

India's quest for strategic autonomy in the changing geopolitical landscapes

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ABSTRACT

The existing global landscape has spotted multifaceted geopolitical tensions, regional conflicts and shifting power structures. Crises in the South China Sea, Taiwan, Ukraine and the Middle East present serious threats to both regional and global security. These disputes not only endanger national sovereignty and territorial integrity but also have far-reaching implications for global stability, trade and economic growth. The geopolitical order stands at a crossroads: rising powers are adopting increasingly assertive diplomatic strategies, while proponents of a status quo struggle to retain dominance. The geopolitics of global contestation in gaining merit are altering the balance of power struggle between the United States of America, the People's Republic of China and certainly The Russian Federation. Confidence-building measures are crucial to mitigate a viable and peaceful resolution to contemporary conflicts as research suggests. Since India gradually improves its position in the global order, it is bound to face the dilemmas of foreign policy choices. Confidence-building measures are essential for fostering viable, peaceful resolutions to contemporary conflicts, as highlighted by research. As India strengthens its position in the evolving global order, it faces complex foreign policy dilemmas. Despite these challenges, India plays a critical role in promoting peace-building and ensuring regional security, particularly in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and beyond. The study underscores how protracted conflicts undermine multilateral democratic institutions and challenge state policy-making frameworks. By focusing on *Indian foreign policy* in this age of conflict, the paper seeks to analyse

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its decision-making processes and explore policy options that align with India's quest for strategic autonomy.

Keywords: *Geopolitics, Contemporary conflicts, Indian foreign policy, Strategic autonomy.*

Introduction

With India's commitment to democracy, pluralism and its growing economic and military capabilities make it a vital player in the contemporary global affair. In the current geopolitical landscape, India navigates multi-aligned relationships with major powers including the United States, China and Russia while addressing regional security challenges such as terrorism and piracy. India has adopted an active and nuanced foreign policy which promotes peace and stability in the region. This multi-faceted approach involves diplomatic engagements, economic cooperation and strategic partnerships. Today the active geopolitical conflicts pose a direct challenge to Indian foreign policy on the global stage. The regional contest in the Indo-Pacific where Chinese dash lines in the South China Sea and East China Sea regions have created much anticipated difference of opinion (Henrich et al., 2010). The Russia-Ukraine conflict initiated by the Russians as of February 2022 (Demir, 2022). The ongoing Israel-Palestine crisis, a result of the October 7th Hamas attacks reigniting the tensions in the Gaza and West Bank sectors and the loss of lives of the civilian population (United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights, 2024). These conflicts have forced India to carefully choose its foreign policy decisions while maintaining its strategic autonomy, as balancing relationships with conflicting countries has become complex. In fact, Indians occasionally use the *Monroe Doctrine (1823)*¹ as a model for Indian foreign policy since they see their country as a benevolent hegemon in the Indian Ocean area. (Holmes, 2023). India's ability to maintain neutrality and engage in diplomatic dialogue with all parties is crucial in ensuring stability and peace in these conflict zones. By actively participating in international forums and advocating for peaceful resolutions, India continues to play a constructive role in addressing these global challenges (Narlikar, 2017). The Ukraine conflict presents

