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**EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**

# India's Iran Stance – The Foreign Policy Debate Between Pragmatism and Principle

 **THE HINDU**

21 March 2026

**SUBJECTS COVERED****IR** **POLITY****GS PAPERS****GS2****CURATED & WRITTEN BY****Bharat Choudhary**

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The Hindu

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GS2

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MAINS RELEVANCE:

GS Paper 2



## INTERVIEW ANGLE

*"Has India's response to the US-Israeli war on Iran compromised its tradition of strategic autonomy, or is it a pragmatic recalibration?"*

## WHY IN NEWS

The Hindu editorial examines the intense foreign policy debate within India over its stance on the US-Israeli military operations against Iran, arguing that India's cautious response reveals deeper tensions between pragmatism, strategic autonomy, and moral obligation in Indian diplomacy.

## THE CORE DEBATE

The editorial frames India's response to the Iran conflict as a test case for the viability of **strategic autonomy** — India's long-held principle of pursuing national interests without aligning permanently with any power bloc.

### India's Official Position

India adopted a **cautious, balanced stance**, calling for de-escalation and dialogue while stopping short of condemning the military operations — a position critics argue is tantamount to tacit support.

### WHY THE GOVERNMENT CHOSE CAUTION

**US relationship** — The United States is India's largest trading partner; bilateral ties span defence, technology, semiconductors, and Quad cooperation

**Gulf interests** — Approximately **9 million Indians** live in Gulf states; annual remittances exceed **USD 40 billion**; energy security depends on Gulf oil and gas

**Israel defence ties** — India is one of Israel's largest defence customers; cooperation spans UAVs, missile systems, and intelligence sharing

**Iran’s diminished leverage** – Iran’s importance to India has reduced since the US sanctions forced India to stop Iranian oil imports in 2019

## STRATEGIC AUTONOMY UNDER STRAIN

India’s foreign policy has long celebrated **strategic autonomy** – the ability to engage with all sides without being locked into alliances. The editorial argues this principle is being tested:

### Historical Anchors of Strategic Autonomy

Period	Expression
<b>1947-1991</b>	Non-Alignment Movement (NAM) – India co-founded NAM at Bandung (1955) and Belgrade (1961)
<b>1991-2014</b>	Multi-alignment – engaging US, Russia, and regional powers simultaneously
<b>2014-present</b>	“Multi-vector diplomacy” – deeper US ties while maintaining Russia/Gulf/ASEAN engagement

### How Iran Tests This Framework

India abstained on UN resolutions condemning Iran’s nuclear programme but now appears to acquiesce to military operations

India’s silence contrasts with its vocal opposition to the Iraq War (2003) and Libya intervention (2011)

The editorial argues that **strategic autonomy requires consistency** – selective application undermines credibility

## INDIA-IRAN RELATIONS — HISTORICAL CONTEXT

Dimension	Details
<b>Civilisational ties</b>	Over 2,000 years of cultural, linguistic, and trade connections
<b>Chabahar Port</b>	India's strategic gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia — bypassing Pakistan; India committed <b>USD 500 million</b>
<b>INSTC</b>	International North-South Transport Corridor — India-Iran-Russia multimodal route to connect Mumbai to Moscow
<b>Oil imports</b>	India was Iran's second-largest oil buyer before US sanctions forced a halt in May 2019
<b>Afghan cooperation</b>	Both India and Iran supported the Northern Alliance against the Taliban
<b>Iranian diaspora</b>	Significant Shia Muslim population in India with cultural ties to Iran

## THE DEMOCRATIC DIMENSION

The editorial makes a broader argument: foreign policy in a democracy cannot remain the exclusive domain of professional diplomats. Public engagement is both **valid and necessary** because:

Citizens are directly affected by global decisions (oil prices, remittances, trade)

Democratic legitimacy requires informed public debate on security and strategic choices

Media, academia, and civil society enrich policy formulation with diverse perspectives

**Article 51 (Directive Principles)** mandates that the State shall promote international peace and security

## POLICY IMPLICATIONS FLAGGED

**Diversify energy sources** — reduce vulnerability to any single region's instability

**Strengthen Chabahar engagement** — ensure the port remains operational regardless of geopolitical shifts

**Articulate red lines clearly** — strategic ambiguity has limits; India must define what it stands for

**Parliamentary oversight** — the editorial calls for greater legislative scrutiny of foreign policy decisions

## UPSC RELEVANCE

NAM (Bandung 1955, Belgrade 1961), Chabahar Port (USD 500 million), INSTC, Article 51 (DPSP — international peace).

### MAINS GS2:

India's foreign policy — strategic autonomy vs alignment; India-Iran relations; impact of US hegemony on Indian diplomacy; Neighbourhood First vs extended neighbourhood.

### MAINS GS2:

Parliament's role in foreign policy oversight; democratic accountability in strategic decisions.

## ★ FACTS CORNER — KNOWLEDGEPEDIA

### INDIA-IRAN RELATIONS:

Chabahar Port: India committed USD 500 million; strategic bypass of Pakistan for Afghanistan/Central Asia access

INSTC: International North-South Transport Corridor (India-Iran-Russia; Mumbai to Moscow)

India halted Iranian oil imports in May 2019 under US sanctions pressure

India was Iran's second-largest oil buyer before sanctions

### STRATEGIC AUTONOMY:

NAM: co-founded by India at Bandung (1955) and Belgrade (1961)

India's current framework: "multi-vector diplomacy"

Article 51 (DPSP): State shall promote international peace and security

### INDIA'S GULF INTERESTS:

~9 million Indians in Gulf states

Annual remittances from Gulf: ~USD 40 billion

Gulf supplies significant share of India's energy imports

### OTHER RELEVANT FACTS:

India is one of Israel's largest defence customers (UAVs, missile systems)

US is India's largest trading partner

India opposed Iraq War (2003) and Libya intervention (2011) vocally

Sources: [The Hindu](#), [The Diplomat](#)

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