

Recent Developments in Foreign Policy — Part 2

Day 50 — the final capsule. India's western arc — the Gulf, Iran, Israel and Palestine — the vision of a new world order, and the hard-power turn, compressed for fast recall. **Revise → write a little → the chain is complete.**

A West Asia & the Gulf

Kabir Taneja reads West Asia as three separate poles India engages on their own terms — the Gulf as an economic and remittance relationship, Israel as a defence and intelligence partner, and Iran as an extended neighbour and a corridor to Central Asia. Each partner accepts India's ties with the others, until a single regional war forces all three files onto the table at once.

AI India · Saudi Arabia

Overview

- Diplomatic ties formalised in 1947; a **Strategic Partnership** from 2010.
- Milestones: the Delhi Declaration (2006), the Riyadh Declaration (2010) and the **India–Saudi Arabia Strategic Partnership Council** (SPC, 2019) → a move from routine exchanges to structured cooperation.

“The Kingdom of Saudi Arabia is one of India's most valued partners — a maritime neighbour, a trusted friend, and a strategic ally... In a world full of uncertainties, our bond stands strong, as a pillar of stability.” — Narendra Modi

Areas of cooperation

Track	Substance
Geo-strategic	Saudi influence over Pakistan gives India traction on terrorism; the joint exercise SADA TANSEEQ (2024); cooperation on the Gulf of Aden and Strait of Hormuz sea-lanes.
Geo-economic	Vision 2030 seeks diversification; Saudi sovereign-wealth funds back projects like the ~US\$44 billion Ratnagiri refinery. Bilateral trade ~US\$52.76 billion (2022–23) and ~US\$42.98 billion (2023–24), with India as Saudi Arabia's second-largest partner. Saudi Arabia is India's third-largest crude supplier (14.3% of oil imports, 2023–24) and a major LPG source (18.2%); a US\$100 billion investment commitment across sectors.
Interdependence	India's e-Migrate linked with Saudi e-Thawtheeq to ease migration.
Cultural	Hajj facilitation for ~175,000–200,000 Indians; a ~2.7 million diaspora sending over US\$11 billion in remittances; a 2021 MoU on Yoga cooperation.
COVID	India supplied 4.5 million COVISHIELD doses (Feb–Mar 2021); the Kingdom sent liquid oxygen during India's second wave.

Frictions

- Conflicting foreign policies — the Saudi role in Yemen and growing ties with China.
- Delayed investment — cancellation of Aramco's planned 20% stake in Reliance; a stalled Ratnagiri/West Coast refinery.
- Energy pricing — the “Asian Premium” charged by Saudi Arabia and other OPEC producers.
- Labour — “Saudization” and a “Family Tax” strain the Indian workforce; the contested **Kafala** system.
- Trade imbalance — India's deficit ~US\$31.3 billion (2022–23); a stalled India–GCC FTA.

Md. Muddassir Quamar reads Saudi Arabia as central to India's Middle East security and economic integration; **Dr. Yogender Singh** notes expansion across energy, defence, infrastructure, technology and education, driven by leadership-level trust.

“The institutionalization of the SPC has transformed ties from ad hoc engagement to a more strategic relationship with strong economic, political, and security components.” — Kinda Bakr

Overview

- A deep historical and cultural bond. **Jawaharlal Nehru**, in *Discovery of India*, wrote that few peoples have been so closely related in origin and through history as those of India and Iran; **Modi** calls it “a friendship as old as history.”
- India’s ~25 million Shias and ~70,000 Parsis add a civilisational dimension.

Why Iran matters

- **Geography and energy** — a major oil supplier bordering Pakistan and Afghanistan; an alternative route when transit through Pakistan is blocked; a junction of South Asia, the Middle East, Central Asia and the Caucasus, opening onto the Persian Gulf and the Gulf of Oman.
- **Strategic and cultural mutualities** — India’s Shia population and NAM leadership align with Iran’s diplomatic goals.
- **Economic and diplomatic** — India a major buyer of Iranian oil; India’s NAM platform aids Iran’s outreach; India’s balance offsets a Pakistan aligned with the US and Saudi Arabia.

