

# PSIR & GS-2 Daily Brief

**About this initiative :** Briefs, scans the best academic platforms, national newspapers & leading think tanks to pick the most relevant articles & research. It converts them into crisp, high-impact points you can directly use in your mains answers.

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Optional by  
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| ForumIAS |



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India has demonstrated strategic autonomy, but its record is not perfect: IE

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Cost of Asian Disunity and the Middle East crisis: ORF

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Democracy without elections : Deccan Herald

# Article - 1 : India has demonstrated strategic autonomy, but its record is not perfect

## India has demonstrated strategic autonomy, but its record is not perfect



KANTI BAJPAI

SINCE THE Russian invasion of Ukraine, Indian officials and commentators have increasingly suggested that India is and should be guided by the concept of strategic autonomy. What exactly is strategic autonomy? How would we know it when we see it? And has it been good for India?

Former foreign secretary Shyam Saran, the originator of the term "strategic autonomy" in Indian discourse, defined it as "the capacity of a state to take relatively autonomous decisions on matters of vital interest". The words "vital" and "relatively" are important because "not all interests are of a vital nature, and in a multi-state landscape, one cannot ascribe absolute value to every interest". Put differently, trade-offs and concessions are inevitable in foreign policy, but not on vital interests.

How would we know what strategic autonomy actually means for India? As things stand, official pronouncements on it are largely non-falsifiable — almost any decision can be ascribed to strategic autonomy.

Outside of government, can we assess India's strategic autonomy? Where has India made crucial decisions in external and internal policy that run counter to the demands or expectations of China, the European Union (EU), Russia, and the US?

China has made three key demands on India, historically — abide by the One China policy (stop sheltering the Dalai Lama and Tibetans, no recognition of Taiwan); settle the border by conceding Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh; and reject a US-led containment structure in Asia.

India has largely refused to give in to Chinese demands. It has continued to shelter the Dalai Lama and Tibetans. While it does not recognise Taiwan diplomatically, it has trade and other relations with the island. Despite Chinese blandishments and coercion, it has rejected any deal on the border that concedes Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh. On containment, India's record is more mixed. While it has rejected any US-led containment of China, it has partnered the US, Japan, and Australia in the Free and Open Indo-Pacific and the Quad, both of which initiatives are a response to a rising, more assertive China.



The EU seemingly has had no very high-stakes demands on India except perhaps on trade and human rights, which India has resisted. More importantly, since 2022, it has badgered India on the war in Ukraine. It has repeatedly asked India to condemn Russia's invasion, mediate between Ukraine and Russia more actively, reduce its dependence on Russian oil, and honour international sanctions on Russia.

Here again, India has resisted. It has never condemned Russia for the February 2022 invasion. It

For some critics, being stiff-necked has resulted in rigid diplomacy and no big-power friends. Others maintain that while India has resisted the bigger powers, it no longer voices criticisms of them on behalf of others. It has thereby lost influence globally

eliminate high tariffs on US goods and strengthen intellectual property rights, stop buying Russian oil and reduce arms purchases from Russia, commit to buying US energy, technology, and agriculture products, and prevent BRICS from anti-American actions such as "de-dollarisation". It has also asked India to curtail relations with Iran (oil purchases and cooperation, trade and investment, the development of Chabahar port and the Chabahar-Zahedan rail link).

Overall, in relation to the US, India has stuck to its guns. The exceptions are BRICS and Iran policy. India has opposed BRICS abandoning the dollar — though it is unclear if its opposition was under US pressure or for its own reasons. And on Iran, it has curtailed relations and, most recently, avoided condemning the US war and Israeli actions in Iran and Lebanon.

In sum, India has shown a willingness to defy bigger powers, though its record is not perfect. For some critics, being stiff-necked has resulted in rigid diplomacy and no big-power friends. Other critics maintain that while India has resisted the bigger powers, it no longer voices criticisms of them on behalf of others (as it used to do in the heyday of its internationalist diplomacy). It has thereby lost influence globally. Supporters of India's diplomacy argue that it wisely practises "multi-alignment", which means balanced relations with bigger powers and not giving offence to them except when its security and welfare are directly threatened. As a result, India is free to focus on its internal economic development.

Who is right? The answer depends on a rigorous assessment of whether India is strategically friendless and whether that matters, whether it has lost global influence and whether that matters, and whether multi-alignment plus stubborn resistance when it counts has indeed left India free to focus on the home front to the benefit of security and welfare.

The US is the most stringent test case for Indian strategic autonomy. Over the past decade, the US has demanded that India

Russia probably needs the sales as much as India. Russian leverage is therefore limited. On oil purchases, a desire to diversify supplies and to take advantage of affordable prices for India continuing to buy Russian oil.