itself as a major obstacle to India's historic principle of neutrality and strategic autonomy as Western powers, including the U.S., repeatedly threatened India with sanctions for acquiring energy resources from Russia (Topchi, 2022). Despite mounting pressure, India is able to maintain its historical ties with the Russian Federation. It is a success for Indian foreign policy, measured by the fact that India has strengthened its partnerships with Western nations, who view Russia as the aggressor and support the Ukrainians with economic cooperation and critical arms supply. India's balancing act was also reflected in the United Nations, whereby, carefully abstaining from various voting procedures, it was able to maneuver striking a balance between both parties. The Indian government emphasised the need for peaceful dialogue and an end to the war, reiterating Prime Minister Modi's axiom of "*not an era of war*" (Roy, 2023). Prime Minister Modi is perhaps the only leader who met both President Zelenskyy and President Putin personally, and conveyed India's support for the peace settlement between the two countries (Peri, 2024). Further India and the state of Israel have enjoyed strong ties both on the diplomatic front and in the technological sphere. Although sharing similar interests in various domains, the Indian state has historically had a stance of favoring the two-state solution for peaceful resolution of the Israel-Palestine conflict, yet again complimenting its balance in the Middle Eastern region crucial for trade and energy imports (Alterman & Mohan, 2023). The terrorist attack executed by the Hamas group on Israel has questioned the neutral stance. India has shown solidarity with the civilians and the state of Israel condemning the act of terrorism. "We stood in solidarity with Israel at their moment of crisis, when they were facing these terror attacks" PM Modi said in addition to expressing his condolences for the deaths in the October 7 terror attack in Israel (UN Press, 2023). Towards the east, the South China Sea remains a critical zone of geopolitical tension particularly for India, as it navigates complex relationships with China and other regional players. India's balancing act in this region involves addressing territorial disputes, overlapping maritime claims and strategic interests of extra-regional powers. As India aligns its interests with Southeast

Asian nations, it aims to counterbalance China's assertiveness (Grossman, 2023). The increasing militarisation of the region and involvement of non-regional powers such as the United States, changes various dimensions in India's strategic calculus particularly emphasising the need for strategic partnerships to ensure regional stability (Paul, 2018).

Objective of the study

To analyse contemporary geopolitical conflicts and India's contention for strategic autonomy.

Methodology

The paper is based on qualitative research methodology using secondary data sources to analyse regional conflicts and their repercussions on global security. The present study has been divided into three sections focusing "Indo-Pacific region and the Taiwan dilemma, The Russia-Ukraine conflict and multi-alignment, and Navigating the troubled waters of the Israel-Palestine conflict" while examining India's foreign policy.

Indo-Pacific region and the Taiwan dilemma

India was amongst the first countries in the world to establish diplomatic relations with the People's Republic of China (PRC) in 1950. Despite the annexation of Tibet, a buffer between India and China, India's first Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru forged cordial relations with Beijing. In addition, New Delhi adopted the One-China policy in spite of the unfinished Chinese civil war resulting in the formation of Republic of China (ROC), prominently known as Taiwan (Gokhale, 2022). As per official standings of the Government of India, Taiwan is recognised under the One-China policy, but allegiance to the One-China policy started to wane in the beginning of the 21st century as the indications of difficulty on the Sino-Indian border appear to remain and the United States - India relations were improving steadily (Mohan, 2022). As of 2010, following the visit of then Chinese Premier Wen Jiabao, India discontinued this practice. This decision was rooted in India's dissatisfaction with China's issuance of 'stapled visas' rather than conventional visas for residents of Jammu and Kashmir

traveling to China (Mohan, 2010). Taiwan is in the midst of the Indo-Pacific's power politics contest as the People's Republic of China and the United States aim for dominance in regional geopolitics. India aims for significant influence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) and wants to be a net security provider in the region (Singh, 2021). This leverage major choke points and thus crucial in the context of growing Chinese aspirations (Scott, 2008). More than 80% of the world's seaborne trade in oil transits through the IOR narrow straits (Singh, 2022). The strategic importance of the Indian Ocean has portrayed a major struggle of power among global powers to secure trade routes implying a security dilemma to India (Medcalf, 2020). The expansionist method of the Chinese Belt and Road Initiative (BRI) in the twenty-first century has challenged India's national interest. The ensuing geopolitics and race for hegemony among global powers in IOR largely lay stress on India's regional security structure. In the Chinese periphery, among other conflicts the Taiwan issue has emerged as a major flashpoint. India seeks to maintain good relations with both China and Taiwan. India's stance on the Taiwan issue is driven by a desire to balance its relationships with China and the United States, while also advancing its own strategic interests in the region (Satoru, 2023). The Taiwan issue has substantial implications for India's relations with China and the United States (Pant, 2020). China views India's relations with Taiwan as a challenge to its sovereignty and has responded with increasing assertiveness in the region and The United States, on the other hand, has sought to strengthen its relations with India as a counterbalance to China's growing influence in the region. India's stance on the Taiwan issue navigates complex dynamics, while advancing its own interests (Medcalf, 2020) and backing international norms on open seas. China's increasing perseverance in the region poses a significant challenge to India's foreign policy decision making and to develop effective strategies for the foreseeable future. New Delhi while balancing its relationships has also advanced its own strategic interests through its Act East policy and pursuit of economic and security cooperation with the Association of South East Asian Nations (ASEAN). India currently attempts to manage China's