The US factor and the sanctions history

- The 1979 revolution and hostage crisis reordered Iran’s ties with the world.
- US pressure repeatedly constrained India — Reliance pressured over a ~US\$900 million US Exim Bank loan (**S Samuel C Rajiv**); the 2006 IAEA vote against Iran, soon after the India–US civil nuclear understanding; discontinuation of the Asian Clearing Union swap (December 2010); oil-import cuts of 11% (2012) and ~15% annually thereafter.
- The **IPI** (“peace pipeline”) — a 2,775-km Iran–Pakistan–India gas project — could never be realised under US pressure; India instead signed the India–US Civil Nuclear Agreement.

Under Modi and after

- Modi’s May 2016 visit (the first by an Indian PM in fifteen years, per **Ankit Panda**) produced ~12 agreements, chiefly on **Chabahar** and a Trilateral Transport and Transit Corridor with Iran and Afghanistan; a US\$150 million Exim credit line; and IRCON’s role in the ~500-km Chabahar–Zahedan railway.
- Chabahar bypasses Pakistan and counters China’s Gwadar; goods reach Afghanistan via the Delaram–Zaranj highway.
- Trump’s May 2018 withdrawal from the JCPOA and renewed sanctions (August and November 2018) forced India to cut Iranian oil imports (**Ravi Joshi**, ORF).
- **Vijay Gokhale** reframed strategic autonomy as **issue-based** alignment rather than ideological non-alignment; India secured written US assurance for banks to facilitate ~US\$85 million of Chabahar equipment.
- Frictions: Article 370 and India’s place in the Israel–UAE–US coalition; Iran’s limited support for the Taliban (**Samuel Ramani**); the Farzad-B gas-field dispute. **Anita Inder Singh**: India will “remain on the tightrope.”

2020 and 2025 flashpoints

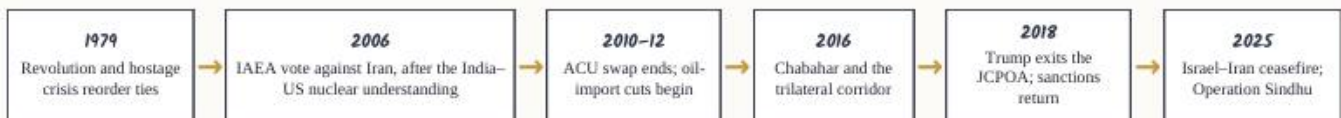
- **2020** — the US killing of Quds Force commander General Qasem Soleimani near Baghdad International Airport raised fears of full-blown Iran–US conflict, threatening energy security for India, China, Japan and South Korea.
- **2025** — India welcomed the June 2025 Israel–Iran ceasefire and praised US and Qatari mediation, holding that “there is no alternative to dialogue and diplomacy”; it distanced itself from the SCO’s condemnation of Israel, launched **Operation Sindhu** to evacuate nationals, and read the crisis through the same lens as the Ukraine war. **P.R. Kumaraswamy** called the stance “calculated, nuanced, and matured”; **Shanthie Mariet D’Souza** flagged that strategic ambiguity works only while conflicts stay within India’s core interests; **Meena Singh Roy** ties the relationship’s potential to resolving Farzad-B; **Sumitha Narayanan Kutty** sees India expanding energy, connectivity and trade to secure its interests and balance rival powers.

Current — the Twelve-Day War, the 2026 escalation & the Iran hedge

- **The Twelve-Day War (13–24 June 2025)** — Israel’s Operation Rising Lion struck Natanz, Fordow, Isfahan and Arak and killed the IRGC head and nine nuclear scientists; Iran’s Operation True Promise 3 fired over 550 missiles and 1,000+ drones (Israel claimed 80–90% intercepted). On 22 June the US bombed Fordow, Natanz and Isfahan (Operation Midnight Hammer) and Iran struck the US Al-Udeid base in Qatar; a ceasefire followed on 24 June with US and Qatari involvement. **Prasanta Kumar Pradhan** (MP-IDSA) reads the war as reaffirming American primacy — Russia, tied down in Ukraine and weakened by Assad’s fall, could not help Iran, and China condemned the strikes but sent no material support.
- **The 2026 escalation** — from 28 February 2026, US–Israel strikes (Epic Fury / Roaring Lion) killed Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei; Iran closed the Strait of Hormuz on 4 March 2026; a memorandum to end the war was signed on 17 June 2026. India did not condemn the killing and sent only its foreign secretary to sign the condolence book; with the strait shut, it used **Chabahar** as an evacuation route.
- **The hedge under American pressure** — **Nirupama Subramanian** traces India’s caution to the 2005 IAEA vote against Iran and recalls that Iran had shielded India at the UN over Kashmir in 1994; she reads the refusal to condemn the strikes as autonomy narrowed into dependence, while **Kabir Taneja** reads the same silence as deliberate hedging that protects a pending trade agenda. India kept roughly five per cent of its energy basket from Iran despite

