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Role of India's Diplomacy in Global Energy Partnerships: An Analysis

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Abstract

This paper explores the strategic role of India's global energy partnerships in advancing its foreign policy objectives, including energy security, geopolitical influence, and sustainable development. It analyzes India's engagement through multilateral platforms like the International Solar Alliance and BRICS, as well as bilateral collaborations with key global powers. The study also examines domestic factors such as political economy, technological capacity, and institutional readiness that shape India's external energy strategies. While progress in renewable energy diplomacy has enhanced India's international standing, challenges related to infrastructure, financing, and global geopolitical shifts persist. The paper concludes by highlighting the need for integrated policy frameworks to ensure that energy diplomacy remains a vital tool in India's evolving foreign policy approach.

Keywords: *Energy Diplomacy, Energy Partnership, Energy Security, Foreign Policy, International Cooperation, Renewal Energy.*

Introduction:

Energy security has become a cornerstone of national development strategies in the contemporary global order. For India, a nation witnessing sustained economic growth, urban expansion, and rising energy demand, the pursuit of reliable and diversified energy sources has assumed strategic urgency. This urgency is compounded by the volatility of global energy markets, geopolitical tensions, and the imperative to transition toward cleaner and more sustainable energy systems.

India's diplomacy has progressively adapted to these challenges, emerging as a critical instrument in securing the country's energy future. By engaging in bilateral agreements with energy-rich nations, participating in multilateral energy forums, and championing global renewable initiatives, India has positioned itself as both a major energy consumer and a proactive international partner. Its diplomatic engagements span regions as diverse as the Middle East, Central Asia, Africa, and Latin America, reflecting a calibrated approach that balances traditional fossil fuel needs with an increasing emphasis on renewable energy cooperation.

Moreover, India's leadership in initiatives like the International Solar Alliance and its active role in climate diplomacy signal a broader redefinition of energy diplomacy—not merely as a tool of resource procurement, but as a means of shaping global energy governance. As the global energy landscape undergoes a fundamental transformation, India's strategic use of diplomacy serves as a compelling example of how emerging economies can navigate complex geopolitical and environmental imperatives to secure national interests while contributing to global sustainability.

Overview of India's Energy Challenges and Diplomacy

India is facing a rapidly growing energy demand, primarily driven by its expanding economy and rapidly increasing population. With one of the fastest-growing large economies worldwide, the country faces a considerable challenge: its native energy reserves are insufficient to meet its domestic needs, resulting in increasing reliance on imports. A disparity between supply and demand in the energy sector results in vulnerabilities to energy security,

which impacts India's overall economic growth path. A combination of limited indigenous fossil fuel resources and a rapidly growing industrial and urban population demands a carefully planned energy policy that reconciles domestic needs with global participation. India's energy policy development is well-described through the two-level game approach, which combines internal policy preference formation with the international diplomatic framework. Domestically, factors such as energy scarcity, outdated subsidy systems, bureaucratic inefficiency, and the influence of electoral constituencies shape policy priorities, whereas externally, India's foreign policy objectives and customs interact with a competitive and resource-constrained global setting. Over many years, India has had to pursue energy security through a range of international partnerships and diplomatic efforts in order to mitigate global resource constraints and escalating geopolitical tensions over energy provision. Understanding the connection between domestic and external factors is crucial for grasping India's dual objectives of providing affordable, sustainable energy access and reconciling these goals with its foreign policy agenda.

Conceptual Linkage between Energy Diplomacy and Foreign Policy

Foreign policy has increasingly relied on energy diplomacy as a key tool, particularly for nations heavily reliant on imported energy sources, such as India. States employ energy diplomacy to negotiate safe, reasonable, and renewable energy sources across intricate economic, political, and security environments. Energy diplomacy in India functions as a means to secure essential energy supplies and also as a strategic instrument that promotes broader international connections, facilitating influence in economic and security spheres. Balancing competing interests is a key aspect of the decision-making process in energy diplomacy, where numerous state and non-state actors are involved. Integrating economic goals with national security concerns, energy diplomacy illustrates the growing interdependence between these two fields. The distinction is evident in instances where countries have employed energy as either a geopolitical tool or collaborative resource based on their status as energy exporters or importers [4]. In the Indian context, energy diplomacy must adapt to shifting international energy markets, intensifying geo-economic rivalries, and pressing environmental concerns, suggesting the requirement for advanced foreign policy tools that

can attain both energy security and international strategic leverage.

