President Ronald Reagan and held discussions on issues such as technological cooperation, economic development, regional security, scientific research, and global peace. Rajiv Gandhi's modern outlook, youthful leadership style, and emphasis on technology and innovation created a positive impression among American political leaders, intellectuals, and business communities. He projected India as a modernizing democracy eager to participate actively in global economic and technological developments. His speeches emphasized democratic values, peaceful international cooperation, and scientific progress, thereby improving India's image in the United States and fostering a more positive atmosphere in bilateral relations.

One of the most important dimensions of the improvement in Indo-US relations during Rajiv Gandhi's period was cooperation in science and technology. Rajiv Gandhi strongly believed that technological progress was essential for India's national development and international competitiveness. Consequently, he encouraged collaboration with the United States in sectors such as telecommunications, electronics, information technology, aviation, computer science, and education. During the 1980s, Rajiv Gandhi initiated policies aimed at expanding computerization and digital communication in India, and the United States became an important source of technological expertise and innovation. Academic exchanges, scientific collaborations, and educational partnerships increased during this period, helping strengthen intellectual and institutional ties between the two countries. Rajiv Gandhi's emphasis on technology-oriented diplomacy laid the foundation for the future growth of India's information technology sector and contributed to the development of long-term Indo-US cooperation in knowledge-based industries.

Economic relations between India and the United States also improved gradually during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure. Although India continued to follow a mixed economic model with significant state control and regulatory restrictions, Rajiv Gandhi introduced limited economic reforms aimed at industrial modernization, efficiency, and greater international cooperation. These reforms encouraged foreign investment, industrial expansion, and technological collaboration. American businesses and multinational corporations began to view India as a potential market with significant economic opportunities. Rajiv Gandhi's efforts to modernize India's economy and encourage technological imports signaled a gradual shift toward greater

economic openness. While the full-scale economic liberalization of India occurred only in the 1990s, Rajiv Gandhi's policies played an important role in preparing the groundwork for future Indo-US economic cooperation.

Another significant factor contributing to improved Indo-US relations was Rajiv Gandhi's balanced diplomatic strategy. While strengthening ties with the United States, he simultaneously maintained India's close strategic relationship with the Soviet Union. This demonstrated that India's engagement with Washington was not based on abandoning non-alignment or aligning with a particular bloc but rather on pursuing national interests through diversified international partnerships. Rajiv Gandhi transformed the concept of non-alignment into a more pragmatic policy that emphasized strategic autonomy and flexibility instead of rigid ideological positioning. This approach enabled India to improve relations with the United States while preserving its independent foreign policy identity.

Despite these positive developments, several challenges continued to influence Indo-US relations during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure. One of the most important issues was the United States' close strategic partnership with Pakistan during the Soviet-Afghan conflict. Pakistan received significant military and financial assistance from the United States, including advanced weapon systems, which India viewed as a direct threat to regional security. Rajiv Gandhi repeatedly expressed India's concerns regarding American military aid to Pakistan and the implications of Pakistan's nuclear ambitions. These strategic differences prevented the development of complete trust between the two countries. However, unlike earlier periods when such disagreements often led to diplomatic hostility, Rajiv Gandhi attempted to manage differences through dialogue and constructive engagement.

The issue of nuclear policy also remained a point of disagreement between India and the United States. India refused to sign the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT), arguing that it was discriminatory and unfair because it allowed certain countries to retain nuclear weapons while restricting others. The United States continued to advocate nuclear non-proliferation and expressed concerns regarding India's nuclear program. Rajiv Gandhi responded to these concerns by promoting global nuclear disarmament rather than accepting unequal international nuclear arrangements. His presentation of the Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan at the United Nations in 1988 reflected India's commitment to a nuclear weapon-free world and strengthened India's moral standing in global diplomacy.

The long-term significance of Rajiv Gandhi's efforts to improve Indo-US relations lies in the

fact that he initiated a process of diplomatic normalization and strategic engagement that later governments expanded substantially. His emphasis on technology, economic modernization, education, scientific cooperation, and balanced diplomacy helped redefine India's approach toward the United States. Many aspects of the strong Indo-US partnership that emerged in the post-Cold War period—including cooperation in information technology, defense, trade, education, and strategic affairs—can be traced back to the foundations established during Rajiv Gandhi's tenure.