sanctions (**Harsh V. Pant**), and Iran sits under the foreign ministry's **PAI** (Pakistan–Afghanistan–Iran) desk.

India–Iran: four decades on the tightrope



Abraham Accords — read-across for India–Iran

Works for India

Validate strategic autonomy; a calmer Israel–Gulf equation aids regional stability and gives India more room to manoeuvre.

Works against India

Closer Israel–Gulf ties may strain India–Iran; sharper sectarian tensions; an alignment dilemma for Pakistan; and pressure to keep Israel ties from overshadowing Iran interests.

“Once we make up our mind, the distance between Kashi and Kashan is just half a step.” — Narendra Modi

UPSC 2023 · ISm What are the challenges and limitations in India - Iran relations?

A3 India · Israel

Overview

- A deep, expanding partnership built on shared democracy and pluralism and two knowledge-based economies.
- **Michael Walzer**, in *The Paradox of Liberation* (2015), observes that both India and Israel underwent similar transitions — beginning with secular nationalist movements that later gave way to religiously influenced ideologies.
- The 30th anniversary of full ties (from 1992) was marked with a commemorative logo pairing the Star of David and the Ashoka Chakra.

Evolution of India's approach

- India recognised Israel in 1950 and allowed a Mumbai consulate, but withheld full ties until 1992 (established under **P.V. Narasimha Rao**), given anti-colonial alignment and Arab ties.
- Shift markers: President Pranab Mukherjee's 2015 visit; Modi's 2017 visit (the first by an Indian PM); Netanyahu's reciprocal 2018 visit → widening the relationship beyond military cooperation into economy and technology.

Cooperation and divergence

Sectors of cooperation

Energy — Israel's Mediterranean gas reserves.
Space — India has launched Israeli spy satellites; the alignment of Israel's Beresheet and India's Chandrayaan-2 programmes.
Defence — Spyder missile, Barak-8, AWACS.
Intelligence — RAW–Mossad counter-terrorism cooperation.
Agriculture — dryland-farming and drip-irrigation know-how; 27 Centres of Excellence across 21 Indian states.

Points of divergence

The **Palestinian issue** — support for self-determination and a two-state solution; UN votes critical of Israeli settlements (2016, 2018).
Continued dealings with **Iran** and resistance to US-backed sanctions.
Posture — India's stress on peaceful coexistence and non-interference vs a more aggressive security posture (India sought a ceasefire in the 2014 Gaza conflict).
Domestic politics — since the 1920s Khilafat movement, some nationalist opinion has read Palestine through an Islamic prism.

On Barak-8, its success has “emboldened the hopes ... of both these countries in the field of defense research.” — Deeksha Singh

Current — the Special Strategic Partnership & Sudarshan Chakra

- Ties were elevated to a **Special Strategic Partnership** on 26 February 2026. India's planned air-defence shield, **Mission Sudarshan Chakra** (announced 15 August 2025, with a 2035 target), draws on Israeli systems — MRSAM, SPYDER, Harop, Rampage and the Phalcon AWACS (**Sukhbir Kaur Minhas**, MP-IDSA); **Kabir Taneja** likens Israel to a one-stop shop for advanced military technology.
- **The Gaza ceiling** — the convergence still has limits. Taneja reports that even Israel's admirers in India recoiled at the scale of destruction in Gaza and that New Delhi has privately conveyed concern; India declined Israeli requests to ban Hamas, citing legal grounds and a large domestic Muslim population.
- **The Israel–Lebanon front** — a November 2024 ceasefire followed the killing of Hassan Nasrallah and Hezbollah's retreat north of the Litani; a US-brokered Framework Agreement in June 2026 opened the first direct Israel–Lebanon talks since 1983.