India's Strategy and Global Energy Partnerships

India's energy policy is increasingly shaped by its reliance on global partnerships, which are crucial for addressing the country's expanding energy requirements amid limited indigenous energy resources. As one of the fastest-growing economies in the world, India's energy consumption is projected to rise significantly over the coming decades. However, domestic energy production is insufficient to meet this surging demand, compelling India to import a substantial portion of its energy—particularly crude oil, natural gas, and high-grade coal—from abroad. This import dependency drives India to actively engage in energy diplomacy across bilateral, regional, and multilateral levels.

These global partnerships are not confined to conventional supply contracts; rather, they constitute comprehensive frameworks for long-term collaboration. They contribute to India's broader strategic interests by enhancing energy security, facilitating technology transfers, encouraging capital investments, and fostering innovation in clean and sustainable energy sources. Moreover, such engagements serve as platforms for India to assert its influence on global energy governance and climate discourse, reflecting its aspirations as an emerging

global power.

Bilateral and Multilateral Engagements

India has cultivated a wide array of bilateral partnerships with key global players, each tailored to mutual interests in the energy domain:

- **Russia:** Long-standing cooperation in nuclear energy (e.g., Kudankulam Nuclear Power Plant) and hydrocarbons, with recent focus on Arctic oil exploration.
- **United States:** Collaboration in clean energy, shale gas, and the U.S.-India Strategic Clean Energy Partnership, emphasizing innovation and green hydrogen.
- **Iran:** Although constrained by geopolitical tensions and sanctions, India continues to seek engagement, particularly around the Chabahar Port and energy transit routes.
- **European Union:** Emphasis on energy efficiency, renewables, and decarbonization through the EU-India Clean Energy and Climate Partnership.

In addition to bilateral relations, India's participation in multilateral initiatives amplifies its energy diplomacy:

- **BRICS and G20:** Platforms for dialogue on energy transition and global energy governance.
- **International Renewable Energy Agency (IRENA):** Facilitates access to global best practices and financial mechanisms.
- **International Solar Alliance (ISA):** A flagship initiative led by India to promote solar energy deployment across the Global South, positioning India as a leader in climate action.

Strategic Benefits of Global Energy Partnerships

These engagements yield multiple strategic dividends:

1. **Energy Security:** Diversification of energy sources and suppliers mitigates geopolitical risks.



2. **Technology Transfer:** Access to advanced technologies, especially in renewables and nuclear energy.
3. **Investment Inflows:** Foreign direct investment in India's energy infrastructure and R&D.
4. **Geopolitical Leverage:** Strengthening India's voice in global energy forums.
5. **Sustainable Development:** Supporting the transition to a low-carbon economy in line with India's climate commitments.

Achievement of India's Energy Diplomacy

Energy Diplomacy from Independence to Liberalization Era India's energy diplomacy has evolved through distinct phases since independence. Initially, India's approach was marked by an emphasis on self-reliance and close cooperation with the Soviet Union, which was seen as a strategic ally and an essential partner in securing energy resources. During this period, India's energy policy graduates from reliance on indigenous coal to diversified sources, including oil imports secured through Soviet assistance, as Western refiners showed reluctance in processing Soviet crude. This cooperation included the establishment of domestic refineries and infrastructure aimed at reducing dependence on Western energy firms. With the end of the Cold War and economic liberalization in 1991, India's energy diplomacy shifted towards diversification and engagement with global energy markets. The post-liberalization era saw India expanding its oil diplomacy aggressively, investing in overseas energy assets and seeking more integrated international cooperation frameworks. These shifts reflect an acknowledgment of India's growing energy needs and a more pragmatic foreign policy approach that balances ideological considerations with market-driven realities.