The writer is visiting professor, International Relations, Ashoka University, and emeritus professor, Lee Kuan Yew School of Public Policy, National University of Singapore

**Context** India's claim of strategic autonomy is examined by how far India has resisted pressure from China, the EU, Russia and the US on vital foreign policy issues.

## Facts

■ Strategic autonomy: The capacity of a state to take relatively autonomous decisions on matters of vital interest.

■ India follows multi-alignment, but its autonomy record is limited to Iran & BRICS.

India resisted China on Tibet, Taiwan links, Aksai Chin and Arunachal Pradesh.

## Analytical Crux

Strategic autonomy is not isolation and it is not anti-Westernism; it means freedom to protect vital interests. India has shown this freedom against China, the EU, Russia and the US, but with exceptions. The main concern is whether India can resist pressure from bigger powers when core interests are involved. India's present foreign policy is not non-alignment in old sense, but issue based multi-alignment with selective defiance.

## Verbatim Quotes

"India has shown a willingness to defy bigger powers but US is the most stringent test case for Indian strategic autonomy."

- Kanti Bajpai

# Article - 2 : Cost of Asian Disunity and the Middle East crisis

## Cost of Asian Disunity and the Middle East Crisis

AUTHOR : KABIR TANEJA

Originally Published *ORF Middle East* Published on May 11, 2026



Author



**Context** The Strait of Hormuz crisis exposes Asia's heavy energy dependence on West Asia and its weak ability to act together because of India-China rivalry, US dependence and competing strategic interests.

## Facts

Two maritime blockades are at the centre of the crisis: one by Iran and one by the United States across the Strait of Hormuz.

India had US \$6 billion dues owed to Iran due to sanctions - related payment blockage.

## Analytical Crux

Energy security is no longer an economic issue; it is a geopolitical issue. Asia faces a common threat in the Strait of Hormuz, but it cannot act as one because India-China rivalry prevents strategic trust. The US acts as the security provider in West Asia, but the US-led order creates uncertainty for Asian Powers. For India energy security needs maritime capacity, diplomatic flexibility and reduced overdependence on any external protector.

## Verbatim Quotes

“The economic repercussions are acute for Asian economies, which face disproportionate exposure due to their reliance on energy imports transiting through region.”

“Despite narratives suggesting otherwise, American power remains undiminished and the US continues to function as the preeminent global hegemon.” - Kabir Taneja

# Article - 3 : Democracy without elections



## Democracy without elections?

Theorists advocate the forming of citizen assemblies where members are recruited through random lottery rather than elections. This method – sortition – is known to have prevailed in ancient Athens, where several public offices were filled by lot since elections were seen as susceptible to the influence of wealth and elite power,

**Context** whether democracy can be deepened beyond elections through citizen assemblies chosen by lottery, so that citizens participate more directly in public decision-making.

## Facts

Sortition in ancient Athens – public offices were filled by lottery instead of election.

In India, Gandhi supported the idea of local community control.

Ireland, Iceland, Canada and the Netherlands experimented with citizen groups between 2004 & 2013.

## Analytical Crux

The elections cannot exhaust the meaning of democracy. Sortition can make democracy more participatory by bringing ordinary citizens into decision-making. Theorists who support this idea includes John Burnheim, James Fishkin, Terry Bouricius, Helene Landemore and David Van Reybrouck. In India the idea is practised through decentralisation, Gram Swaraj and participatory governance.

## Verbatim Quotes

“Sortition makes democracy less about the sharing of power through elections and more about reliable ways of making public decisions.”  
-Chandan Gowda

“New pathways for enabling robust citizen participation in policy and governance processes and for revitalising Indian democracy in a complementary spirit, need to be urgently explored.”  
-Chandan Gowda

- 1. GS-II 2025: “Energy security constitutes the dominant kingpin of India’s foreign policy, and is linked with India’s overarching influence in Middle Eastern countries.” How would you integrate energy security with India’s foreign policy trajectories in the coming years?**
- 2. PSIR 2025, Paper II: “India continues to invoke its time-tested policy of strategic autonomy vis-à-vis both the United States of America and Russia by rejecting US’ offer of mediation on Kashmir issue and by refusing to criticize Russia in its ongoing war against Ukraine. Comment.”**
- 3. PSIR 2024, Paper I: “Deliberative democracy seeks to promote democratic decision making about public issues among the citizens. Discuss.”**
- 4. GS-II 2024: “Examine the need for electoral reforms as suggested by various committees with particular reference to ‘one nation – one election’ principle.”**
- 5. PSIR 2023, Paper II: “What are the challenges and limitations in India – Iran relations?” and “Discuss the significance of ‘West Asia Quad’ in the light of India’s ‘Look West’ policy.”**

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