assertiveness in the region using diplomatic measures including its balancing act with growing relations with the U.S., Japan and allied nations, setting up economic viability both at home and in abroad through attracting foreign investments and expanding its military industrial base through various partnerships and technology transfers. The Taiwan issue poses significant challenges to Indian foreign policy, including balancing relations, managing China's assertiveness and advancing India's own strategic interests. For this, India avoids strong political connections based on ideology and military contracts and concentrates more on economic cooperation. As per Table 1.1, in 2022-23 the annual bilateral commerce trade substantially touched US \$10.9 billion in 2023 (Hashmi & ORF, 2023).

Table 1.1: Trade between India and Taiwan, 2015-23
(in US\$ billion)

Year	Exports	Imports	Total Trade	Balance of Trade
2015-16	1.4	3.3	4.7	(-) 1.9
2016-17	2.2	3.1	5.3	(-) 0.9
2017-18	2.15	3.9	6.05	(-) 1.75
2018-19	2.6	4.5	7.1	(-) 1.9
2019-20	1.7	4	5.7	(-) 2.3
2020-21	1.6	4	5.6	(-) 2.4
2021-22	2.7	6.2	8.9	(-) 3.5
2022-23	2.6	8.3	10.9	(-) 5.7

Source: Department of Commerce, Government of India (2023)

New Delhi wants to encourage more Taiwanese capital to participate in India's economic development and ranks as the sixteenth largest trading partner for Taiwan standing as the twenty-seventh largest import source for the republic (Vanvari & Tan, 2021). Taiwanese companies had invested in the infrastructure, petrochemical, steel, electronics, shipping and finance sectors here in India. Additionally, as per market trends New Delhi is eager to collaborate with Taiwanese businesses in manufacturing semiconductor chips as the technology thrives in Taiwan making it a crucial part of the China-Taiwan geopolitical tensions (The Economist, 2023). As the world becomes more technology driven,

marvels such as semiconductors come as significant factors for powering the growth of a nation's economic and industrial ecosystem. India thus pursuing to become a potential player for global chip manufacturing has instigated its growing efforts for semiconductor cooperation (*The Strategic Implications of Chip War for India – CENJOWS*, 2024).

Despite ongoing challenges pertaining to the areas of infrastructure and supply chain, such a collaboration is crucial to India's semiconductor aspirations due to its reciprocal advantages. One of India's prominent challenges is its inability to draw in Taiwan's semiconductor giants, such as Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company (TSMC). Today India's initial semiconductor industries benefit greatly from technological assistance from collaboration with Taiwanese businesses. Vedanta and Foxconn recently inked a Memorandum of Understanding to produce semiconductors in India. The two businesses first-of-its-kind cooperative venture will help the prime minister realize his goal of developing an Indian chip manufacturing ecosystem. (KNN India, 2022). The growing bilateral relations between the two democracies as a result of Chinese peripheral diplomacy and economic viability not only poses major ramifications for Taiwan but for India as well. The Taiwan question, as China grows, has become a more concerning part of the geopolitical dynamics of the Indo-Pacific region. In addition to promoting its own strategic interests in the area, India's position on the Taiwan problem must negotiate a number of intricate relationships, including those with China and the U.S.