Energy Security and International Cooperation : 2000s Onwards

From the early 2000s, India intensified its energy diplomacy by expanding overseas investments in oil and gas fields, acquiring strategic assets abroad to enhance energy security. This period marks the integration of energy considerations within the broader foreign policy framework, where energy security aligns with economic diplomacy, trade expansion, and geopolitical maneuvering. Multilateral

cooperation on energy issues begins to emerge as a defining feature of India's international engagement, with the country actively participating in global energy governance institutions and fostering bilateral partnerships that encompass clean energy transitions as well as conventional energy supplies. India's foreign policy thus evolved to embrace energy as both an economic necessity and a strategic instrument, promoting diversified energy sources and fostering economic diplomacy as a complement to traditional political and security concerns. The policy shifts also reflect a more nuanced understanding of global energy markets' volatility and the need for resilient supply chains.

Recent Transformations under Modi's Government

Under Prime Minister Narendra Modi, India's energy diplomacy has become more assertive and multifaceted, reflecting a clear agenda to secure diversified energy supplies while promoting renewable and sustainability on the international stage. Modi's government has elevated energy cooperation to a strategic level, embedding it within its broader multi-alignment foreign policy. This approach balances relations with global powers such as the United States, Russia, and Japan, leveraging partnerships for Technology transfer, investment and infrastructure development.

The Modi administration's energy diplomacy is characterized by a push for renewable energy diplomacy, evidenced by the establishment and promotion of the International Solar Alliance and commitments to ambitious clean energy targets. This signals a paradigm shift from traditional energy cooperation predominantly focused on fossil fuels to an expansive strategy that integrates climate commitments with energy security imperatives. Furthermore, energy diplomacy under Modi is also tightly linked to economic diplomacy and development cooperation, reflecting an integrated approach that enhances India's global profile while pursuing pragmatic energy objectives.

India's Bilateral Energy Partnerships

India-Russia Energy Cooperation

India-Russia energy relations have a long-standing foundation marked by mutual trust and sustained cooperation, vital for India's energy security. Russia has been a key supplier of petroleum, natural gas, and nuclear fuel, with recent expansions into liquefied

natural gas (LNG) and renewable energy sectors signaling a diversification of the partnership. These bilateral relations have also extended to developing a skills corridor to support energy sector growth, reflecting cooperation beyond resource trade towards capacity building and technology sharing.

Strategically, this partnership helps India reduce its dependence on volatile Middle East suppliers, while Russia benefits from Indian markets amid shifting geopolitical circumstances. Despite global political upheavals, including Russia's altered relations with the West, the India-Russia energy partnership remains resilient, underscoring the geostrategic importance of energy cooperation in their bilateral relationship.

India-Iran Relations and Energy Dependence

India's energy ties with Iran exemplify its complex balancing act in a geopolitically sensitive context. Despite stringent U.S. and EU sanctions on Iran, India has continued to import crude oil, reflecting its dependence and the geo-economic necessity of this bilateral engagement. Managing this relationship requires careful diplomatic maneuvering to maintain energy supplies without jeopardizing broader strategic ties with allies such as the United States and Gulf countries.

The regional security dynamics, particularly in Afghanistan and the broader Middle East, further complicate this energy diplomacy. India must reconcile its energy interests with shifting alliances and ongoing conflicts, reinforcing the theme of energy as a critical variable in its foreign policy calculus. This long-term engagement with Iran reflects India's nuanced approach towards regional geopolitics, energy security, and diplomatic balancing.

Cooperation with Developed Nations on Renewable Energy

India's renewable energy diplomacy involves strategic partnerships with countries like the United States, Germany, and Japan. These collaborations facilitate technology transfer, investments, and joint research in cutting-edge areas such as hydrogen fuel, offshore wind, and grid integration enhancements. Such initiatives are vital for advancing India's ambitious renewable energy targets and reducing carbon footprints in line with global climate commitments.

