

India's Middle East Policy: Strategic Autonomy, Multi-Alignment, or Selective Alignment?

Amara Sehar Qureshi^{1*}, Azeeta Seher Qureshi²

¹ Research Scholar, University of Kashmir, Jammu and Kashmir, India

² University of Kashmir, Jammu and Kashmir, India

*Corresponding Author Email: qureshiamara07@gmail.com

Abstract

India's foreign policy has seen an ideological shift from non-alignment and anti-colonial solidarity to a pragmatic, national interest-based approach which is now described as "Multi-Alignment". This article analyses whether India's proclaimed neutral and de-hyphenated stance is a genuine display of an independent and autonomous sovereignty specially in relation with Iran, Israel, United States. This article uses a mixed-method of combining textual analysis with statistical data from trade, diplomatic, military partnership, energy security, defence cooperation, and United Nations voting record commencing from 2010 to 2025. The conclusion shows that while India's official stance continues to rhetorically campaign Palestinian statehood, sovereignty, non-interference due to its ideological posture, yet its practical actions show selective partnerships based on the economical, strategic and geopolitical reasons. To understand the paradox of India's Foreign policy, where it remains formally independent but practically constrained, the article uses the framework of the "bounded strategic autonomy". India's choices are restricted by its ongoing requirement to import military hardware, to navigate unequal power dynamics of contemporary world and to balance against China's geopolitical assertiveness at global forums. This article contributes to the contemporary deliberations about how developing nations conduct their foreign affairs and demonstrate the dynamics of neutrality in multilateral world.

Keywords

Foreign Policy, India, Iran, Israel, Middle East, Multi-alignment, Sovereignty, Strategic Autonomy, United States.

INTRODUCTION

India's historical ties with the Middle East were shaped by shared ideological values, economical necessities, and geopolitical interplay. During the Cold War era, India's foreign policy was anchored in the principles of the Non-Aligned Movement (NAM), emphasizing anti-colonial solidarity, support for Palestine, and strategic distance from competing power blocs. This ideological orientation was particularly evident in India's consistent diplomatic backing of Palestinian self-determination and its limited engagement with Israel until the early 1990s [1], [2].

The fundamental revision in the foreign relations and strategy of India was driven by the fall of the erstwhile Soviet Union, India's economic liberation and the rise of U.S.A as a new global hegemon. The normalization of the relation between India and Israel in 1992 catalysed a deepened cooperation in technology, defence, agriculture and innovation. Moreover, India has carefully balanced this with by sustaining critical energy and infrastructure links with Iran, mostly Chahbahar port, while simultaneously publicly backing Palestine in Global discussions [3], [4].

Currently, under successive BJP led administration, India has adopted a "Multi-Alignment" approach. Under it, instead of choosing sides, New Delhi. The core objectives and methods of this approach is to secure vital national interests by balancing and de-hyphenating. This approach allows India flexibility of shifting alliances in this complex geopolitical environment where cooperation and conflict are two sides of a coin and conjugated with economic gains [2].

Notwithstanding, India's purported Neutrality, its foreign policy is increasingly seen as favouring the U.S.A and Israel. Commentators argue that New Delhi is pivoting towards America's geopolitical goals and Israel's security doctrine, as evident by growing partnership in defence acquisition, joint anti-terrorism operations and diplomatic manoeuvring [5]. The debate is further complicated by a steep decline in Iranian oil export after the imposed sanction by USA and growing strategic ties with Israel.

India's caution reaction to the recent attacks on Iranian supreme leader and disposition of Venezuela's President has intensified scrutiny to the claim of India's neutrality. These subdued reactions are views as deliberate strategic pragmatism rather than strict adherence to moral and ideological stance [6], [7]. Similarly, India's position on ongoing Gaza crisis has garnered significant attention. Although advocating for humanitarian aid and de-escalation, India has restrained directly condemning Israel, even amid fierce global debates regarding disproportionate force and international law violation [2], [8].

India's conduct on multilateral platforms prioritizes a calculated stance. Its approach to the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation), noted for nuanced engagement rather than absolute alignment, is evident during regional escalations involving Iran. Analysts view this selective participation as a core component of India's strategic autonomy to sustain crucial relations on all the sides without alienating key actors [9].

Additionally, India's Quiet Diplomacy to major powers like USA shifting foreign policy such as withdrawing from

internationally determined commitments, tax wars, protectionism, etc., stems from a calculated strategy of restraints. India deliberately chooses patience over immediate vocal pushback to avoid diplomatic frictions, trade penalties or policy volatility. It reflects India's broader framework of preserving long term games over short term diplomatic assertiveness [2].

