

Strategic Autonomy, Energy Security, and India's West Asia Policy: Diplomatic Balancing amid the Iran-Israel-US Conflict

Gireesh B¹  Neethu Thankachan² 

¹M S Ramaiah College of Arts, Science and Commerce (Autonomous), Bengaluru, Karnataka

²Department of Humanities and Social Sciences, Surana College (Autonomous), South End Circle, Bengaluru, Karnataka

Abstract

The intensifying geopolitical tensions involving Iran, Israel, and the United States have significantly reshaped the strategic landscape of West Asia, creating complex political, economic, and security challenges for emerging powers such as India. "India depends on West Asia for over 50 percent of its crude oil imports and maintains deep trade and diaspora linkages with the region, making regional stability central to its strategic interests" (Anas 2021, 63; Ahmad 2014, 28). The ongoing crisis has heightened concerns relating to energy security, maritime trade disruptions, and economic vulnerability, compelling India to recalibrate its diplomatic engagement in an increasingly volatile geopolitical environment. This paper examines India's evolving West Asia policy through the frameworks of strategic autonomy, energy security, connectivity politics, and multipolar diplomacy in the context of the Iran-Israel-US conflict. Particular attention is given to the IMEC-INSTC connectivity competition, Red Sea maritime disruptions, and the growing significance of BRICS+ in regional diplomacy. The study adopts a qualitative policy-analysis approach based on official statements, policy documents, geopolitical assessments, and contemporary secondary literature. The paper argues that India is gradually moving beyond conventional non-alignment towards a pragmatic model of multi-aligned diplomacy characterised by strategic flexibility and calibrated engagement with competing powers. The findings suggest that India's contemporary West Asia policy increasingly reflects broader ambitions relating to maritime security, geo-economic connectivity, and strategic influence within an evolving multipolar order.

Keywords: Strategic Autonomy, Energy Security, West Asia, India's Foreign Policy, Multipolar Diplomacy, Geopolitical Realignment

Received: 12/05/2026 | **Accepted:** 30/06/2026 | **Published:** 20/07/2026

Corresponding Author: Gireesh B (ORCID: 0009-0008-2588-0338) | **Email:** gireeshb789@gmail.com

© 2026 The Author(s). Published by Allahabad Academic Press. This is an Open Access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution 4.0 International (CC BY 4.0) License.

1. Introduction

West Asia has long occupied a central position in India's foreign policy owing to its strategic location, energy resources, economic significance, and deep historical linkages with the Indian subcontinent. Over the past two decades, the region has witnessed recurring political instability, geopolitical rivalries, armed conflicts, and shifting alliances that have profoundly influenced regional and global politics. "The recent escalation of tensions involving Iran, Israel, and the United States has further intensified these dynamics, creating a complex and uncertain security environment. Beyond its regional implications, the conflict has affected global energy markets, maritime trade routes, and diplomatic alignments, compelling states across the world to reassess their strategic priorities" (Pant 2019, 112; Mohan 2006, 201).

For India, developments in West Asia are not merely external events but issues of direct national significance. The region remains a major source of India's energy imports and hosts a substantial Indian diaspora that contributes significantly to economic and social linkages between India and the Gulf. Furthermore, vital maritime routes passing through the Arabian Sea, the Strait of Hormuz, and the Red Sea constitute critical arteries for India's trade and energy security. Consequently, any escalation in regional instability has the potential to affect India's economic interests, supply chains, and broader strategic calculations.

India's engagement with West Asia has undergone a notable transformation in recent years. Traditionally guided by the principles of non-alignment and strategic autonomy, Indian foreign policy has increasingly adopted a more pragmatic and flexible approach in response to changing geopolitical realities. The strengthening of India's relations with Israel, the continuation of strategic engagement with Iran, growing partnerships with Gulf countries, and deepening cooperation with the United States collectively illustrate a foreign policy that seeks to balance multiple and, at times, competing interests. The contemporary Iran–Israel–US conflict presents a significant test of this balancing strategy, requiring India to navigate complex diplomatic challenges while safeguarding its national interests.

Several scholars have examined the evolution of India's engagement with West Asia from the perspectives of energy security, strategic partnerships, and regional diplomacy. Studies by C. Raja Mohan and Harsh V. Pant highlight "the growing importance of West Asia in India's foreign policy and the emergence of a more pragmatic diplomatic approach" (Mohan 2006; Pant 2019). Other scholars have focused on India's relations with Israel, Iran, and the Gulf states individually, emphasising defence cooperation, energy interdependence, and connectivity initiatives. More recent studies have explored the concept of strategic autonomy and its relevance in an increasingly multipolar international order (Basrur 2021; Hall 2016). However, much of the existing literature analyses these dimensions

separately. Limited attention has been devoted to understanding how India simultaneously manages competing relationships and strategic interests during periods of geopolitical crisis. This paper seeks to address that gap by examining India's diplomatic balancing amid the Iran–Israel–US conflict through an integrated framework of strategic autonomy, energy security, connectivity politics, and multipolar diplomacy.