Beyond the bilateral stage, India has actively promoted South-South cooperation with African and SAARC countries, expanding renewable energy access and capacity. These efforts are embodied by the International Solar Alliance, which has positioned India as a leader among solar-rich nations collaborating on climate action and sustainable development. This blend of bilateral and multilateral renewable energy partnerships enhances India's soft power and global influence while advancing domestic energy transition priorities.

Multilateral Energy Engagements and Their Strategic Role

India's multilateral energy engagements play a strategic role in advancing its energy security and foreign policy objectives. Through active participation in frameworks like BRICS, India promotes equitable resource distribution and sustainable development, leveraging partnerships with energy-rich nations like Russia to address its growing energy needs across fossil fuels, nuclear, and renewables. The expansion to BRICS+ further enhances India's outreach by incorporating more energy stakeholders, reinforcing a multipolar energy order. Simultaneously, India's presence in global platforms such as the G20, IRENA, and the International Solar Alliance allows it to champion energy equity, technology sharing, and climate-resilient development, particularly for the Global South. India's leadership in the ISA reflects its ambition to shape global clean energy norms. In Central Asia, India engages in strategic energy diplomacy, seeking diversified supply routes through pipeline initiatives and partnerships amidst geopolitical competition from China, Russia, and the U.S. These multidimensional engagements reflect India's broader goal of securing energy through diversified, sustainable, and strategically balanced cooperation at both global and regional levels.

Renewable Energy Partnerships as a Strategic Instrument of Foreign Policy

India has effectively leveraged renewable energy partnerships as a key component of its foreign policy, aligning domestic sustainability goals with international diplomacy. The National Solar Mission, targeting 500 GW of renewable capacity by 2030, has not only driven technological advancement and public-private collaboration domestically but also served as a platform for international cooperation and

soft power projection. Central to this effort is the International Solar Alliance (ISA), a multilateral initiative led by India to unite solar-rich countries—particularly in the Global South—around shared objectives of technology transfer, capacity building, and financing solar infrastructure. ISA strengthens India's leadership in global climate diplomacy while reinforcing its commitment to inclusive development and climate justice. Furthermore, India's renewable energy diplomacy is bolstered by strategic technology partnerships with advanced economies like the United States, Germany, and Japan, focusing on innovations such as green hydrogen, offshore wind, and smart grid systems. These collaborations not only enhance India's domestic capabilities and reduce technological dependency but also elevate its status as a key negotiator and influencer in global energy governance, firmly integrating clean energy into its foreign policy framework.

Strategic Implications of Energy Diplomacy on India's Foreign policy Goals

India's energy diplomacy plays a vital strategic role in advancing its foreign policy objectives by simultaneously addressing national energy security, geopolitical influence, and climate leadership. A key component of this strategy is diversification—reducing dependence on a single energy source or region, especially geopolitically sensitive areas like the Middle East. By forging partnerships across regions and investing in both conventional and renewable energy assets abroad, India enhances its energy resilience while gaining diplomatic leverage. Additionally, energy ties with global powers such as the United States, Russia, and the European Union not only strengthen bilateral cooperation but also support India's multi-alignment approach in an evolving world order. These partnerships serve as platforms for broader political and security dialogues, reinforcing India's influence in strategic forums. Moreover, India's alignment of energy policy with global climate goals, such as the Paris Agreement and SDG 7, has positioned it as a leader in sustainable energy diplomacy. This integration of climate and energy strategies enhances India's global image, facilitates technology transfers, and attracts international collaboration, thereby supporting both domestic development and international climate responsibility.

Domestic Factors Influencing Global Energy Diplomacy

India's global energy diplomacy is deeply shaped by domestic determinants such as political economy, private sector involvement, and technological capacity. Electoral dynamics, regional party interests, and welfare-driven energy policies influence the country's external negotiation stance, often creating friction between populist domestic agendas and pragmatic international cooperation. Bureaucratic inertia and regulatory complexities further affect the agility of India's foreign energy engagements. At the same time, the growing role of the private sector and public-private partnerships (PPPs) provides a counterbalance, enabling India to attract foreign investment, integrate global expertise, and advance renewable energy projects that serve both domestic development and international diplomatic goals. Critical to this effort is India's focus on securing access to essential resources such as critical minerals, which are necessary for clean energy technologies. By combining domestic resource development with global sourcing and sustainable practices, India enhances both its energy self-reliance and diplomatic leverage in international forums.