The Indian Foreign policy through the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue, a strategic partnership of likeminded democracies or more commonly known as the 'QUAD' initiative is striking a balance in the region without indulging into a direct conflict. The QUAD partnership, with members like the United States, already committed to the Taiwanese defence, houses an option of extending its favour in the defence of Taiwan in the Indo-Pacific (Fong, 2022). Taiwan, when compared with a much bigger China, may have a hard time defending itself on its own. Taiwan and the

QUAD countries ought to work together in order to prevent the Chinese from attempting to invade the island nation. Increasing Taiwan's military cooperation with the regional alliance network is not only advantageous to the island but also a tremendous advantage to QUAD members and other governments in the region. It is of utmost importance for many QUAD members that the region including the Taiwan challenge remains under control (Sang & Le, 2022). Countries like Japan mark Taiwan as "extremely important" and the belief is shared by the Americans and Australians too. It is but India that has not yet fully and openly endorsed its support for Taiwan (Kishi, 2022). Also, the QUAD is less likely to react to a Taiwan Strait emergency successfully without Taiwan's integration in such forums. The QUAD countries mutually agree to expand the participants in the strategic alliance (Chen, 2022). It is quite crucial in order to convince member countries to move forward together, as each QUAD member considering their own interests and geopolitical determinants will move forward with the challenge and assess how the QUAD and Taiwan will complement each other. In such geopolitical settings it becomes significantly important for member countries to discuss the development of a shared defense policy enhancing the military capabilities of the allied (Chen, 2022). Towards south in the South China Sea (SCS), Chinese territorial claims under its self-proclaimed Nine-dash line theory heavily dominates the regional maritime boundaries. Such claims has erupted maritime disputes with its South East Asian region neighbours and displayed regional hegemonic ambitions of the PRC. The countries like the Philippines, Vietnam, Indonesia and more have their reservations on China's threatening acts to dominate the region. India's diplomatic response to SCS emphasizes freedom of navigation aligned to International laws (Xu, 2014). Continuing its efforts in the region, in 2016, India and USA signed the "Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement" (LEMOA) to strengthen maritime cooperation and security (PIB, 2016). This established US-India's strong defence ties with ASEAN countries as a counter to Sino-Pak nexus in the Himalayas. While avoiding actions and policies that could provoke new tensions or crises, India's approach to

diplomacy actively seeks peaceful resolutions and aims to minimize regional conflicts. This strategy is exemplified by Prime Minister Modi's visits to Russia and Ukraine conflict, where he sought frameworks for global peace, as discussed further in the subsequent section of this paper.

The Russia-Ukraine conflict and multi-alignment

Modern traditional styled conflicts were supposed to be a swift effort. Innovations across multiple dimensions of technology, particularly within the military-industrial complex and dual-use technologies, the implementation of new doctrines and tactics, as well as military drills were intended to reduce the timeframe of a conflict. However, the current situation deviates from these expectations. The concept of a short and decisive battle originated from the complexities posed by traditional wars and engagements between various nation-states most prominently seen in the 20th century. As humanity has progressed and transformed over centuries, so too have the strategies and rationales behind waging a war. We find ourselves once again today in an epoch characterized by protracted conflicts. The dissolution of the Union of Soviet Socialist Republics (USSR) in December 1991 signified the conclusion of the Cold War and facilitated the establishment of the Russian Federation alongside fourteen additional states (Kanet & Kozhemiakin, 1997). For many observers the conclusion of the Cold War and the fragmentation of the Soviet Union were paradoxically significant events. The current President, Vladimir Putin characterized this occurrence as “*the greatest catastrophe of the 20th century*” (Kramer, 2019). In the aftermath of the Soviet Union's disintegration, its successor, the contemporary Russian state continued to embody the same contest for dominance in the global geopolitical landscape and the power politics that were historically pursued by the Tsars and the Soviets. The ambitions and dilemmas have been widely visible in the context of the Russia-Ukraine hostilities which continues unabated two years into the confrontation as of February 2022 (Troianovski & MacFarquhar, 2022). The crisis in Ukraine offers valuable insights for India. Presently Ukraine finds itself caught between two

formidable powers contesting for their geopolitical ambitions. India too faces similar scenarios dealing its hands and having to navigate and balance its relations with the United States and its European allies, as well as the Russia-China coalition.