Against this backdrop, the present study seeks to address the following research question: To what extent does India's response to the Iran–Israel–US conflict reflect an evolving strategy of multi-aligned diplomacy aimed at preserving strategic autonomy in West Asia? To answer this question, the study pursues four objectives. First, it examines the strategic significance of West Asia in India's foreign policy. Second, it analyses India's diplomatic response to the ongoing conflict involving Iran, Israel, and the United States. Third, it assesses the implications of energy security, maritime security, and regional connectivity initiatives for India's strategic interests. Finally, it evaluates the role of strategic autonomy and multi-alignment in shaping India's contemporary engagement with West Asia.

Methodologically, the study adopts a qualitative research design based on policy analysis and document analysis. The analysis draws upon official government statements, policy documents, parliamentary debates, academic literature, think-tank reports, and contemporary geopolitical assessments. By examining India's diplomatic responses and strategic engagements, the study seeks to identify the broader patterns that characterise India's evolving foreign policy behaviour in West Asia.

The central argument advanced in this paper is that India's response to the Iran–Israel–US conflict reflects an evolving model of multi-aligned diplomacy that seeks to preserve strategic autonomy while simultaneously protecting energy security, economic interests, maritime connectivity, and regional influence. Rather than aligning exclusively with any single power bloc, India has pursued a strategy of calibrated engagement that enables it to maintain productive relations with competing actors while preserving policy flexibility. This approach reflects the broader transformation of Indian foreign policy in an increasingly fragmented and multipolar international order.

The paper is organised into six sections. Following the introduction, the second section discusses the conceptual foundations of strategic autonomy and multi-alignment. The third section examines India's core interests in West Asia. The fourth section analyses India's diplomatic balancing amid the Iran–Israel–US conflict. The fifth section explores emerging strategic challenges and opportunities, including connectivity initiatives, maritime security concerns, and the growing significance of BRICS+. The final section evaluates the broader implications of these developments and concludes by reflecting on the future trajectory of India's West Asia policy.

2. Strategic Autonomy and Multi-Alignment: Conceptual Framework

“Strategic autonomy has remained one of the most enduring principles of Indian foreign policy since independence” (Basrur 2021; Saran 2017). Although the concept has evolved considerably over time, its central objective has remained largely unchanged: preserving India’s ability to make independent foreign policy decisions without excessive dependence on any external power. In the contemporary international system, strategic autonomy is no longer understood merely as political non-alignment or diplomatic neutrality. Rather, it represents a flexible framework through which India seeks to engage multiple actors simultaneously while safeguarding its national interests. The growing complexity of global politics, characterised by shifting alliances, regional conflicts, economic interdependence, and emerging centres of power, has further reinforced the relevance of strategic autonomy in India’s external engagements.

Historically, India’s commitment to strategic autonomy was closely associated with the policy of non-alignment during the Cold War. “Under the leadership of Jawaharlal Nehru, India sought to avoid formal alignment with either the United States-led Western bloc or the Soviet bloc” (Saran 2017, 54). Non-alignment was not intended as passive neutrality; instead, it reflected an effort to preserve sovereign decision-making and create diplomatic space for newly independent states. While the Cold War context has disappeared, the underlying concern of maintaining policy independence continues to shape India’s foreign policy calculations. However, the contemporary international environment differs significantly from the bipolar structure that gave rise to non-alignment. The emergence of a more fragmented and multipolar order has compelled India to adapt its diplomatic strategy to new geopolitical realities.

This transformation has contributed to the rise of what many scholars describe as multi-alignment (Hall 2016, 273; Pant 2019, 87). Unlike traditional non-alignment, multi-alignment does not imply equidistance from major powers. Instead, it involves the simultaneous cultivation of strategic partnerships with multiple states and institutions based on issue-specific interests. India today maintains strong relations with the United States while continuing defence cooperation with Russia. It has deepened strategic engagement with Israel without abandoning its long-standing relationship with Iran. Similarly, India participates in groupings such as the Quad while simultaneously engaging with BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. These seemingly diverse engagements are not necessarily contradictory; rather, they reflect an attempt to maximise strategic flexibility in a rapidly changing international environment.

Recent scholarship further argues that India’s contemporary foreign policy reflects the growing interaction between strategic autonomy, strategic partnerships, and great-power aspirations. Rather

than abandoning autonomy, India increasingly pursues issue-based cooperation while retaining decision-making flexibility. This approach enables India to engage with diverse actors across multiple regions while preserving policy independence and strategic room for manoeuvre (Basrur and Hall 2022; Miller 2021; Carnegie India 2024).

