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EDITORIAL ANALYSIS

Five Principles for Indian Diplomacy in a Shifting World Order

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INTERVIEW ANGLE

"Is strategic autonomy a doctrine, a slogan, or a transitional posture that India will outgrow as it joins one camp?"

EDITORIAL SUMMARY:

Writing in The Indian Express, C Raja Mohan proposes five organising principles for Indian diplomacy in a world transitioning from American unipolarity to layered multipolarity – principled multi-alignment, sharper protection of core interests, defence indigenisation as autonomy lever, calibrated economic statecraft, and selective coalition-building. The thesis is that the inherited vocabulary of “strategic autonomy” must be operationalised through specific bets in technology, trade and security rather than recited as a slogan.

A WORLD ORDER THAT WILL NOT STAND STILL

The post-2022 international system is unrecognisable in important respects. The Russia-Ukraine war, now in its fourth year, has shattered the assumption that Europe is settled. The United States has pivoted to a sustained China contest while remaining ambivalent on alliance burden-sharing. China’s Belt and Road, Asian Infrastructure Investment Bank and Global Security Initiative project an alternative architecture. The Israel-Gaza war and the West Asia recalibration have produced a new geometry where Saudi-Iran detente coexists with Abraham Accords. BRICS expansion in 2024 brought in Egypt, Ethiopia, Iran and the UAE, with Saudi Arabia an associate. The Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, chaired by India in 2023, continues to widen.

India’s diplomacy must operate across all these theatres simultaneously. The author identifies five principles that should guide that effort.

PRINCIPLE ONE: PRINCIPLED MULTI-ALIGNMENT

Non-alignment was a posture of distance; **multi-alignment** is a posture of presence. India sits in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) with the US, Japan and Australia; in BRICS+ with Russia, China and the Global South; in the SCO with Eurasian partners; and in the I2U2 with Israel, the UAE and the US. The Russia-Ukraine UNGA abstentions and the simultaneous purchase of S-400 from Russia while navigating CAATSA exemptions from the US illustrate the operational logic: India will not let one partnership veto another.

PRINCIPLE TWO: PROTECT THE CORE, NOT THE PERIPHERY

The author argues that India's diplomatic energy should be ruthlessly concentrated on core interests – territorial integrity, technology access, **energy security**, the diaspora and economic growth – and disinvested from peripheral causes that yield neither material gain nor reputational return. Operation Sindoor and the post-Pahalgam recalibration show what core-interest defence looks like in practice. The willingness to abstain on issues that do not implicate Indian stakes, even at the cost of multilateral disappointment, is part of the discipline.

PRINCIPLE THREE: DEFENCE INDIGENISATION AS AUTONOMY LEVER

Strategic autonomy is hollow without domestic capacity. Defence indigenisation – through the positive indigenisation lists, the iDEX innovation framework, INS Vikrant's commissioning, the Tejas LCA, Pinaka, Akash NG and the BrahMos exports to the Philippines and Vietnam – converts diplomatic flexibility into hardware reality. The S-400 deliveries, the GE F-414 engine deal, the MQ-9B Predator acquisition and the joint development of jet engines with France and the US illustrate that autonomy and partnership are not opposites.

PRINCIPLE FOUR: CALIBRATED ECONOMIC STATECRAFT

The Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF), the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC) announced at G20 Delhi 2023, free trade agreements with the UAE (CEPA 2022) and Australia (ECTA 2022), and the negotiations with the EU and UK constitute India's economic statecraft. Rupee invoicing arrangements with 22 countries, the Local Currency Settlement framework with the UAE, and the push at BRICS for non-dollar settlement reflect a calibrated – not absolute – de-dollarisation. The Nuclear Suppliers Group (NSG) entry and the Financial Action Task Force (FATF) compliance status anchor India's economic credibility in formal regimes.

PRINCIPLE FIVE: SELECTIVE COALITIONS OF THE WILLING

The author's final principle is that India should be willing to build small-format coalitions where multilateralism has failed. The [International Solar Alliance](#), the [Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure](#), the [Global Biofuels Alliance](#) and the [Voice of Global South Summit](#) are templates. They are coalitions of utility, not ideology, and they let India set the agenda rather than respond to it.

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Key arguments:

- The post-2022 world order is layered and contested; non-alignment as posture is obsolete, multi-alignment as practice is necessary.
- Defence indigenisation (positive lists, iDEX, BrahMos exports, GE F-414 deal) is the material foundation of strategic autonomy.
- Economic statecraft via CEPA, IPEF, IMEC, rupee invoicing and BRICS expansion creates instruments without locking India into camps.
- Small coalitions of utility (ISA, CDRI, GBA, Voice of Global South) allow India agenda-setting that the UN system no longer permits.

Counterarguments:

- Multi-alignment risks reputational dilution – partners may view India as transactional rather than principled.
- The S-400 and CAATSA navigation worked once; sustained great-power contest may force harder choices.
- Voice of Global South branding will struggle when Indian votes diverge from African and Latin American expectations.

Keywords: Quad, BRICS+, SCO, I2U2, CEPA 2022, IPEF, IMEC, ISA, CDRI, S-400 CAATSA, iDEX, positive indigenisation lists, NSG, FATF, rupee invoicing, Voice of Global South.

The Indian Express's view is that India's foreign policy has matured beyond Cold War-era vocabulary but has not yet articulated its post-Cold War grammar. The five principles offered are not a doctrine but a checklist – pragmatic, hardware-backed and coalition-flexible. The next decade will test whether India can sustain this posture as great-power rivalry sharpens, or whether the gravitational pull of one or another camp eventually forces choices that multi-alignment was designed to defer.

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