Beyond defence — connectivity and geo-economics

- **IMEC** links India to Europe via the UAE, Saudi Arabia, Jordan and Israel — rail, road, port, energy and data — bypassing Suez as an alternative to the Belt and Road.
- **I2U2** (India, Israel, UAE, US) broadens cooperation to water, energy, transport, space, health and food security. **Sameena Hameed** reads I2U2 and IMEC together as India's shift from bilateral dealings to minilateral connectivity.
- India's acquisition of **Haifa Port** gives a logistics foothold on IMEC's Mediterranean end; Indian firms now run the Haifa container terminal once managed by China.
- Trade climbed from US\$200 million (1992) to US\$4.82 billion — India Israel's seventh-largest trading partner and third-largest in Asia.

Assessment

Israel is "in many ways as perhaps our most trusted and innovative partner." — **S. Jaishankar (2021)**

A "marriage made in heaven being implemented here on Earth." — **Benjamin Netanyahu**

The idea of **I2T2** — India's talent and Israel's technology — points to its future orientation; Vasudhaiv Kutumbakam in India mirrors 'Tikun Olam' ("heal the world") in Israel. **Kanchi Gupta** cautions that India will not abandon its traditional support for Palestinian statehood — domestic politics and ideology still shape the policy.

UPSC 2020 · 15m Identify the key sectors of cooperation between India and Israel since 2014. Examine their significance in strengthening the bilateral ties between the two countries.

UPSC 2022 · 20m How does India-Israel bilateral ties reflect the autonomy of India's foreign policy choices?

A4 India · Palestine

Overview

- Rooted in India's anti-colonial ethos and a focus on West Asian stability; the Palestinian issue is often called the "mother of all crises."
- India opposed Israel's creation (1948), supported Palestine's UN inclusion (1949), recognised the PLO (1974) and formally recognised the State of Palestine (1988) — among the first non-Arab nations to do so.
- India backs a sovereign Palestinian state on pre-1967 borders with East Jerusalem as its capital, reflected in UN voting and alignment with the G77 and BRICS.

"Palestine belongs to Arabs in the same way England belongs to the English." — **Mahatma Gandhi (1938)**

De-hyphenation

Engaging Israel and Palestine on independent tracks rather than as a single package — the frame that lets India deepen ties with one without abandoning the other.

Areas of cooperation

- Budgetary aid totalling ~US\$30 million since 1995; the Jawaharlal Nehru Library at Al-Azhar University; the "TURATHI" Women Empowerment Centre; the India-Palestine Super Specialty Hospital.
- US\$1.25 million pledged to UNRWA; scholarships (150 under ITEC, 100 through ICCR); cultural ties through Indian martial arts and Kathak.
- Modi's 2018 visit — the first by an Indian leader — reaffirmed support for a sovereign Palestine, alongside a de-hyphenation policy toward Israel.

Continuity and change

- The 1992 opening to Israel and the 1994 post-Oslo trajectory shifted priorities; support for Palestine became "more symbolic than substantive."
- Core continuities persist — a two-state solution, strategic autonomy, and developmental-needs-driven engagement.
- India endorsed a UN resolution (2017) criticising the move to declare Jerusalem Israel's capital, advocates a two-state solution, and endorses UNSC Resolution 242's "land for peace."
- During the October 2023 Gaza conflict, India condemned terrorism while voicing concern over civilian casualties; it abstained on the June 2025 UN ceasefire resolution — keeping ties with both Israel and the Global South.

Current — the Gaza ICJ case & India's UN voting

- **South Africa v. Israel at the ICJ** — filed 29 December 2023, with provisional measures ordered on 26 January 2024 (and further measures on aid access and the Rafah offensive later that year). Judge **Dalveer Bhandari** sat with the ICJ majority that found some Palestinian rights plausible, while India as a state has stayed out of the interventions filed under the Genocide Convention.
- **India's UN voting on Gaza** — India voted for the December 2024 ceasefire resolution but abstained on the Spain-led resolution of 12 June 2025 (149–12), becoming an outlier in Asia; Ambassador Parvathaneni Harish defended the abstention by citing India's earlier votes and its preference for dialogue and diplomacy (**Devirupa Mitra**, *The Wire*).
- The gap between the Indian judge's vote and the government's silence captures New Delhi's caution: India supports the ICJ as an institution while keeping its own hands free.