“The growing importance of strategic autonomy in contemporary Indian foreign policy is closely linked to the emergence of multipolarity” (Basrur 2021; Mohan 2006). Unlike the post-Cold War period, which was characterised by significant American dominance, the present international system is marked by the rise of multiple centres of power. The increasing influence of China, the resurgence of regional powers, evolving security architectures, and the growing significance of economic connectivity have created both opportunities and challenges for middle powers such as India. In this context, strategic autonomy functions as a mechanism through which India can navigate competing geopolitical pressures without becoming excessively dependent on any single actor or alliance structure.

West Asia represents one of the most significant arenas in which this strategy is tested. The region occupies a critical position in India’s foreign policy due to its energy resources, trade routes, diaspora connections, and strategic geography. At the same time, it is characterised by persistent rivalries involving Iran, Israel, Saudi Arabia, and other regional actors, often intersecting with the interests of external powers such as the United States. Maintaining productive relations with these actors simultaneously requires a careful balancing strategy. The contemporary Iran–Israel–US conflict has intensified this challenge by creating situations in which diplomatic choices may carry significant economic and strategic consequences.

To analyse India’s response to these developments, this study adopts an analytical framework based on four interconnected dimensions. The first dimension is strategic autonomy, which refers to India’s capacity to preserve independent decision-making in its external relations. The second dimension is energy security, reflecting the importance of stable energy supplies for India’s economic growth and development. The third dimension is maritime connectivity and security, particularly in relation to vital trade routes such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Red Sea. The fourth dimension is multi-aligned diplomacy, which captures India’s efforts to maintain constructive engagement with competing regional and global actors without entering into rigid alliance commitments.

These four dimensions provide a useful framework for understanding India’s contemporary engagement with West Asia. Energy security shapes India’s economic priorities, maritime security influences its strategic calculations, and diplomatic engagement reflects broader concerns regarding regional stability and international influence. Together, these factors help explain why India has adopted a cautious and calibrated approach towards the Iran–Israel–US conflict. Rather than viewing the crisis

through a purely ideological or alliance-based lens, India has sought to balance multiple interests while preserving room for diplomatic manoeuvre.

The conceptual framework developed in this section serves as the foundation for the subsequent analysis. It enables a more comprehensive understanding of how strategic autonomy operates in practice during periods of geopolitical uncertainty. More importantly, it provides a basis for examining whether India's contemporary foreign policy represents a continuation of traditional strategic autonomy or an adaptation of that principle to the realities of an increasingly multipolar international order.

3. India's Strategic Interests in West Asia

West Asia occupies a pivotal position in India's foreign policy owing to its strategic, economic, and security significance. The region's importance extends beyond geographical proximity and historical interactions; it is deeply connected to India's energy requirements, trade networks, diaspora interests, and maritime security considerations. As India's global profile and economic ambitions continue to expand, developments in West Asia increasingly influence its broader strategic calculations. Consequently, stability in the region has become an essential component of India's national security and foreign policy priorities.

One of the most significant dimensions of India's engagement with West Asia is energy security. Despite ongoing efforts to diversify energy sources and promote renewable alternatives, India remains heavily dependent on imported crude oil and natural gas to sustain economic growth. A substantial proportion of these imports originates from West Asian countries, particularly Saudi Arabia, Iraq, the United Arab Emirates, Kuwait, and Qatar. Any disruption in regional stability, whether through armed conflict, sanctions, or maritime insecurity, has the potential to affect energy prices and supply chains. Rising oil prices not only increase India's import bill but also contribute to inflationary pressures and broader economic challenges. Consequently, ensuring uninterrupted access to energy resources remains a central objective of India's engagement with the region (Anas 2021, 67; Ahmad 2014).

Beyond energy considerations, West Asia represents an important economic partner for India. Trade relations between India and several Gulf countries have expanded considerably over the past two decades. The United Arab Emirates has emerged as one of India's most significant trading partners, while economic cooperation with Saudi Arabia, Qatar, Oman, and other Gulf states continues to deepen. Recent initiatives such as comprehensive economic partnership agreements, investment partnerships, and infrastructure cooperation have further strengthened these ties. "The growing economic interdependence between India and the region highlights the need for a stable geopolitical environment that facilitates trade, investment, and connectivity" (Pant 2019; Ministry of External Affairs 2023).