Scholarly works demonstrate that the shared domestic ideology and ideological politics increasingly drive international relations, extending far beyond geopolitical strategy. In India, for example, the rise of majoritarian politics of Hindu nationalism and exclusion of minority has sparked debates over secularism, identity-based nationalism and minority rights, including hijab ban [10]. Similarly, in Israel academic debates explore the intersection of ethnic identity, minority integration, and state policies towards Palestinian communities [8], [11]. While comparing two situations remains controversial, the parallel emphasis on state security, nationalist identity, policing and counter-terrorism creates similarity in their policy approach [4].

Altogether, India is trading absolute neutrality for selective strategic selectivity in the Middle East. Although India ostensibly retains core tenants like sovereignty, two state solution, non-interference, and its diplomatic stances are carefully managed reactions to global pressure, transnational economic imperative, energy dependency and growing alliances like I2U2.

This article evaluates the central research question:

Whether India's non-interventionist policy in the Middle East is an assertion of determined strategic autonomy, or it is a calculated reaction caused by structural or ideological alliances?

LITERATURE REVIEW

Through the scholarly lenses, the India-Middle East policy is varied. While some academics view it as a pragmatic multi-alignment that maximizes national interests. Critics view it as an opportunistic selective alignment, and advocates praises its strategic autonomy in balancing geopolitical rivalries. This academic discourse is categorised into theoretical and pragmatic perspective of Multi-Alignment and Realism, empirical perspective of de-hyphenation and resource security, and critical perspective of populist and personalised democracy and geopolitical balancing acts.

In his analysis [1], explains that India's earlier Middle East diplomatic outreach was guided by anti-colonialism, and post-colonial assertiveness. By campaigning movements like Palestinian statehood, India projected as a newly independent state. Yet, he points out that over time, this ideological diplomacy has been replaced by pragmatic and realistic priorities following the cold war [4].

Building on this analysis, Harsh V. Pant argues that the changing national interest has shifted India's ideological stance to a more pragmatic one. He asserts that deepening ties with Israel recalibrates focus on technological and militarily

modernisation. Furthermore, Pant argues that this change does not abandon core basic historical principals but rather modernise them to fit global geopolitics [12].

In his 2022 analysis, C. Raja Mohan characterised India as a "Bridging Power", capable of interacting with major conflicting global powers concurrently. India's Middle East policy perfectly demonstrates this flexible, interest-based diplomacy as it allows New Delhi to foster relationships with Gulf States, Iran and Israel without being locked into formal alliance [13].

Rajagopalan contends that the pursuit of strategic autonomy has become increasingly unviable in an interconnected world. India's foreign policy is compelled by structural alignments and geopolitical imperatives. This is mostly seen specifically in India's partnership with America to balance China's dominance. Consequently, this structural framework dictates India's cautious diplomacy with Iran and its adherence to U.S sanctions [14].

Scholar Ashley J. Tellis, notes that the realities of great power competition heavily dictate India's foreign policies. He explains that as India relies more on U.S for advanced military and technological support, it inadvertently limits its own freedom of action. Consequently, while India maintains the illusion of total independence, its practical political choices increasingly mirror Washington's geopolitical objectives [9].

Ian Haall's analysis asserts that the Modi government redefined India's approach towards Israel. It has gone a major evolution shifting from "covert and cautious" to "overt and strategic". India has shifted from discreet ties to open and robust cooperation. This change shares a nationalist and security focused [15].

Departing from the conventional realistic perspective, ethical and critical analysts have emphasised the moral dimension of the India's Middle East engagements. Documented findings of systematic biases from Human Rights Watch and B'Tselem describe Israeli policies in Palestine as discriminatory. Consequently, given India's long stand for Palestine, these ethical critiques highlight a glaring contrast with New Delhi's currently muted diplomatic response.

In his analysis [10], argues that the ideological underpinning of BJP's Hindu Nationalist agenda drives majoritarianism and stringent security management. This ideological pivot, fosters a convergence of interests with Israel creating a natural ideological bridge as both nations prioritize national security and identity-based politics [10].

The International Crisis Group highlights, how U.S led maximum pressure campaign against Iran narrows the diplomatic avenues around New Delhi. This compels India to employ a highly measured and prudent diplomatic manoeuvres. This shows how powerful nation still holds hegemony of influencing developing nations.

A 2025 assessment by the Institute of South Asian Studies, outlines India's strategy as a pragmatic balancing driven by energy needs, diaspora welfare, and geopolitical realities.

This approach allows India to avoid fixed alliances and employ a selective engagement policy to fulfil its economic needs, secure energy requirements and protect its vast diaspora.

Concluding, data from United Nations General Assembly (2024) resolutions, indicates that India formally backs Palestine through its voting records. Nevertheless, a growing pattern of diplomatic abstention and nuanced language suggests a more strategic ambiguous stance.

