

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

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Abstract

India's foreign policy in the Middle East has undergone a significant transformation over the past three decades, shifting from an ideologically driven framework rooted in non-alignment and anti-colonial solidarity to a pragmatic, interest-based strategy often described as "multi-alignment." This paper critically examines whether India's proclaimed neutral stance in the Middle East particularly in relation to Iran, Israel, and the broader regional conflicts is a genuine reflection of strategic autonomy or a constrained posture shaped by external influences, especially the United States and Israel. Using a mixed-method approach that integrates qualitative discourse analysis with quantitative economic and diplomatic data, the study analyzes trade flows, defense partnerships, energy dependencies, and United Nations voting patterns between 2010 and 2025. The findings suggest that while India continues to rhetorically uphold principles such as sovereignty, non-intervention, and support for a two-state solution in Palestine, its policy choices reveal patterns of selective alignment driven by economic, strategic, and geopolitical constraints. The paper introduces the concept of "bounded strategic autonomy" to explain this paradox where India retains formal independence in decision-making but operates within structural limitations imposed by global power hierarchies, energy security imperatives, and defense dependencies. The study contributes to broader debates on foreign policy behavior in emerging powers and highlights the evolving nature of neutrality in a multipolar world.

Keywords

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