The Indian diaspora constitutes another critical pillar of India's relationship with West Asia. Millions of Indian citizens live and work across Gulf countries, making the region home to one of the largest overseas Indian communities in the world. These communities contribute substantially to India's economy through remittances while also serving as an important bridge between India and host countries. During periods of regional instability, the safety and welfare of Indian nationals become significant foreign policy concerns. Consequently, India's diplomatic engagement often reflects the need to protect diaspora interests alongside broader strategic and economic objectives (Anas 2021).

Maritime security has also emerged as a vital component of India's strategic interests in West Asia. The region is closely connected to key maritime routes that facilitate the movement of energy supplies, commercial goods, and strategic commodities. The Strait of Hormuz, in particular, remains one of the world's most critical energy chokepoints, while the Red Sea and the Bab el-Mandeb Strait have gained increasing importance in global trade. Disruptions in these waterways can have far-reaching consequences for India's economy and energy security. "Recent attacks on commercial shipping and escalating regional tensions have underscored the vulnerability of maritime supply chains and highlighted the growing importance of naval preparedness and maritime diplomacy" (Gateway House 2024).

In recent years, connectivity initiatives have added a new dimension to India's strategic engagement with West Asia. Projects such as the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) and the International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC) illustrate India's efforts to strengthen economic integration and improve connectivity across regions. These initiatives are not merely commercial projects; they also possess significant geopolitical implications. While IMEC reflects growing cooperation involving India, the Gulf region, and Europe, the INSTC highlights the continuing strategic importance of Iran in India's connectivity calculations. The coexistence of these initiatives demonstrates India's attempt to pursue multiple partnerships simultaneously without becoming dependent on any single geopolitical framework (Observer Research Foundation 2024; MP-IDSA 2024).

Taken together, energy security, economic cooperation, diaspora welfare, maritime security, and connectivity initiatives constitute the core pillars of India's interests in West Asia. These interests are closely interconnected and often reinforce one another. More importantly, they help explain why India has adopted a cautious and carefully calibrated approach towards regional conflicts. The Iran–Israel–US conflict is therefore not simply a diplomatic challenge for India; it is a test of its ability to protect a diverse range of strategic interests in an increasingly uncertain geopolitical environment. Understanding these interests is essential for analysing India's diplomatic balancing and strategic behaviour, which forms the focus of the subsequent section.

4. India's Diplomatic Balancing amid the Iran–Israel–US Conflict

The escalating tensions involving Iran, Israel, and the United States have created a complex diplomatic environment for India. Unlike many states that are closely aligned with one side of the conflict, India maintains significant strategic relationships with all three actors. Israel has emerged as an important defence and technology partner, Iran remains critical for regional connectivity and energy considerations, and the United States occupies a central position in India's broader strategic and economic engagement. Consequently, the contemporary crisis presents a significant test of India's ability to pursue strategic autonomy while maintaining productive relations with competing powers.

India's relationship with Israel has expanded considerably over the past two decades. Cooperation in defence, agriculture, cybersecurity, water management, and innovation has transformed bilateral ties into a multifaceted strategic partnership. Israel has become one of India's important defence suppliers, while high-level political engagements have contributed to closer diplomatic coordination. At the same time, India has generally avoided adopting positions that would indicate unconditional support for Israeli actions during periods of regional conflict. This reflects an effort to preserve the broader balance that characterises India's engagement with West Asia. "While strategic cooperation with Israel continues to deepen, Indian policymakers have consistently emphasised dialogue, restraint, and the peaceful resolution of disputes" (Kumaraswamy 2010; Ministry of External Affairs 2023–2025).

Simultaneously, Iran continues to occupy a significant place in India's regional strategy. Beyond its historical and civilisational links with India, Iran remains important because of its geographical location and its role in regional connectivity initiatives. Projects such as the Chabahar Port and the International North–South Transport Corridor provide India with opportunities to expand trade and connectivity beyond conventional routes. Moreover, Iran's location makes it strategically relevant to India's engagement with Central Asia and Eurasia. Despite challenges arising from international sanctions and geopolitical tensions, India has generally sought to maintain constructive engagement with Tehran while carefully managing its broader diplomatic commitments (MP-IDSA 2024; Ministry of External Affairs 2023–2025).

The United States represents another crucial dimension of India's balancing strategy. Over the past two decades, India–US relations have witnessed substantial growth in areas such as defence cooperation, technology, trade, and strategic dialogue. Shared concerns regarding regional security, maritime stability, and the evolving balance of power in the Indo-Pacific have further strengthened bilateral cooperation. Nevertheless, India's engagement with the United States has not translated into formal alliance commitments. Instead, "India continues to emphasise independent decision-making and issue-based cooperation, reflecting its broader commitment to strategic autonomy" (Pant 2019;

Mohan 2006). The Iran–Israel–US conflict therefore places India in a position where it must protect an increasingly valuable partnership with Washington while avoiding policies that could undermine its relations with other regional actors.