There were various instances during the ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict where the Indian Foreign Minister was questioned by Europeans for the purchase of Russian energy supplies which the minister rebutted with the dictum of 'multiple options' (Bhattacharya, 2024). The art of harmonizing the significant factions of the global power politics is gaining traction for the Indian state in the global multipolarity is paving a way for multiple options or '*multi-alignment*' for others to follow. As the global power politics moves into a sense of multipolarity major powers and rising powers are becoming more and more significant, especially for countries like Russia which is struggling to maintain its power and influence in the world of rising China and the hegemonic West. The 'Primakov doctrine'², named after Yevgeny Primakov, a former Russian Prime and Foreign Minister, has been emphasised by Russia's current Foreign Minister Sergey Lavrov as a concept promoting multipolarity that future historians will examine closely (Sysoyev, 2014). This doctrine asserts that a unipolar world dominated by a single center of power that is the United States, is impossible for Russia. Instead, the Russian foreign policy should aim for a multipolar world, managed by a coalition of major powers – Russia, China, and India along with the United States. As per the framework, Russia seeks not to confront the United States alone but rather collaborate with other major powers to limit the United States' influence and also position itself as an essential player whose approval and dissent are crucial for resolving significant issues confronting the international community. It is argued that a unipolar world is fundamentally unbalanced while multipolarity would establish checks and balances against unilateral and arbitrary exertions of power by a hegemon (Rumer, 2019). Such drive towards multipolarity is asserting India towards being of great strategic value for the Russians. The West has long been cautious of Russia, which has succeeded in maintaining its significance in the global power

landscape for centuries. Even after the Soviet Union's collapse, Russia resurfaced as a formidable nation capable of contesting Western supremacy most evidently perceived in Ukraine, Georgia, Central Asia and the Caucasus among the many other regions.

Ukraine's geographical position caught between European nations favouring Western power dynamics and the Russians and its ethnic diversity has majorly contributed to the ongoing crisis and challenges within Ukraine (Gerard, 2017). This situation has afforded India a crucial strategic window to assess the implications of the Ukrainian situation within the broader context of global power struggles and to reassess its own strategies in this environment. In this reassessment, the West is striving to bring India closer by underscoring the threat that China poses and the growing partnership between Russia and China. In the present geopolitical landscape concerning India, the influence of China is a significant factor for India's decision-making. Daleep Singh, the Deputy National Security Advisor, conveyed to India's External Minister in 2022 that it is improbable Russia would provide support to India in a conflict with China (Chang, 2022). This was illustrated in the Galwan clashes in 2020 when Russia maintained a neutral stance. The Western allies, particularly the United States, condemned Chinese aggression against India's sovereignty and reaffirmed their commitment to protect their allies and partners (Sharma & Dhar, 2024). These assessments along with the security dilemma and strategic threats facing India are notably shifting India's strategic calculations and pursuit of autonomy which will undoubtedly influence the re-evaluations being undertaken by the Indian side in the long term. Such changing dynamics of global politics pose considerable challenges for the India-Russia partnership as well, especially given China's growing influence and efforts of dominance in its peripheral region and the West putting in efforts to influence India. As China fortifies its strategic ties with Russia (Kapoor, 2024). Thus, India carefully navigates its alliances and security strategies in this increasingly complex geopolitical environment.