Reading the recalibration

Harsh V. Pant reads it as a response to regional change; **Suhasini Haidar** and others warn that abstentionism can look ambiguous or passive, while Brookings/ORF analysts see a hedged approach that maximises flexibility. Theoretically it is a hybrid of principle and pragmatism, drawing on **complex interdependence** (**Keohane and Nye**) and constructivism; **Amrita Narlikar** frames India's foreign policy as coalitional diplomacy and issue-based pragmatism.

On the conflict itself: **Jessica Stern** stresses the psychological toll and the case for nonviolent resistance, urging pressure to protect civilians; **Noura Erakat** critiques the application of international law and points to legal actions to halt arms sales to Israel; **Nishank Motwani** notes the strengthening of India–Israel ties under Modi after 7 October; R. Ravindra, India's Deputy Permanent Representative at the UN, has highlighted the war's direct impact on India's economic, energy and maritime interests, stressing de-escalation and continued humanitarian aid.

UPSC 2017 · 10m Has the recent Indo-Israeli relationships given a new dynamics to India's stand on Palestinian statehood?

UPSC 2024 · 20m Critically examine the continuity and change in India's Palestine policy in the wake of the ongoing Israel-Hamas War.

AS India · United Arab Emirates

Overview

- Ties go back centuries through Indian Ocean trade and migration; formal relations from 1972. Modi's 2015 visit gave new momentum and established the **Comprehensive Strategic Partnership**.

"India and the UAE have always found common ground because their economic and geopolitical interests align. The past decade has only deepened that trust and cooperation." — **Dr. Muneer Ahmed (IPCS)**

Areas of convergence

Domain	Substance
Economic and trade	India the UAE's second-largest partner, the UAE India's third-largest; trade ~US\$85 billion since the 2022 CEPA ; UAE sovereign-wealth investment in infrastructure, renewables and technology; IMEC to cut transport costs. The Rupee-Dirham/Local Currency Settlement reduces dependence on third-party currencies.
Energy and security	Oil supply, strategic petroleum reserves, upstream projects; maritime security, counter-terrorism, defence production and intelligence-sharing.
Technology and soft power	ISRO–UAE Space Agency links; an IIM Ahmedabad campus in the UAE; a 3.5-million-strong diaspora, the largest expatriate community there.
Geopolitical alignment	India's Look West Policy aligns with the UAE's Vision 2021 and Economic Vision 2030.

Challenges

- CEPA trade still concentrated in gems, petroleum and electronics rather than technology and green energy; the Kafala system and slow labour reforms.

Talmiz Ahmad reads engagement as shaped by both economic realities and the shifting security dynamics of the Gulf; the Atlantic Council cautions on institutional capacity to deliver on ambitious cooperation. **Muneer Ahmed** calls it "not just a transactional relationship — a meeting of visions, backed by determined leadership"; Modi's framing: the partnership "isn't just economic — it's a global signal."

Debate — vindicated or strained? India's multi-alignment across the West Asia crises

Vindicated. **Harsh V. Pant** holds that balance is now the source of Indian influence and that flexible diplomacy has softened each shock; the former diplomat **T. S. Tirumurti** agrees that India's space contracts only when it abandons multi-alignment for one camp. Pant names the approach **calibrated multi-alignment**, and **Patrizia Cogo Morales** treats multi-alignment as the current form of strategic autonomy.

Strained. **Amitabh Mattoo** treats strategic autonomy as a test under acute strain, warning that neutrality is becoming a luxury as rival camps demand loyalty at once; **Nirupama Subramanian** goes further, reading India's silence as strategic dependence. **Shanthie Mariet D'Souza** takes the middle view — the doctrine still holds, but the ability to balance conflicting partners nears its limit if war drags on.