India's diplomatic response to the crisis demonstrates a pattern of cautious and calibrated engagement. Rather than adopting overtly partisan positions, Indian policymakers have generally emphasised de-escalation, dialogue, and regional stability. Official statements have consistently highlighted the importance of diplomacy, the protection of civilian lives, and the need to prevent the expansion of conflict across the region. Such responses reflect an awareness that prolonged instability could have significant implications for India's energy security, trade interests, and diaspora communities.

The principle of strategic autonomy is particularly visible in India's efforts to avoid binary choices between competing actors. Traditional alliance politics often requires states to align firmly with one side during geopolitical crises. India's contemporary foreign policy, however, reflects a different approach. "By maintaining communication channels with Israel, Iran, the Gulf states, and the United States simultaneously, India seeks to maximise diplomatic flexibility while minimising strategic risks" (Hall 2016; Basrur 2021). This approach enables India to engage with multiple actors without becoming excessively dependent on any single partnership.

The contemporary crisis has also highlighted the increasing role of economic considerations in diplomatic decision-making. Rising energy prices, disruptions to shipping routes, and uncertainty in global markets have reinforced the need for a stable regional environment. As a result, India's diplomatic balancing is not solely driven by political or security concerns but also by broader economic calculations. Protecting trade flows, ensuring energy availability, and maintaining investor confidence have become integral components of foreign policy decision-making.

At the same time, India's balancing strategy is not without challenges. Maintaining close relations with multiple actors can generate competing expectations and diplomatic pressures. Actions perceived as favourable to one side may create concerns among others, while rapidly changing regional dynamics can complicate policy choices. The Iran–Israel–US conflict therefore illustrates both the strengths and limitations of strategic autonomy as a guiding principle. Although the policy provides flexibility and room for manoeuvre, it also requires continuous diplomatic engagement and careful management of competing interests.

Overall, India's response to the Iran–Israel–US conflict reflects an evolving model of multi-aligned diplomacy. Rather than viewing regional politics through the lens of fixed alliances, India has sought to balance strategic partnerships, economic interests, and security priorities within a rapidly changing

geopolitical environment. This approach demonstrates how strategic autonomy functions in practice and provides important insights into the broader transformation of Indian foreign policy in the twenty-first century.

5. Emerging Strategic Challenges and Opportunities

The contemporary geopolitical environment in West Asia presents India with a complex mixture of challenges and opportunities. While the Iran–Israel–US conflict has intensified regional uncertainty, it has also accelerated strategic realignments that carry important implications for India's foreign policy. Beyond immediate diplomatic concerns, emerging developments in connectivity initiatives, maritime security, and multilateral diplomacy are reshaping the strategic landscape within which India operates. These developments provide valuable insights into the practical application of strategic autonomy and multi-aligned diplomacy in an increasingly fragmented international order.

One of the most significant developments in recent years has been the growing importance of connectivity politics. Infrastructure corridors and trade routes have become central instruments of geopolitical influence, linking economic interests with strategic objectives. In this context, the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) and the International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC) represent two important yet distinct connectivity frameworks. IMEC seeks to enhance economic integration between India, the Gulf region, and Europe through a network of transport and logistics corridors. The initiative reflects growing cooperation between India, several Arab states, and Western partners. In contrast, the INSTC relies heavily on Iran's strategic location and seeks to improve connectivity between India, Iran, Central Asia, Russia, and Europe.

For India, these initiatives are not mutually exclusive. Instead, they illustrate the broader logic of multi-alignment that characterises contemporary Indian foreign policy. Participation in IMEC strengthens India's engagement with Gulf states and Western partners, while continued support for the INSTC underscores the strategic importance of maintaining constructive relations with Iran. The coexistence of these projects demonstrates India's effort to diversify connectivity options and reduce excessive dependence on any single geopolitical framework (Observer Research Foundation 2024; MP-IDSA 2025). “The geopolitical significance of IMEC has also been examined as part of the broader transformation of regional connectivity politics and economic corridors in West Asia” (Das 2024). At the same time, regional instability poses challenges to the implementation of both initiatives, highlighting the close relationship between connectivity and security.

Maritime security has emerged as another critical area of concern. Recent disruptions in the Red Sea and attacks on commercial shipping have exposed the vulnerability of global trade routes to regional

conflicts. For India, whose economic growth is closely linked to maritime commerce, ensuring the security of sea lines of communication has become increasingly important. The Red Sea, the Bab el-Mandeb Strait, and the Strait of Hormuz collectively constitute some of the world's most strategically significant maritime corridors. Any disruption in these routes can affect energy supplies, increase transportation costs, and create broader economic uncertainties.