Challenges in India's Global Energy Partnership Framework

However, India's global energy partnership framework faces substantial challenges that must be addressed to sustain progress. Geopolitical volatility, including conflicts, sanctions, and the strategic rivalry between major powers, complicates India's engagement with countries like Iran and influences its energy alignment amid U.S.-China tensions. These scenarios demand diplomatic finesse to maintain strategic autonomy while ensuring secure and diversified energy supply chains. Additionally, structural hurdles such as inadequate financing, technological gaps, and weak infrastructure threaten the scalability of renewable initiatives. Institutional and legal constraints further hamper swift policy execution, undermining investor confidence and slowing down energy cooperation. To overcome these barriers, India must pursue adaptive legal reforms, strengthen institutions, and align domestic regulatory systems with international energy governance standards to ensure the long-term success of its energy diplomacy strategy.

Domestic Drivers and Structural Challenges in India's Energy Diplomacy

India's energy diplomacy is significantly influenced by internal political, economic, and technological factors, which both enable and constrain its global engagements. Domestic political considerations, including electoral pressures and regional party interests, often shape the energy policy agenda, at times creating tensions between international commitments and local welfare priorities. Simultaneously, the rise of public-private partnerships has positioned the private sector as a key player in facilitating foreign collaborations and accelerating renewable energy development. Efforts to secure critical minerals for clean energy technologies further reflect the strategic alignment of domestic capabilities with global supply chain goals. However, India's energy diplomacy also faces structural challenges such as geopolitical tensions, restricted access to international finance and technology, infrastructural shortcomings, and regulatory inefficiencies. Navigating sanctions, balancing relations between competing global powers, and addressing internal institutional weaknesses remain ongoing hurdles. To strengthen its global energy presence, India must adopt coherent policy reforms, build investor confidence, and enhance its legal and institutional framework to support sustainable, secure, and diversified energy partnerships.

Conclusion

India's pursuit of energy security through global partnerships has become a central pillar of its foreign policy strategy, reflecting a comprehensive approach that links economic growth, geopolitical influence, and climate leadership. By engaging in bilateral and multilateral energy cooperation, including platforms such as BRICS, the International Solar Alliance, and the G20, India has positioned itself as an emerging voice in global energy governance. These engagements are not only vital for meeting its rapidly growing domestic energy demand but also serve as instruments to project strategic autonomy and diplomatic relevance in a multipolar world. The integration of clean energy ambitions with foreign policy—through initiatives like the National Solar Mission, critical mineral diplomacy, and technology transfer agreements—underscores a deliberate shift toward sustainable and resilient energy systems.

Nevertheless, India's energy diplomacy faces persistent challenges that stem from both external uncertainties and internal constraints. Geopolitical tensions, shifting global power equations, and infrastructural limitations intersect with domestic political pressures, regulatory complexities, and resource constraints. These factors often hinder the full realization of energy agreements and dilute the pace of renewable energy deployment. The balancing act between ensuring affordable energy access for a large population and adhering to international climate commitments adds further complexity to India's strategic calculus. Therefore, greater institutional coherence, adaptive policy frameworks, and long-term planning are essential to align national priorities with global energy transformations.

Looking ahead, India's energy diplomacy must evolve to address emerging challenges such as technological disruptions, volatile supply chains, and the intensifying global competition for green energy leadership. Strengthening domestic capabilities, particularly in innovation, financing mechanisms, and infrastructure, will be critical to translating diplomatic commitments into tangible outcomes. Moreover, leveraging its role in South-South cooperation and climate diplomacy can enable India to lead in shaping a more equitable and sustainable global energy order. In conclusion, the synergy between India's energy diplomacy and its broader foreign policy objectives will continue to define its strategic posture, making energy cooperation not just a developmental necessity but a cornerstone of its global engagement and leadership in the 21st century.

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