B India & the New World Order

B1 The vision of a new world order

Concept and evolution

- The term “new world order” gained prominence after President George H.W. Bush's 1991 speech advocating a system governed by the rule of law.
- The trajectory: Westphalian multipolarity → Cold War bipolarity → post-Cold War unipolarity.
- The world is now at a critical juncture, with the Indo-Pacific and Asia — the “Asian Century” — as the pivot, and the US facing rising challenges from Asian powers.

From Westphalia to the Asian Century



India's vision — multipolarity and multi-alignment

- A multipolar world reflecting India's pluralistic, tolerant heritage — contrasting with China's “Middle Kingdom” perspective — aiming to expand strategic space without a new hegemon or bipolar system.
- Rooted in **strategic autonomy** (manoeuvrability), **diverse interests** (many partners) and **countering hegemony** (countervailing coalitions).
- Scholars: **S. Jaishankar** urges proactive engagement and active roles in international organisations as traditional powers decline; **Veena Kukreja** sees an assertive India seizing the opening left by the end of US unipolarity; **Barry Buzan** describes a “rise of the rest” diffusing power; **C. Raja Mohan** traces the shift from non-alignment to multi-alignment; **Avinash Kumar** backs multipolarity to democratise international relations; **Sumit Ganguly** examines the balance between strategic independence and active diplomacy.

Strategic autonomy — Nehru to Modi

Strategic autonomy

Freedom to choose partners and positions by interest, not bloc loyalty — recast by S. Jaishankar from the “choice of inaction” into the “choice of action.”

- **Vijay Gokhale** grounds autonomy in an issue-based approach rather than ideological non-alignment.
- **India and Russia:** ties from April 1947; non-interference as a constant — Russian silence on Chumar, Doklam and Galwan; India's neutrality on Crimea and Ukraine. Post-2022, India became the second-largest importer of Russian oil, with almost a 600% trade rise. **Harsh V. Pant** reads the Ukraine war as the most serious test of India's autonomy under Modi.

The five pillars of the India–Russia partnership:

Strategic alignment

Economic development

Defence cooperation

Science & technology

Cultural exchange

Strategic autonomy, redefined

CHOICE OF INACTION

Non-alignment as caution — standing apart from blocs

Nehru · NAM · strategic restraint



CHOICE OF ACTION

Multi-alignment — issue-based coalitions, engaged on all sides

Jaishankar · Gokhale · QUAD · SCO · BRICS

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.

Contribution — G20, culture, connectivity

- Cultural heritage — multiculturalism, pluralism, tolerance, cosmopolitanism — as India's distinctive asset in shaping an inclusive order, to be matched by unity and inclusivity at home.
- Modi at the World Economic Forum (India as a "champion of liberal international order"), at the Shangri-La Dialogue (clarity on the Indo-Pacific), drawing on Lothal (ancient trade) and Buddhism (peace).
- **G20 Presidency (2023)**: the theme "One Earth, One Family, One Future" (Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam). Achievements: inclusion of the African Union; the Global Biofuels Alliance (with the US and Brazil); digital-economy and cybersecurity frameworks; a pledge to triple renewable capacity by 2030; and IMEC as a counter to the Belt and Road.
- The stated ambition: India moving from a mere "balancer" to a "leading state."
- Analysts: **Chietigj Bajpae** — India "sees itself as a bridge between the West and the Global South"; **Ume Farwa** traces autonomy from Nehru's non-alignment to Modi's realpolitik, warning of a China "security dilemma" and a "lack of real partners"; **Purnendra Jain** — India "aims to be a leading power," convening Voice of Global South summits.

A multipolar world and a multipolar Asia

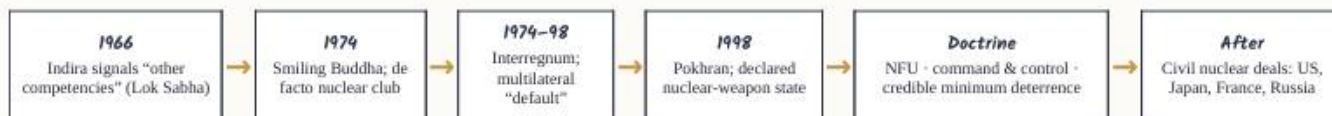
- India envisions a multipolar Asia of shared regional leadership, reasoning that China's rise is unbalancing the regional structure and eroding India's choices.
- The essence rests on an equal distribution of power and responsibility (the AIIB, an expanded SCO and the NDB illustrate China's stature).
- Three elements: the diffusion of power interlinks Asian — especially Indian — security with global security and strengthens India at the UNSC; major and minor powers must share collective decision-making; and inclusivity, not exclusivity, should leave space for an external power like the US. In Asia, India promotes "shared leadership" among India, China and Japan.