The growing instability in maritime domains has also contributed to an expanded role for the Indian Navy in protecting commercial interests and ensuring regional stability. India's naval deployments, anti-piracy operations, and maritime surveillance initiatives reflect a gradual shift from a predominantly reactive posture towards a more proactive security role. This development adds an important dimension to strategic autonomy. "While India continues to avoid formal alliance commitments, it has become increasingly willing to contribute to the protection of regional maritime commons when its interests are directly affected. Consequently, maritime security has become a crucial component of India's broader strategic engagement with West Asia" (Gateway House 2024).

Another important development concerns the evolving role of BRICS+ in contemporary geopolitics. The expansion of BRICS and the inclusion of several West Asian countries have created new opportunities for diplomatic engagement. The presence of countries such as Iran, Saudi Arabia, and the United Arab Emirates within the same multilateral framework provides India with an additional platform for dialogue and cooperation. Unlike traditional security alliances, BRICS+ offers a relatively flexible forum through which states with diverse interests can pursue economic and political engagement.

For India, the growing significance of BRICS+ aligns closely with its broader support for multipolarity and Global South cooperation. The platform allows India to engage regional rivals simultaneously while promoting dialogue on issues such as development, trade, energy security, and institutional reform. Although BRICS+ is unlikely to eliminate regional rivalries, it nevertheless provides an important diplomatic space that complements India's strategy of maintaining balanced relations with multiple actors (BRICS Summit Declaration 2024).

Taken together, connectivity initiatives, maritime security challenges, and emerging multilateral platforms reveal the increasingly complex environment in which India's West Asia policy operates. These developments demonstrate that strategic autonomy is no longer confined to diplomatic positioning alone. It now encompasses economic connectivity, maritime resilience, technological cooperation, and multilateral engagement. The Iran–Israel–US conflict has therefore become more than a regional crisis; it has evolved into a broader test of India's ability to adapt to shifting geopolitical realities while preserving strategic flexibility.

The evidence discussed in this section suggests that India's approach to West Asia is becoming progressively multidimensional. Rather than relying on a single partnership or strategic framework, India is pursuing a diversified strategy that seeks to balance competing interests across multiple domains. This evolving approach reflects both the opportunities and challenges of navigating a multipolar international order and provides an important context for reassessing the contemporary meaning of strategic autonomy in Indian foreign policy.

6. Discussion: Reassessing Strategic Autonomy in Contemporary Indian Foreign Policy

The preceding analysis demonstrates that India's engagement with the Iran–Israel–US conflict cannot be adequately understood through traditional frameworks of alliance politics or diplomatic neutrality. Instead, India's response reflects a broader transformation in the practice of strategic autonomy. While the principle continues to occupy a central position in Indian foreign policy, its contemporary application differs significantly from its earlier association with Cold War non-alignment. The current geopolitical environment requires a more flexible and adaptive approach capable of accommodating multiple partnerships, competing interests, and rapidly changing regional dynamics.

One of the most significant findings of this study is that strategic autonomy has evolved from a defensive foreign policy principle into an active instrument of diplomatic engagement. During the Cold War, strategic autonomy primarily functioned as a mechanism to preserve political independence and avoid entanglement in bloc politics. In contrast, contemporary strategic autonomy is increasingly characterised by selective engagement with multiple actors across different issue areas. India today simultaneously maintains strategic partnerships with the United States, defence cooperation with Israel, connectivity initiatives involving Iran, and economic engagement with Gulf countries. This pattern suggests that strategic autonomy is no longer defined by distance from major powers but by the ability to engage them without sacrificing independent decision-making.

The findings of this study lend support to scholarly arguments that strategic autonomy remains a defining feature of Indian foreign policy despite significant changes in the international system (Pant 2019; Basrur 2021). Scholars such as Harsh V. Pant and Rajesh Basrur have argued that strategic autonomy has adapted to contemporary geopolitical realities rather than disappeared altogether. The evidence presented in this study broadly supports this interpretation. However, it also suggests that contemporary multi-alignment extends beyond earlier formulations by incorporating new dimensions such as connectivity politics, maritime security, supply-chain resilience, and emerging multilateral platforms such as BRICS+ (Hall 2016). "Strategic autonomy therefore appears less as a policy of diplomatic distance and more as a framework for managing multiple partnerships while preserving

independent decision-making” (Saran 2017; Mohan 2006).

The Iran–Israel–US conflict provides a valuable case study for examining this transformation. Rather than aligning explicitly with any one actor, India has sought to preserve diplomatic flexibility while protecting its strategic interests. This approach reflects an understanding that contemporary geopolitical challenges rarely permit binary choices. Energy security, maritime stability, trade connectivity, and diaspora welfare are interconnected concerns that require engagement with a diverse range of regional and global actors. Consequently, India’s response to the conflict has prioritised stability, dialogue, and de-escalation rather than ideological alignment or geopolitical confrontation.