Synthesis of Literature

- Realist Pragmatic view opining India is based on National Interest, Security and Power Balancing: Pant, Mohan, Tellis, Hall.
- Strategic Autonomy but within structural constraints: Rajagopalan, ISAS, Crisis Group.
- Critical Ideological shows that domestic ideology and normative considerations shape external alignment: (Jaffrelot, Human Rights Watch, B'Tselem)

This varied spectrum of practical economic needs, global power dynamics, and ideological framework resists a single classification. This re-enforces the nuanced and impractical view of pure neutrality.

THEORETICAL FRAMEWORK

While traditional paradigm like Realism, Strategic Autonomy forms the bedrock of India's Middle East strategy, they are no longer sufficient to decode modern diplomatic shifts including multi alignment and ideological factors. This paper fulfils the gap by incorporation of the critical thoughts, explicitly analysing the roles of domestic nationalism, populism and evolving ideological affinities that drive international partnerships.

Realism

Rooted in realist tradition, the states prioritize power and self-interests above all. By securing energy supply, building defence agreements, bridging connectivity projects and aligning with U.S and Israel, India is pragmatically maximizing its strategic influence and safety in the highly competitive world.

India's pivot away from the Iranian oil to comply with U.S sanctions, its growing defence ties with Israel, its willingness to disturb historical energy pipelines from Iran, maximizing discounted crude oil from Russia amidst Russia-Ukraine conflict, the Chahbahar port exception, and participation in QUAD and I2U2, demonstrates how national interest supersedes ideological and historical diplomatic alignments [16].

Strategic Autonomy (Bounded Autonomy)

In the contemporary era, India's foreign policy is better described as multi-alignment rather than absolute strict autonomy [17].

This article proposes the idea of "bounded strategic autonomy," contending that while New Delhi retains sovereign decision making, yet this freedom is relative. Real

world choices, examples of which are, procuring S-400 from Russia, while simultaneously renewing a nuclear deal with US and cooperating in iCET; deepening defence and technology with France and Israel via QUAD while limiting Iranian oil; countering China's assertiveness in BRICS etc., suggests that choices are made to protect and improve national interest and these choices are conditioned by the forces of realpolitik, globalisation, dominant nation's influence and regional security dynamics [9].

Multi-alignment

India's multi-alignment replaces passive neutrality with dynamic engagements. By simultaneously balancing with rivals, India maximizes its security and energy needs and tends to the modern technological innovations. India is positioning itself as a stabilizing "Third Pole" through forums like G20 and campaigning for the global south while lucratively maintaining ties with the West [18].

This simultaneous engagements with powers like Russia vs West; BRICS vs Western Forum; defence from Russia, France, Israel, U.S; QUAD vs SCO; Chahbahar vs IMEC; allows India a mechanism for risk mitigation, multi-alignment, and diversified reliance. This hedging of India although pragmatic, but is found to be restrained and bounded within interplay of power dynamics in the contemporary world [12], [13] (Pant 2016; Mohan 2022).

Populism and Majoritarian Nationalism

To decode the contemporary foreign relations, the work puts India's foreign policy through the lens of Populism and Majoritarian Nationalism. This theory assumes that populist leaders analyse the world as a battle between Idealized "Pure people" and hostile "internal/external" forces. Their diplomacy becomes heavily dependent on "us vs them" dynamics. Routine diplomatic negotiations are frequently scrutinized as existential crisis as seen in many cases such as, for example, rejection of Multilateral norms by Hungary and protectionist policy of America First by U.S. By doing so, foreign policy becomes a tool to mobilise a majoritarian, religion-driven, domestic based against supposed external conspiracies. Their agenda heavily depends upon the national security and identity politics and they institutionalise the communication channels.

In India, the mainstream Hindu Nationalism has altered the nation's political narrative by cantering on the cultural and civilizational pride, territorial defence, diasporic engagement, ideological and security alignment with the likes of the same [10]. This in turn has influenced the outcome of the foreign policy and international engagements of India [15].

Ideological Convergence and Security Doctrine

The ideological synergy particularly in the domain of trans-national terrorism mechanism and security shows convergence between India and Israel. Both nations employ a preventive government, a state-centric security doctrine, technological centrality and a robust cutting-edge domestic

surveillance architecture to neutralise perceived threats [4], [15].

As documented by the Observer Research Foundation, a strong executive authority is put forward to manage regional security. Both nations believe that conventional tools are inoperable to suffice against ideological and religious extremism, justifying a stauncher stance. Security doctrine depends on Offensive rather than defensive tactics which contrasts with India's no first use nuclear policy [19].

Minority Politics and Normative Tensions

Instead of viewing foreign alliances as purely strategic or neutral, various critics and organisations like Human Rights Watch and B'Tselem demonstrates that internal treatment of minorities and domestic political structure heavily dictate foreign policy and international cooperation. They highlight that in Israel systemic inequality and structural discrimination are used to maintain demographic and political dominance [8], [11] (Human Rights Watch 2021; B'Tselem 2021).