Navigating the troubled waters of the Israel-Palestine conflict

Historical ties and contemporary strategic interests have influenced the Israel-Palestine conflict and India's stance on the delicate matter. During the Nehruvian era, India avoided Cold War alignments and fostered strategic relations with both Israel and Iran reflecting India's complex geopolitical positioning. During Indira Gandhi's tenure, India supported Arab nations, particularly advocating for Palestinian self-determination, to appeal to Muslim voters and balance Pakistan's influence (Aishwarya, 2022) in the region. Although India had recognised Israel in 1950, the establishment of diplomatic ties with Israel were only made in 1992 (Bhaduri, 2023). The menace of terrorism and the growing American interests have further strengthened India-Israel relations, signaling a shift toward pragmatic diplomacy along with bilateral trade in the military sectors and technology sharing in various academic fields including agriculture as established by the 'Indo-Israel Agriculture Project' (Kumaraswamy, 2004). India's foreign policy regarding the Israel-Palestine conflict has evolved significantly over the years. Initially, India maintained a strong pro-Palestinian stance on international platforms, supporting Palestinian rights and opposing the creation of Israel voting against the partition of Palestine in the UN in 1947 driven by its desire to align with Arab nations and its large Muslim population. However, post-Cold War, India began reassessing its foreign policy. The establishment of diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992 marked a pivotal shift, and since then, India has sought to balance its ties with both Israel and Palestine. While strengthening relations with Israel, India continues to support the Palestinian state and its rights. Recent developments, such as Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2017 state visit to Israel, symbolize deepening relations between the two countries (Pate, 2020). Modi's government has prioritised Israel within India's foreign policy, enhancing military and economic cooperation, making Israel India's second-largest defense supplier, and growing bilateral trade to nearly \$4.6 billion. Diplomatic engagement under Modi's leadership has been marked by visits to both Israel and Arab countries, showcasing a subtle approach to balancing security concerns and economic interests

while fostering strong relations with both parties (Radhar, 2023; Kumaraswamy, 2022). India's evolving stance allows it to play a more significant role in Middle Eastern diplomacy, potentially acting as a mediator in the Israel-Palestine conflict, underscoring India's regional stability and global aspirations (Dash, 2024). India's foreign policy toward Israel and Palestine is also shaped by its economic interests, which have evolved in the context of geopolitical dynamics and historical relationships. India's strategic approach to maximizing its national interests in the region is evident in its balancing relations with Arab nations and Israel. Israel has become a key partner in defense and technology, with India benefiting from advanced military technology and equipment critical to its national security (Rajeev, 2012). Expanding trade relations, Israel has become a significant partner in agriculture, water management, and cyber security (Pete, 2020). India's political stance on Palestine remains supportive, particularly in international forums, helping to strengthen its ties with Arab nations while countering Pakistan's influence in the region (Singh, 2001; Rajeev, 2012; Kumaraswamy, 2008). Additionally, India has aided Palestine, reinforcing its commitment to the two-state solution and enhancing its influence in the Arab world (Dash, 2024). An unstarred question was put up in the Rajya Sabha regarding India's position in the ongoing Palestine-Israel war. Question number 1994, put forward by Shri Abdul Wahab (Member of Parliament from Kerala), asked for answers regarding details of the talks initiated by India, the country's position at multilateral forums, the view India holds concerning the asylum or any other assistance to Palestinians on humanitarian grounds. The answer given by the Minister of State in the Ministry of External Affairs was that the terror strikes on Israel on October 7, 2023, and the civilian casualties in the current Israel-Hamas conflict have been strongly denounced by India and that the country has demanded a halt to hostilities and ongoing aid for Gaza's citizens.

During the continuing crisis, India has contributed 70 tons of humanitarian goods, including 16.5 tonnes of medications and medical supplies. India has always adopted a hyphenated foreign policy regarding Israel and Palestine. But by emphasizing the