The study also highlights the growing significance of geo-economic considerations in shaping foreign policy behaviour. Traditional analyses of strategic autonomy often focus on military and diplomatic dimensions. However, contemporary realities indicate that economic resilience, connectivity networks, supply-chain security, and energy access have become equally important components of national strategy. India’s participation in initiatives such as IMEC and the INSTC reflects an awareness that economic corridors are increasingly linked to geopolitical influence. Similarly, concerns regarding maritime security demonstrate how economic interests can directly influence strategic decision-making.

At the same time, the findings suggest that India’s model of multi-aligned diplomacy is not without limitations. Maintaining balanced relations with multiple actors requires continuous diplomatic engagement and careful management of competing expectations. Regional crises often create situations in which policy choices are closely scrutinised by different partners. Actions perceived as favouring one side may generate tensions elsewhere, while prolonged instability can reduce diplomatic flexibility. The challenge, therefore, lies not merely in preserving strategic autonomy but in sustaining it under conditions of increasing geopolitical competition.

Another important observation concerns the relationship between strategic autonomy and multipolarity. India’s foreign policy increasingly reflects the belief that a multipolar international order provides greater opportunities for middle powers to pursue independent strategies. The expansion of forums such as BRICS+ and the growing importance of regional partnerships support this perspective. Nevertheless, multipolarity also introduces new uncertainties, as states must navigate a more fragmented and less predictable international environment. Strategic autonomy, therefore, functions both as a guiding principle and as a practical response to these uncertainties. These developments also support broader arguments regarding India’s evolving role in the emerging global order and its growing capacity to shape regional and international outcomes through flexible diplomatic engagement (Ganguly 2020; Observer Research Foundation 2025).

The evidence presented in this paper indicates that India’s contemporary West Asia policy is best understood as a strategy of calibrated multi-alignment. This strategy does not seek neutrality in the traditional

sense, nor does it imply equal distance from all actors. Instead, it involves issue-based engagement, strategic flexibility, and the pursuit of overlapping partnerships that advance national interests across multiple domains. In this regard, the Iran–Israel–US conflict illustrates how India has adapted its foreign policy to the realities of a changing international order while retaining the underlying objective of independent decision-making.

Ultimately, the evolution of strategic autonomy reflects broader changes in India's role within global politics. As India's economic capabilities, diplomatic reach, and strategic ambitions continue to expand, its foreign policy is increasingly shaped by the need to balance regional commitments with global aspirations. The contemporary practice of strategic autonomy therefore represents not a departure from earlier principles but an adaptation of those principles to the challenges and opportunities of the twenty-first century.

7. Conclusion

The contemporary geopolitical tensions involving Iran, Israel, and the United States have created a complex strategic environment that carries significant implications for regional and global politics. For India, these developments extend beyond diplomatic concerns and directly affect critical national interests relating to energy security, trade, maritime connectivity, and regional stability. As a major emerging power with expanding economic and strategic ambitions, India has been compelled to navigate this challenging environment while preserving its ability to pursue an independent and flexible foreign policy.

This study examined India's response to the Iran–Israel–US conflict through the interconnected frameworks of strategic autonomy, energy security, connectivity politics, maritime security, and multi-aligned diplomacy. The analysis demonstrated that India's contemporary engagement with West Asia cannot be understood solely through traditional concepts of non-alignment or alliance politics. Instead, Indian foreign policy increasingly reflects a pragmatic and adaptive approach designed to balance multiple relationships simultaneously while safeguarding core national interests.

The findings indicate that strategic autonomy remains a central principle of Indian foreign policy, although its meaning and application have evolved considerably. Rather than maintaining distance from major powers, contemporary strategic autonomy enables India to engage constructively with diverse actors while retaining decision-making independence. India's simultaneous engagement with Israel, Iran, the United States, and key Gulf states illustrates this transformation. The study further showed that considerations relating to energy security, economic connectivity, diaspora welfare, and maritime stability have become integral components of strategic decision-making, expanding the

scope of strategic autonomy beyond its traditional diplomatic and security dimensions.

The analysis of emerging developments such as the IMEC–INSTC connectivity competition, Red Sea maritime disruptions, and the growing significance of BRICS+ highlights the increasingly multidimensional nature of India’s West Asia policy. These developments demonstrate that India’s regional engagement is no longer confined to bilateral diplomacy but is increasingly shaped by broader geopolitical, geo-economic, and institutional considerations. As a result, India’s approach to West Asia reflects a strategy of calibrated multi-alignment that seeks to maximise opportunities while minimising strategic vulnerabilities.