India's internal shift towards Hindutva directly influences its diplomacy. Indiscrimination towards Muslim minority forces the Government to engage in intense diplomatic damage control to preserve their critical economic engagements such as with GCC. This implies that internal domestic politics, such as soft diplomacy of Yoga, socio-religious debates, diaspora and civilizational solidarity, para-diplomacy, legal reforms and minority rights such as Citizens Amendment Act directly dictates nations international legitimacy, diplomatic partnerships, and external alliances with evolving domestic definitions of belongings and solidarity [10].

Jingoism and Strategic Communication

States leverage hyper and belligerent nationalism characterised by saber-rattling and identity politics to unite domestic population and to project international dominance [7]. This blend of extreme nationalism and assertiveness prioritizes strength over soft diplomacy.

In Indian context, this is highlighted by some key events like 2019 Balakot Airstrike, broader stand offs with China, the war-room atmosphere created by media, and leveraging diaspora for foreign policy as seen in case of "Howdy Modi" [7].

Disbalancing and Selective Engagement

Unlike traditional Balance-of-power theory, that posits nations to either counter or make alliance with super powers, India pursues a "Disbalancing approach". Instead of hard balancing or locking into military alliance, it navigates global politics through "Issue-based" priorities rather than adhering to a permanent alignment [3], [5].

Examples include:

- Strategic alignment with the United States in defence
- Continued engagement with Iran for connectivity
- Diplomatic support for Palestine in multilateral forums

Such behaviour reinforces the argument that India operates

within a framework of issue-based alignment rather than consistent strategic positioning [18].

Religious Nationalism and Civilizational Narratives

Civilizational identity, religious nationalism and historical consciousness shapes how India and Israel approach their foreign policy [10], [4]. Even with stark institutional difference, their national identity is tied to their ancient civilizational roots. Both nations share a commitment to state sovereignty, national security and defending national security. This creates a mutual bond of understanding and cooperation between the two nations [15].

Integrated Framework

- Material Drivers: Realism, energy security, defence needs
- Structural Constraints: Bounded strategic autonomy
- Strategic Behaviour: Multi-alignment and disbalancing
- Ideational Factors: Populism, nationalism, ideological convergence
- Normative Dimensions: Minority politics and global human rights discourse

This approach goes beyond conventional classifications of binary neutrality or alignment to emphasise how power, identity, and strategy play in foreign policy outcomes.

METHODOLOGY

This research evaluates India's Middle East engagements through a mixed- method framework. It measures tangible or quantitative trends and policy or qualitative discourses to explore domestic priorities, discursive, ideational, global structure and core interests. It expresses both material factors like trade, defence and narrative factors like strategic signalling to dwell deep into the India Middle East policies (Creswell 2014).

The methodology is designed to explicitly analyse India's pursuit of "Bounded strategic autonomy".

Research Design and Analytical Strategy

The research integrates multiple data sources and methods. It combines:

- Process tracing to examine key policy shifts (e.g., post-2014 foreign policy changes, Gaza war response, Abraham Accords engagement)
- Comparative analysis between different time periods (pre- and post-1991; pre- and post-2014)
- Case study methodology focusing on the Gaza war and Abraham Accords as critical junctures

This multi-layered design allows for the identification of patterns of continuity and change in India's foreign policy behaviour (George and Bennett 2005).

Quantitative Analysis

Content Analysis of Official Statements

Primary sources include:

- Statements from the Ministry of External Affairs

(MEA)

- Parliamentary debates and official press releases
- Speeches by key policymakers

By using thematic method of approach, the documents are analysed to identify reoccurring themes such as:

- Strategic autonomy
- Counter-terrorism
- Two-state solution rhetoric
- Neutrality and balancing

This helps assess the gap between rhetorical positioning and actual policy behaviour [15].

Discourse Analysis

The Critical Discourse Analysis is used for examining the hermeneutics in:

- The Gaza conflict
- Relations with Israel and Iran
- India's role in global diplomacy

By dissecting these texts, researchers can uncover how ideologies operate in real world through rhetoric strategies [10].

Secondary Literature Review

It synthesises Academic Journals, think-tank analysis, and media reports to validate empirical findings with theoretical frameworks. Prominent sources include:

- Carnegie Endowment reports
- ISAS publications
- International Crisis Group analyses

This enables cross-verification of findings and incorporation of diverse scholarly perspectives.

Quantitative Analysis

Trade and Economic Data

- Bilateral trade volumes between India and Israel, Iran, and Gulf states
- Sectoral breakdown (defence, technology, energy)

Method of Trend analysis is employed for identification of economic shifts over time period of 1992 to 2025.