relationship with Israel and tying it to the Palestinian Authority, India was effectively precluded from pursuing a sensible policy that would have served its interests. India has been moving toward a de-hyphenation of policy in recent years. India's policy towards Palestine has been long-standing, and the country has always supported a negotiated two-state solution towards the establishment of a sovereign, independent, and viable State of Palestine within secure and recognized borders, living in peace with Israel. The UN General Assembly, which consists of 193 members, overwhelmingly approved the draft resolution "Peaceful settlement of the question of Palestine" that Senegal presented on Tuesday, December 3, 2024. India supported the United Nations General Assembly (UNGA) resolution, supporting the need for a comprehensive, equitable, and long-lasting peace in West Asia and demanding that Israel leave the Palestinian territories it has occupied since 1967, including East Jerusalem. India needs a stable West Asia for its connectivity programs and projects like the India Middle East Europe Corridor (IMEC). This projected economic corridor promotes connectivity and economic integration between Europe, the Persian Gulf, and Asia to support economic development. The viability and sustainability of the project may be seriously threatened by the Israel-Palestine conflict and thus cause serious concern for India's plan to counter China's presence through the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI).

Conclusion

India's foreign policy faces significant challenges from active conflict zones like Israel-Palestine and Russia-Ukraine, which directly impact its global geopolitical priorities. India emphasizes resolving these conflicts, especially those with severe humanitarian consequences, through mutual dialogue. This approach aligns with India's strategic independence and commitment to multilateralism, vital for realising the vision of *Viksit Bharat*. A stable global atmosphere fosters trade, economic growth and India's role as *Vishwa Mitra* – a trusted global partner. The Ukraine conflict tests India's principles of neutrality and strategic autonomy. Despite Western threats of sanctions for energy trade with Russia, India

continues its historical partnership with Moscow, reflecting confidence in its foreign policy stance. India's balanced role has bolstered its image as a rising global power as acknowledged even by Russian President Vladimir Putin. Initiatives like the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (QUAD), BRICS, and the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) highlight India's growing influence amidst China's expanding global footprint. While China's rise unsettles the West and repositions Russia as a junior partner, India could leverage these dynamics to resolve disputes and build trust. Moreover, post-COVID supply chain diversification narratives increasingly include India alongside Southeast Asian nations like Vietnam despite China's continued dominance. India-China relations strained by incidents like the Galwan clashes and Beijing's growing influence in South Asia underscore India's need for strategic partnerships. Balancing U.S.-China rivalry, especially concerning Taiwan remains critical as India views China as its primary security challenge.

A peaceful global environment would strengthen India's economic and geopolitical positioning in the long term. India's nuanced approach to the Israel-Palestine conflict demonstrates its dedication to balance and stability in the Middle East, crucial for energy security and economic interests. While condemning terrorism following the October 7 Hamas attack, India reiterated its support for a two-state solution and peaceful dialogue. This balance is further reflected in India's abstention from recent U.N. votes on the conflict emphasising national and economic security considerations. The rise of non-state actors and new global powers adds complexity to power politics, requiring India to deftly navigate relationships amid evolving geopolitical realities. India's success in maintaining cordial ties with conflicting parties, resolving disputes and fostering trust is integral to its foreign policy efficacy. Thus, balancing immediate challenges include energy security, economic interests and regional stability with long-term aspirations underlines India's role as a confident, independent actor on the world stage.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author declares no potential conflicts of interest concerning this article's research, authorship and publication.

Notes

1. President James Monroe's 1823 foreign policy declaration is known as the Monroe Doctrine. The doctrine described the United States' position in the Western Hemisphere and its ties to Europe as follow:
 1. *Non-intervention*: The United States would refrain from meddling in European matters.
 2. *No new colonization*: No further European colonialism or puppet monarchies were allowed in the Western Hemisphere.
 3. *Hostile acts*: The United States would be the target of any European ambitions to occupy the Western Hemisphere.
2. The Primakov Doctrine emphasises Russia's geopolitical goal of asserting its sovereignty and altering the world order to maintain balanced international relations by placing a strong emphasis on diplomatic, economic and military means. By developing strategic partnerships with up-and-coming nations like China and India, and establishing a counterbalance to NATO's influence. The Primakov Doctrine underscores the necessity of restoring Russia as a major world force. The doctrine also places a high priority on enhancing Russia's position in the post-Soviet sphere, which Moscow considers vital to its geopolitical security.

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