The study also reveals that while multi-aligned diplomacy provides significant flexibility, it is not without challenges. Managing competing partnerships requires sustained diplomatic engagement, careful policy coordination, and the ability to respond effectively to rapidly changing geopolitical circumstances. The persistence of regional rivalries and the uncertainty associated with an evolving multipolar order will continue to test India’s diplomatic capabilities and strategic judgement.

In conclusion, the Iran–Israel–US conflict serves as an important case study for understanding the evolution of India’s foreign policy in the twenty-first century. It demonstrates how strategic autonomy has adapted to contemporary geopolitical realities and how India increasingly seeks to balance competing interests without sacrificing policy independence. As global power structures continue to evolve, India’s ability to sustain this approach will remain a crucial determinant of its regional influence and international standing. The future trajectory of India’s West Asia policy is therefore likely to be shaped by its continued pursuit of strategic flexibility, diversified partnerships, and an enduring commitment to autonomous decision-making in an increasingly complex international environment.

References

1. Ahmad, Talmiz. 2014. *West Asia at War: Repression, Resistance and Great Power Games*. New Delhi: HarperCollins.
2. Anas, O. 2021. “India–West Asia Relations under the ‘Nationalist’ Modi Government.” *International Studies* 58 (1): 59–79. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020881720984324>.
3. Basrur, Rajesh. 2021. “India’s Strategic Autonomy and the Future of Asian Security.” *International Affairs*.
4. Basrur, Rajesh, and Ian Hall. 2022. “India’s Strategic Partnerships and the Challenge of Multi-Alignment.” *International Politics*.
5. Carnegie India. 2024. *Strategic Autonomy in India’s Contemporary Foreign Policy*. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. <https://carnegieendowment.org/india>.
6. Das, Debasish. 2024. “Revising the Contours of the Evolving Middle Eastern Order through the India–

- Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor.” *Asian Journal of Political Science*.
7. G20. 2023. *G20 New Delhi Leaders' Declaration*. New Delhi: G20 Secretariat. <https://www.g20.org/>.
 8. Ganguly, Sumit. 2020. “India's Foreign Policy and the Emerging Global Order.” *Asian Survey* 60.
 9. Gateway House. 2024. *Maritime Security in the Red Sea and India's Strategic Interests*. Mumbai: Gateway House. <https://www.gatewayhouse.in/>.
 10. Hall, Ian. 2016. “Multialignment and Indian Foreign Policy under Narendra Modi.” *The Round Table* 105 (3): 271–286.
 11. Kumaraswamy, P. R. 2010. *India's Israel Policy*. New York: Columbia University Press.
 12. Malone, David M. 2011. *Does the Elephant Dance? Contemporary Indian Foreign Policy*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 13. Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA). 2024. *Chabahar Port and India's Connectivity Strategy*. New Delhi: MP-IDSA. <https://www.idsa.in/>.
 14. Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses (MP-IDSA). 2025. *International North–South Transport Corridor and India's Eurasian Outreach*. New Delhi: MP-IDSA. <https://www.idsa.in/>.
 15. Miller, Manjari Chatterjee. 2021. *Why Nations Rise: Narratives and the Path to Great Power*. Oxford: Oxford University Press.
 16. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. 2023–2025. *India–Iran Cooperation Documents and Chabahar Agreements*. <https://www.mea.gov.in/>.
 17. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. 2023–2025. *India–Israel Joint Statements*. <https://www.mea.gov.in/>.
 18. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. 2023–2025. *Official Statements on West Asia*. <https://www.mea.gov.in/>.
 19. Mohan, C. Raja. 2006. *Crossing the Rubicon: The Shaping of India's New Foreign Policy*. New Delhi: Viking.
 20. Observer Research Foundation (ORF). 2024. *India's West Asia Policy in a Changing Regional Order*. New Delhi: ORF. <https://www.orfonline.org/>.
 21. Observer Research Foundation (ORF). 2024. *India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor: Strategic Implications for India*. New Delhi: ORF. <https://www.orfonline.org/research/india-middle-east-europe-economic-corridor-towards-a-new-discourse-in-global-connectivity>.
 22. Observer Research Foundation (ORF). 2025. *Strategic Autonomy and India's Global Engagement*. New Delhi: ORF. <https://www.orfonline.org/>.
 23. Pant, Harsh V. 2019. *Indian Foreign Policy: An Overview*. Manchester: Manchester University

Press.

24. Rajagopalan, Rajesh. 2020. "Evasive Balancing: India's Unviable Indo-Pacific Strategy." *International Affairs* 96 (1): 75–93. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz224>.
25. Saran, Shyam. 2017. *How India Sees the World: Kautilya to the 21st Century*. New Delhi: Juggernaut.