Energy Dependence Analysis

- The data of oil imports from Iran and Gulf
- Transformative trends following U.S specially from 2012 to 2019

This dataset is used to evaluate how heavily international factors and Global constrains sway government action [17].

Defence Procurement Patterns

- Share of Israeli defence imports in India's total procurement
- Evolution of military cooperation

It highlights security alignments and strategic dependencies of India [19].

UN Voting Analysis

Voting pattern in the United Nations General Assembly is

analyses from 2010 to 2025, to get an overview of India's diplomatic positioning.

The variable used are:

- Percentage of Pro-Palestine votes
- Frequency of abstentions
- Shifts in voting patterns post-2014

This allows for a quantitative assessment of normative consistency versus strategic adjustment (UNGA 2024).

Case Study Method

Case Study 1: Gaza War (2023-present)

- Analysis of India's official statements
- UN voting behaviour
- Alignment with international humanitarian law discourse

Case Study 2: Abraham Accords (2020-present)

- Evaluation of India's economic and strategic engagement
- Analysis of new multilateral frameworks (e.g., I2U2)

These selected cases provide a turning point, demonstrating how India manages opposing demands and opportunities.

Data Sources

Primary Sources

- Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) statements
- United Nations General Assembly records
- Government reports and parliamentary debates

Secondary Sources

- Academic books and journal articles
- Think tank reports (Carnegie, ISAS, Crisis Group)
- Reputed media outlets (e.g., Economic Times, Al Jazeera)

Databases

- Trade and economic databases
- Defence procurement records
- Energy statistics repositories

Limitations of the Study

- Data Constraints: Limited availability of classified defence and strategic data
- Interpretive Bias: Qualitative analysis may be influenced by researcher interpretation
- Temporal Scope: Focus on post-2010 trends may overlook longer historical continuities

These constrains are resolved through synthesis and mutual validation of varied data sources.

Methodological Contribution

The study merges empirical data with the qualitative texts analysis. Conventional models relied exclusively on conceptual and tangible variables; thus, this research presents a comprehensive framework that conceptualises India's dynamic interplay with Middle East within:

- Structural constraints
- Strategic interests

- Ideological narratives

This approach is particularly suited to analysing bounded strategic autonomy, where policy outcomes cannot be explained through a single variable.

OBJECTIVES

- Analysing diplomatic engagements in Middle East such as with Iran, Israel, GCC, to get a broader framework of foreign policy objectives [17].
- Evaluating strategic autonomy to assess whether India's strategic Autonomy is independent or a reaction of external constraints [16].
- Investigating multi-alignment and hedging to determine whether it reflects a deliberate, calculated strategy or a reactive policy [17].
- Examining ideological and domestic influences including national identity, populism, and domestic interests that drives India's international relations [10].
- Assessing reactions to international crisis like Gaza war and Abraham Accord for evaluating India's diplomatic manoeuvring [16].

SIGNIFICANCE

- Theoretically, the research evaluates the concept of Bounded strategic autonomy by demonstrating how India operates in these interplays.
- Empirically, the work provides validation to changing dynamics of India Middle East relations through cross-referencing and evidence-based data sets [9].
- Analytically, it provides a deeper multi-dimensional lens by integrating realism with ideological and normative approach.
- Provides policy utility guide to for decision makers as they attempt to balance their national interests in competing world.
- By illustrating how global power manages competing international forces, the article provides a wider global relevance surrounding multipolarity and changing world dynamics.

EMPIRICAL ANALYSIS

Energy Security and Iran

India significantly reduced Iran's crude oil import from approximately 10% in 2012 to near zero % by 2019. This drastic shift came after U.S sanction on Iran, despite India historical ties with Iran¹. The geopolitical pressure from U.S and safeguarding the Indian interests in Iran specially the Chabahar port highlights both the internal and external constraints in foreign policy. Thus, India balanced its energy and regional interests by complying with the sanctions [20].

Strategic Partnership with Israel

India and Israel strategically expanded their relationship since normalising their diplomatic relations in 1992. Within years, the bilateral trade skyrocketed from around \$200

million to over \$10 billion by 2024. Defence ties anchored this bond as Israel supplied cutting-edge technologies to India. Drones, missiles, surveillance tools reflected shared goals in counter terrorism and border security. Israel is among the top importer of arms to India (Al Jazeera, 2026).

Diplomatic Behaviour and UN Voting

Historically, India supported Palestinian self-determination with records showing 80% pro- Palestinian stance. However, frequent abstentions from votes against Israel This shift suggests a deliberate pragmatic and hedging strategy at preserving strong strategic and economic ties with both Israel and Middle East.