In conclusion, the improvement in Indo-US relations under Rajiv Gandhi represented a strategic and transformative development in modern Indian foreign policy. By moving beyond Cold War ideological rigidity and focusing on modernization, technological cooperation, economic engagement, and diplomatic dialogue, Rajiv Gandhi created a more constructive and forward-looking relationship between India and the United States. Although differences remained regarding Pakistan, nuclear policy, and regional security, his pragmatic and balanced diplomacy significantly reduced mistrust and established the basis for future strategic cooperation. Rajiv Gandhi's vision and initiatives therefore played an important role in shaping the evolution of Indo-US relations and contributed substantially to the modernization of Indian foreign policy.

IV. CONCLUSION

Rajiv Gandhi occupies a distinctive and influential position in the history of Indian foreign policy because his tenure represented a crucial transitional phase between the traditional Cold War-oriented diplomatic framework of post-independence India and the more pragmatic, modernization-driven, and globally engaged foreign policy that emerged in the post-Cold War era. As Prime Minister from 1984 to 1989, Rajiv Gandhi inherited a diplomatic legacy shaped by leaders such as Jawaharlal Nehru and Indira Gandhi, who had established the principles of non-alignment, anti-colonialism, strategic autonomy, and peaceful coexistence as the foundation of India's external relations. However, Rajiv Gandhi governed during a period of major global transformation characterized by technological revolution, increasing globalization, economic interdependence, and the gradual weakening of the Cold War bipolar order. Recognizing these changes, he sought to redefine India's international engagement by introducing greater flexibility, modernization, technological cooperation, and pragmatic diplomacy into foreign policy while preserving India's sovereign decision-making and strategic independence. His foreign policy initiatives reflected the understanding that India's

future role in world affairs would depend not only on ideological commitments but also on economic development, technological advancement, regional stability, and constructive engagement with the international community.

One of the most significant aspects of Rajiv Gandhi's contribution to modern Indian foreign policy was his emphasis on modernization and technology as essential components of diplomacy. Unlike earlier generations of Indian leaders whose diplomatic priorities were strongly shaped by anti-colonial struggles and ideological alignments, Rajiv Gandhi represented a younger and more technologically oriented vision of leadership. He believed that India's international status could not be strengthened without scientific advancement, economic growth, and integration into emerging global technological systems. Consequently, he promoted international cooperation in areas such as telecommunications, information technology, education, scientific research, and industrial modernization. His efforts to improve relations with technologically advanced countries, especially the United States, reflected his broader vision of linking foreign policy with national development. By encouraging cooperation in science and technology and supporting limited economic liberalization, Rajiv Gandhi laid the intellectual and diplomatic foundations for India's later transformation into a globally connected economy and a major technological power.

Rajiv Gandhi's role in improving India's relations with major global powers was another important dimension of his foreign policy contribution. During the Cold War, India had often maintained difficult relations with the United States due to ideological differences, nuclear disagreements, and American support for Pakistan. Rajiv Gandhi attempted to reduce mistrust between the two countries and establish a more constructive and balanced relationship based on shared democratic values, economic cooperation, and technological collaboration. His 1985 visit to the United States symbolized a new phase in Indo-US relations and projected India as a modernizing nation open to dialogue and international cooperation. Although strategic differences remained, particularly concerning nuclear policy and Pakistan, Rajiv Gandhi's diplomatic initiatives created a more positive atmosphere that later governments built upon in developing a stronger strategic partnership with the United States.

At the same time, Rajiv Gandhi successfully preserved India's traditional strategic relationship with the Soviet Union. The Soviet Union remained India's primary defense partner and an important ally during his tenure. Rajiv Gandhi maintained cordial relations with Soviet leader Mikhail Gorbachev and supported initiatives related to disarmament,

peaceful coexistence, and international cooperation. His ability to strengthen ties with both superpowers without formally aligning with either demonstrated the continued relevance of India's strategic autonomy. Rather than abandoning non-alignment, Rajiv Gandhi adapted it to changing international realities by making it more pragmatic and flexible. This balanced diplomatic approach later became a defining feature of India's post-Cold War foreign policy.

One of Rajiv Gandhi's most enduring diplomatic achievements was the normalization of relations with China. Since the 1962 Sino-Indian War, relations between India and China had remained tense and marked by suspicion and unresolved border disputes. Rajiv Gandhi's historic visit to China in 1988 reopened political dialogue after decades of limited engagement and helped reduce hostility between the two countries. Although the border issue remained unresolved, the visit established mechanisms for confidence-building and peaceful negotiations that later governments continued to develop. Rajiv Gandhi's willingness to engage diplomatically with China despite historical tensions reflected strategic maturity and long-term thinking. This initiative laid the foundation for the expansion of economic and political relations between the two Asian powers in subsequent decades and remains one of the most important milestones in India's diplomatic history.