B2 The Nuclear Question & India's Hard-Power Posture

Policy evolution

- India's nuclear programme served both civilian and covert military purposes, shaped by its dangerous neighbourhood and the vision of leaders from Nehru onward.
- Indira Gandhi told the Lok Sabha (1966) that India would expand its nuclear know-how and "other competencies" alongside "peaceful" uses. The first peaceful nuclear explosion — Operation Smiling Buddha (May 1974) — made India a de facto member of the nuclear club.
- The 1974–1998 period saw little decisive activity. In 1998 the BJP declared India a nuclear-weapon state; the Pokhran tests moved capability from a covert programme to public status, bringing US sanctions and pressure to join the NPT and CTBT.
- India then announced a doctrine of **no-first-use**, command and control, and **credible minimum deterrence**. Later governments signed civil nuclear deals with the US, Japan, France and Russia.

India's road to 1998 — and the doctrine after



India's reluctance to perceive any 'existential threat' inevitably made the multilateral path to nuclear security a 'default option' until it decided to cross the nuclear Rubicon in 1998. Identify and analyze some of the major reasons behind this shift in India's position on the nuclear question.

After Pahalgam — proactive deterrence

- India's consistent principle after cross-border terror: "defend without descending" — a maturing doctrine of proactive deterrence.
- After Pahalgam, **Operation Sindoor** struck nine camps across the international boundary — the largest such action since 1971 — followed by a ceasefire; Pakistan named its operation 'Bunyanum Marsoos'.
- Force coupled with economic statecraft: the Indus Waters Treaty placed "in abeyance"; a five-point action plan.
- Doctrinally, **deterrence by punishment** within credible minimum deterrence and no-first-use, against Pakistan's first-use posture. **K. Alan Kronstadt** on escalation up to the nuclear threshold; **Fabian Hoffman** on the normalisation of thresholds; an ICWA panel reading Sindoor as a shift "from restraint to active deterrence."
- Operationally, adaptation to multidomain warfare — air, cyber and the electromagnetic spectrum — compressing decision time; Vikram Misri framed the aim as disabling terrorist infrastructure, **Rudra Chaudhuri** emphasised resolve over retaliation. The framing: "to defend with dignity, to punish with

principle.”

Northwestern neighbours — the bifurcated approach

- Punitive, multi-domain deterrence toward Pakistan; measured, need-based engagement with a Taliban-led Afghanistan — neither recognising the Taliban nor vacating the field (minimal presence, humanitarian relief, quiet contacts).
- **Rushali Saha** notes outreach has intensified precisely as Beijing and Islamabad make inroads; India signals support for Afghan sovereignty when Pakistan strikes across the border.
- Security externalities: the Taliban’s “strong and symbiotic” ties with the TTP strain Islamabad, offering India limited relief, while LeT/JeM and ISIS-K keep risks high.

UPSC 2019 · 20m

Do you think that India’s capacity building role in Afghanistan has shrunk the strategic space for Pakistan there? Discuss.

B3 India’s Soft Power & Public Diplomacy

- Cultural diplomacy runs through India’s regional engagement: the **ICCR** runs scholarships and cultural programmes in Afghanistan (Culture Week 2017; ~14,000 Afghan students) and Palestine (ICCR scholarships, Kathak and martial-arts programmes).
- Public diplomacy converts values into influence — vaccine diplomacy (COVISHIELD to Saudi Arabia; doses to Afghanistan after the Taliban takeover), the Voice of Global South summits, and the “One Earth, One Family, One Future” G20 messaging.
- Soft power complements hard power: it sustains India’s foothold without direct security involvement, though critics note it cannot secure every strategic interest on its own.