Discussion: Bounded Strategic Autonomy

The Bounded Strategic Autonomy of India is evident as policy choices are shaped by structural constraints like:

- Dependence on energy imports
- Defence partnerships with Israel and the U.S.
- Integration into global economic systems

Selective Alignment

While outwardly neutral, India exhibits Issue-specific partnerships. This selective alignment is evident in key areas such as:

- Defence cooperation with Israel
- Compliance with U.S. sanctions on Iran
- Strategic partnerships with Western powers

Diplomatic Balancing

India simultaneously maintains its strategic balancing by:

- Support the two-state solution
- Engage with Arab countries
- Participate in multilateral forums

Counter-Arguments

Scholars assert, India practices genuine strategic autonomy by:

- Independent Voting Behaviour: Continued support for Palestine at the UN
- Engagement with Iran: Development of Chabahar port
- Diversified Partnerships: Relations with Gulf countries

These indicators show that India's geopolitical stance avoids complete reliance on one nation.

Broader Implications

- With changing global order, nations like India can no longer adhere to strict, active, non- alignment.
- The decline of binary alignments, i.e., East vs West.
- Neutrality as a tool of diplomatic balancing.
- The rise of multipolarity
- The increasing importance of economic interdependence

CASE STUDY I: GAZA WAR, INTERNATIONAL LAW, AND INDIA'S DIPLOMATIC POSITION

Background to the Gaza Conflict

Triggered by the October 2023 Hamas attack and the ensuing Israeli military response, Gaza conflict became a defining one in Middle East. The resulting displacement, mass destruction, and the loss of lives have triggered a global legal and ethical debate. For emerging global power like India, the conflict highlights the delicate balancing act and geopolitical dilemma that India was tested with to weigh normative foreign policy commitments against strategic imperatives.

International Humanitarian Law and Legal Debates

International Law experts are divided on the conflict in Gaza. While international organisations and U.N bodies have expressed alarm over the potential International Humanitarian Law (IHL), particularly on the laws of:

- Distinction (civilian vs. combatant targets)
- Proportionality (military advantage vs. civilian harm)
- Necessity (legitimacy of force used)

The legality of the current conflict remains fiercely debated. The 2024, session of the U.N General Assembly and 2024 reports from Human Rights Watch have voiced serious concerns regarding potential violations of international law, specifically pointing to the disproportionate use of force and restricted use of force. Reports by Human Rights Watch and debates within the United Nations General Assembly have raised concerns regarding potential violations of these principles, including disproportionate use of force and restrictions on humanitarian access.

Meanwhile, Israel anchors its strategic action in Article 51 of the U.N Charter, asserting its inherent right to self-defence. Consequently, states and global institutes remain divided on the application and interpretation of the International Law.

India's Official Position

India responded to the Gaza conflict by cautiously and strategically balancing the diplomatic relations. India specifically urged for the protection of civilians, condemning the attacks by Hamas and a return to diplomatic dialogue for a peaceful resolution (Ministry of External Affairs, 2023). India propounded for:

- Immediate cessation of hostilities
- Protection of civilians
- Humanitarian assistance
- A return to negotiations based on a two-state solution

This dual approach reflects an attempt to balance:

- Strategic ties with Israel
- Historical support for Palestine
- Broader global diplomatic positioning

India's position thus aligns with what scholars describe as "calibrated neutrality" rather than strict neutrality [12], [13].

UN Voting Behaviour and Diplomatic Signalling

India's voting pattern in the ongoing Gaza Crisis in the U.N gives us an insight into the stance of India. The key resolutions of Gaza crisis are:

- India supported humanitarian resolutions calling for aid access
- It abstained on certain resolutions perceived as overly critical of Israel

This pattern reflects a shift from consistent pro-Palestine voting toward selective abstention, indicating increasing diplomatic caution [2].

These actions illustrated India's strategy of:

- Maintaining credibility with Global South countries
- Avoiding alienation of Israel and Western partners

Strategic Constraints and External Pressures

India's foreign policy on the Gaza conflict relies on delicate balancing act. Rather than taking one side stance, India is navigating a complex matrix of structural realities. In its broader strategic environments, the constraints faced by India is:

- Defence Dependence on Israel: Israel remains one of India's top defence suppliers, particularly in advanced technologies such as drones and missile systems [15].
- Strategic Partnership with the United States: India's growing alignment with the U.S. influences its diplomatic behaviour, especially on issues involving key American allies [13].
- Energy and Diaspora Considerations: India's interests in Gulf countries and the presence of a large Indian diaspora necessitate a cautious approach to regional conflicts [9].

Critical Interpretations

From the Human Rights perspective, India's measured silence regarding the violation of International Law reveals that the foreign policy is driven by a pragmatic national interest rather than principled values. Some critics view it as hypocritical while advocated define it as realistic perspective. Even though India supports a "Two-Nations" theory, its unwillingness to condemn action in middle east shows strategic gains consistently take precedence over human rights advocacy [8], [6], [10].