Rajiv Gandhi also played a transformative role in redefining India's regional diplomacy in South Asia. He strongly supported the establishment and strengthening of the South Asian Association for Regional Cooperation (SAARC) in 1985, believing that regional cooperation was essential for peace, stability, and economic development in South Asia. Through SAARC, Rajiv Gandhi promoted dialogue, trade, education, agriculture, and cultural exchange among neighboring countries. His support for regional integration reflected India's aspiration to play a constructive leadership role in the region. Furthermore, Rajiv Gandhi demonstrated India's growing strategic confidence through regional security interventions. Operation Cactus in the Maldives in 1988 was widely regarded as a successful example of India's ability to act rapidly in defense of regional stability and legitimate government. The operation enhanced India's reputation as a responsible regional power capable of maintaining peace and security in the Indian Ocean region.

However, Rajiv Gandhi's regional policies also revealed important challenges and limitations, particularly in relation to Sri Lanka. The Indo-Sri Lanka Accord of 1987 and the deployment of the Indian Peace Keeping Force (IPKF) became one of the most controversial episodes in India's foreign policy history. Initially intended to resolve the ethnic conflict between the Sri

Lankan government and Tamil militant groups, the mission soon evolved into direct military confrontation between Indian forces and the Liberation Tigers of Tamil Eelam (LTTE). The operation resulted in heavy casualties, political criticism, and strained diplomatic relations. Many analysts viewed the intervention as a strategic miscalculation because it underestimated the complexity of Sri Lanka's internal politics and lacked clear long-term objectives. The IPKF episode exposed the risks associated with regional interventionism and demonstrated the limitations of India's military and diplomatic preparedness during that period. Nevertheless, the intervention also reflected India's increasing willingness to assert itself as a regional power responsible for maintaining stability in South Asia.

Another significant contribution of Rajiv Gandhi was his advocacy of global nuclear disarmament and international peace. In 1988, he presented the Rajiv Gandhi Action Plan before the United Nations, proposing a phased elimination of nuclear weapons worldwide. This initiative reflected India's long-standing commitment to peace, non-violence, and opposition to the nuclear arms race. Although the proposal was not implemented by the major nuclear powers, it enhanced India's moral standing in international diplomacy and demonstrated Rajiv Gandhi's broader vision of a cooperative and peaceful global order. His advocacy for disarmament highlighted India's aspiration to play an influential role in shaping global debates on security and international relations.

A critical evaluation of Rajiv Gandhi's foreign policy therefore reveals a complex combination of achievements and limitations. On one hand, he modernized India's diplomatic outlook, improved relations with major powers, strengthened regional cooperation, promoted technological and economic engagement, and enhanced India's international image as a responsible and peace-oriented nation. On the other hand, certain initiatives, especially the Sri Lankan intervention, exposed weaknesses in strategic planning and implementation. Domestic political instability, economic constraints, and Cold War geopolitical pressures also limited the full realization of his diplomatic vision. Despite these challenges, Rajiv Gandhi's foreign policy represented a major intellectual and strategic shift in India's international relations.

The long-term significance of Rajiv Gandhi's contribution lies in the fact that many features of contemporary Indian foreign policy can be traced back to the foundations established during his tenure. His emphasis on technological modernization anticipated India's emergence as a major information technology power. His balanced engagement with multiple global powers influenced India's later policy of strategic partnerships with diverse countries. His

support for regional integration and active diplomacy laid the groundwork for India's increasing role in South Asian and Indo-Pacific affairs. His commitment to strategic autonomy continues to remain a central principle of Indian foreign policy even in the twenty-first century.

In conclusion, Rajiv Gandhi played a strategic and transformative role in shaping modern Indian foreign policy by introducing pragmatism, modernization, technological orientation, and global engagement into India's diplomatic framework. While preserving India's traditional principles of sovereignty and non-alignment, he adapted foreign policy to the changing realities of the late twentieth century. His initiatives toward major powers, regional diplomacy, economic cooperation, and nuclear disarmament significantly influenced India's emergence as a more confident, modern, and globally active nation. Despite certain failures and controversies, particularly in Sri Lanka, Rajiv Gandhi's diplomatic vision remains historically significant because it prepared India for the challenges and opportunities of the post-Cold War era and contributed substantially to the evolution of modern Indian foreign policy.

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