B4 Assessment

India’s recent foreign policy across its western arc pairs realpolitik with principled diplomacy. In West Asia it has moved from a provider of security toward a builder of peace, holding independent partnerships with the Gulf, Israel and Iran without being trapped by their rivalries. In Afghanistan it balances non-recognition with humanitarian engagement, denying space to a China–Pakistan axis while protecting security and connectivity. Ties with the United States and Israel have deepened even as India guards strategic autonomy — refusing mediation on Kashmir, staying neutral on Ukraine.

Underlying all of it is a reformist vision of a multipolar world and a multipolar Asia, resting on strategic autonomy, multi-alignment and cultural heritage. India’s ambition — from balancer to leading state — will turn on converting flexible autonomy into consistent leadership, deepening regional trust, and presenting a stable, cohesive democracy at home.

• Power Quotes

“Palestine belongs to Arabs in the same way England belongs to the English.” — Mahatma Gandhi (1938)

Few peoples have been so closely related in origin and through history as those of India and Iran. — Jawaharlal Nehru, Discovery of India

India will “remain on the tightrope” between energy-rich Iran and its principal strategic partner, the US. — Anita Inder Singh

Israel is “in many ways as perhaps our most trusted and innovative partner.” — S. Jaishankar (2021)

The relationship is a “marriage made in heaven being implemented here on Earth.” — Benjamin Netanyahu

“Once we make up our mind, the distance between Kashi and Kashan is just half a step.” — Narendra Modi

For a rising power like India, balance is not mere survival — it is “the essence of influence.” — Harsh V. Pant, ORF (2026)

“Strategic autonomy is no longer a slogan. It is a stress test.” — Amitabh Mattoo (2026)

• Scholar Index

Adam Krzymowski · Amitabh Mattoo · Amrita Narlikar · Anita Inder Singh · Ankit Panda · Avinash Kumar · Barry Buzan · Brig. P. P. Singh · C. Raja Mohan · Chietigj Bajpae · Dalveer Bhandari · Deeksha Singh · Devirupa Mitra · Fabian Hoffman · Harsh V. Pant · Jessica Stern · K. Alan Kronstadt · Kabir Taneja · Kanchi Gupta · Keohane & Nye · Kinda Bakr · Md. Muddassir Quamar · Meena Singh Roy · Michael Walzer · Muneer Ahmed · Nirupama Subramanian · Nishank Motwani · Noura Erakat · P.R. Kumaraswamy · Patrizia Cogo Morales · Prasanta Kumar Pradhan · Purnendra Jain · Ravi Joshi · Rudra Chaudhuri · Rushali Saha · S Samuel C Rajiv · S. Jaishankar · Sameena Hameed · Samuel Ramani · Shanthie Mariet D'Souza · Sukhbir Kaur Minhas · Sumit Ganguly · Sumitha Narayanan Kutty · T. S. Tirumurti · Talmiz Ahmad · Ume Farwa · Veena Kukreja · Vijay Gokhale · Yogender Singh

• How UPSC Asks It

Theme	Years & marks
India–Israel and Palestinian statehood	2017 / 10m
India's Afghanistan capacity-building and Pakistan's space	2018 / 20m
India–Israel: key sectors of cooperation since 2014	2020 / 15m
India–Israel and foreign-policy autonomy	2022 / 20m
India–Iran: challenges and limitations	2023 / 15m
India's Palestine policy: continuity and change	2024 / 20m
Strategic autonomy vis-a-vis the US and Russia	2025 / 20m
Crossing the nuclear Rubicon (1998)	2025 / 20m

• Today's Practice

- UPSC 2023 · 15m** What are the challenges and limitations in India - Iran relations?
- UPSC 2025 · 20m** 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.
- UPSC 2025 · 20m** India's reluctance to perceive any 'existential threat' inevitably made the multilateral path to nuclear security a 'default option' until it decided to cross the nuclear Rubicon in 1998. Identify and analyze some of the major reasons behind this shift in India's position on the nuclear question.

Model answers for these drop tonight on [@psirbyamitpratap](#). Where a point above is only sketched, the full working is in your **Foundation / OGP** notes and handouts — revise it, then write.

That closes POWER 50 — fifty capsules, one full pass through the syllabus. Now revise the chain end to end, and write.