Alternative perspective frames India's stance as pragmatic diplomacy, positing that outspoken criticism could jeopardize valuable strategic alliance without altering global trajectories.

CASE STUDY II: ABRAHAM ACCORDS AND INDIA'S STRATEGIC GAINS

Overview of the Abraham Accords

The 2020 Abraham Accord completely reshaped Middle East diplomacy. It established formal ties between Israel and several Arab states, including United Arab Emirates and Bahrain. The shift replaced old hostilities with new avenues of regional trade and security. This provided India a

pragmatic geopolitical framework to strengthen ties across all its regional partners simultaneously allowing for a multi-alignment strategy.

Strategic Implications for India

- Trilateral and Mini-lateral Cooperation
- I2U2 grouping with aims of:
 1. Infrastructure development
 2. Food security
 3. Renewable energy
 4. Technological innovation

India's engagement highlights its capacity to utilize emerging partnership across the area to secure both political and financial gains [14]:

The Abraham Accord has enabled India to:

- Diversify trade in the region.
- Foster connectivity between South Asia and Middle East.
- Have a say in joint ventures and initiatives, mainly defence, technology and agriculture.
- Enabled free and fair Maritime trade routes
- Resilient Energy supply chains

Geopolitical Advantages

The Abraham Accord has anchored India's multi-alignment strategy by:

- De-escalating stress between Israel and Gulf states.
- Enabling simultaneous engagement without diplomatic contradiction

This shift allows India to pursue "convergent diplomacy," where previously competing relationships become mutually reinforcing.

Ideological and Strategic Dimensions

- Restoring diplomatic ties by mutual survival and military defence rather than broader economic integration or shared values
- Mutual concerns regarding terrorism and regional instability serve as a unifying foundation for involved countries.

India benefits from the counter terrorist partnership and security cooperation [10].

Limitations and Risks

The challenges faced by the accord:

- Exclusion of Palestine: The side-lining of the Palestinian issue raises questions about India's long-standing support for a two-state solution
- Regional Polarization: Continued tensions with Iran may complicate India's balancing strategy
- Overdependence Risks: Deepening ties with a specific bloc could limit strategic flexibility

These conditions mean that India must carefully tread and craft rules that are balanced.

Conclusion: Abraham Accords as an Opportunity Structure

The Accord provides India a strategic gateway to diversify economic and geopolitical engagements in the Middle East. As regional dynamics are shifting towards flexible, interest-led ties over rigid alliances, India's diplomatic balancing act is being tested. For India, requirement is to merge the foundational foreign policy values with its growing security and energy goals.

POLICY IMPLICATION AND CONCLUSION

The research findings offer a vital guidance for India's foreign policy strategy in Middle East. By pursuing strategic autonomy alongside mounting global obligations, distinct policy approaches are generated as follows:

Recalibrating Strategic Autonomy:

India must shift from a rhetoric stance to an institutional framework of "bounded strategic autonomy" by diversifying partnership to avoid over dependence on any single power. This approach acknowledges that while absolute independence is unattainable, policy flexibility can be maintained through multi-aligned foreign relations [14].

This requires:

- Expanding defence partnerships beyond a narrow set of suppliers
- Strengthening indigenous technological and military capabilities
- Enhancing economic resilience to external shocks

Balancing Normative Commitments with Strategic Interests:

To maintain international credibility, India must align its diplomatic action with normative values by avoiding excessive silence on humanitarian issues in Gaza Conflict. A balanced approach involves actively championing a two-state solution, providing humanitarian aid and leveraging diplomatic ties to de-escalate the tension [4].

Suggested balanced approach would be:

- Consistent advocacy for international humanitarian law
- Clear articulation of positions on civilian protection
- Continued support for a rules-based international order

Strengthening Multi-Alignment through Issue-Based Coalitions:

India's multi-alignment strategy should evolve into a more structured system of issue-based coalitions. I2U2 is one such platform which would provide for a flexible and diversify issues of specific sectors like technology, food security and infrastructure [14].

Policy diversification should include:

- Expanding mini-lateral frameworks
- Leveraging economic diplomacy in the Middle East
- Enhancing regional connectivity initiatives

Managing Relations with Iran and the Gulf:

India must carefully navigate its relationships with Iran and Gulf states to avoid strategic imbalances [9].

Implications include:

- Revitalizing engagement with Iran through non-sanctioned sectors.
- Maintaining balanced relations with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) countries.
- Securing energy needs and protecting the diaspora's interests.

Reducing Strategic Vulnerabilities:

India's strategic sectors of energy and defense create constraints and vulnerabilities in policy execution. Correcting them requires structural reforms such as:

- Diversification of energy sources.
- Investment in renewable energy.
- Indigenising defence production.

This will let India pursue a more independent foreign policy [1].

Navigating Ideological and Domestic Influences:

Internal ideologies and national identity now heavily shape state's foreign policy. Leveraging these narratives bolster internal political authority, but compromises nation's diplomatic agility and freedom of maneuvering.

Recommendations include:

- Institutional foreign policy rather than by politics.
- Politicization of external relations should be avoided.
- Aligning with a clear-cut distinction between domestic ideology and international commitments.

Enhancing Diplomatic Engagement in Multilateral Forums:

India's UN Voting pattern shows a preference for strategic hesitation and flexible neutrality. Although it protects diplomatic maneuvering, it risks diminishing the country's broader moral and political leadership on Global platform.

To strengthen its global role, India should:

- Take more consistent positions on key international issues
- Actively participate in shaping global governance norms
- Use multilateral platforms to reinforce its leadership in the Global South

Leveraging Emerging Geopolitical Opportunities:

The Abraham Accord grants India the freedom to balance ties between rival nations facilitating broader integration. By utilizing this geopolitical shift, India can broaden its cross-border investments in initiatives like I2U2.

By leveraging these changes, India can:

- Strengthen trilateral and multilateral cooperation
- Enhance trade and investment flows
- Become a key player in integration of Middle East economies.

Balancing these goals while simultaneously advocating for lingering issues like that of Palestine and Gaza is must.

Toward a Coherent Grand Strategy:

Ultimately, India must transition from a reactive, issue-specific approach in Middle East to a cohesive, institutionalized regional framework that integrates long term strategy along with short term needed actions. India's strategy should integrate:

- Economic interests
- Security priorities
- Diplomatic objectives

Such a framework would shift India from impulsive planning and elevate its standing on the world stage.

To successfully navigate Middle East and safeguard its independence, India must transition from simply being a passive reactor to multiple powers to proactively planning its future actions. By overcoming institutional and external constraints and remaining principled, India can expand its regional influence with strategic autonomy.

India's dynamic in Middle East is a balance of national interests rather than strict neutrality. Constrained by global realities, India pursue a flexible partnership. The framework of "Bounded Strategic Autonomy" accurately defines these delicate tensions, highlighting limited decision making due to interdependence in globalised world.

REFERENCES

- [1]. Ganguly, S. (2010). *India's foreign policy: Retrospect and prospect*. Oxford University Press.
- [2]. United Nations General Assembly. (2024). *Resolutions on the situation in Palestine*. <https://www.un.org>
- [3]. ISAS. (2025). *India and Middle East geopolitics*. Institute of South Asian Studies.
- [4]. Gordon, N. (2020). *Israel's occupation*. University of California Press. <https://doi.org/10.1525/9780520345247>
- [5]. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. (2026). *India's evolving Middle East strategy*. <https://carnegieendowment.org>
- [6]. Al Jazeera. (2024). *India's stance on Iran and Middle East tensions*. <https://www.aljazeera.com>
- [7]. International Crisis Group. (2024). *Tensions in Iran and regional implications*. <https://www.crisisgroup.org>
- [8]. Human Rights Watch. (2021). *A threshold crossed: Israeli authorities and the crimes of apartheid and persecution*. <https://www.hrw.org>
- [9]. Tellis, A. J. (2021). *India's great power politics*. Carnegie Endowment.
- [10]. Christophe Jaffrelot, *Modi's India (2021): Hindu nationalism and the rise of ethnic democracy*. Princeton University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1f886xp>
- [11]. B'Tselem. (2021). *A regime of Jewish supremacy from the Jordan River to the Mediterranean Sea: This is apartheid*. <https://www.btselem.org>
- [12]. Pant, H. V. (2016). *Indian Foreign Policy: An Overview*. Manchester University Press.

- [13]. Mohan, C. R. (2022). *India's world: How prime ministers shaped foreign policy*. Penguin Random House.
- [14]. Rajagopalan, R. (2020). *Strategic Autonomy Revisited*. Observer Research Foundation. Al Jazeera. (2026). *India-Israel Relations Overview*.
- [15]. Hall, I. (2019). *Modi and the reinvention of Indian foreign policy*. Bristol University Press. <https://doi.org/10.2307/j.ctv1tbhp2h>
- [16]. Caves, J. P. (2019). *Oil Trade Between Iran and India Plummets*. The Iran Primer, United States Institute of Peace.
- [17]. Tharoor, S. (2012). *Pax Indica: India and the World of the 21st Century*. New Delhi: Penguin Books.
- [18]. Shidore, S. (2026). "India's Multialignment and Democratization of the International Order." Council on Foreign Relations, May 11, 2026.
- [19]. Mitra, Joy. "Beyond Current Nuclear Doctrine Debates: Addressing India's Two-Front Challenge." Observer Research Foundation, Issue Brief No. 394, August 2020.
- [20]. Economic Times. (2026). *India and Iran Oil Trade Analysis*.