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**EDITORIAL ANALYSIS**

# As the US Reshapes Asia Strategy, India Must Rewire Regional Leadership

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CURATED & WRITTEN BY



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# As the US Reshapes Asia Strategy, India Must Rewire Regional Leadership


**The Indian Express**   3 July 2026   **GS2**

Source: [ujyari.com](https://ujyari.com) — researched, fact-checked & UPSC-mapped



## INTERVIEW ANGLE

*"If a great power redefines you from partner to aligned subordinate, how do you keep strategic autonomy without either drifting into its camp or being left exposed? What is India's leverage in its own neighbourhood?"*

Source: [Original editorial](#)  [The Indian Express](#)


**Every fact web-verified against primary sources** (<https://ujyari.com/how-we-verify/>)

## WHY THIS MATTERS NOW

Washington is **recalibrating its Asia strategy** as costly commitments elsewhere reduce its appetite to bear the full burden of containing China. The risk for India is a quiet redefinition: from a **central Indo-Pacific partner** to an **aligned junior partner**, even as **both the US and China court India's neighbours**. For an aspirant, this is a live GS2 case on **strategic autonomy** (<https://ujyari.com/terms/strategic-autonomy/>), **Neighbourhood First and the Indo-Pacific balance**, and on how India protects its interests, and its territorial position, in a shifting order.

## THE CRUX IN 60 WORDS

US overstretch is shifting its Asia policy, risking India's slide from **strategic partner to aligned subordinate**, while both powers **court India's neighbours**. India's response should be to **rewire, not retreat**: lead the region through delivery, **diversify partnerships** across the Quad, Europe, ASEAN and the Global South, and back **strategic autonomy** with indigenous capability. India's stand on Aksai Chin, Arunachal and PoK as integral territory stays firm.

## THE ISSUE, DECODED

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CONCEPT	WHAT IT MEANS	WHY IT MATTERS
<b>Strategic autonomy</b>	Partnering without subordination	India's core foreign-policy principle
<b>US overstretch</b>	Reduced capacity to contain China alone	Recasts India from anchor to aligned partner
<b>Neighbourhood First</b>	Prioritising South Asian ties	India's primacy must now be earned, not assumed
<b>Multi-alignment</b> ( <a href="https://ujivari.com/terms/multi-alignment/">https://ujivari.com/terms/multi-alignment/</a> )	Issue-based ties with many powers	Prevents dependence on any single partner

## THE ANALYSIS: FROM PARTNER TO SUBORDINATE, AND BACK

- 1 Overstretch is reshaping US strategy.** Commitments in Europe and West Asia have cut American appetite to fully fund containment of China, so Washington increasingly seeks to manage Beijing as a competitor.
- 2 India risks a quiet demotion.** In this frame, India can be recast as a large market and aligned junior partner rather than a co-equal Indo-Pacific anchor, even as **bilateral** (<https://ujivari.com/vocab/bilateral/>) trade and technology deepen.
- 3 The neighbourhood is contested.** Both the US and China are courting India's neighbours, so New Delhi cannot assume automatic primacy and must earn regional leadership through reliable delivery.
- 4 Autonomy is the answer, not alignment.** A neighbourhood-first, multi-aligned, capability-backed strategy preserves freedom of manoeuvre and India's territorial position.

## DATA AND INSTITUTIONS VAULT

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*Strategic autonomy; Neighbourhood First; Act East; SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region); Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative. **Groupings: Quad (India, US, Japan, Australia); BIMSTEC; IORA; ASEAN centrality; I2U2; BRICS; SCO; G20. India's official stand: Aksai Chin, Arunachal Pradesh and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir are integral parts of India; Line of Actual Control managed via WMCC (<https://ujivari.com/terms/wmcc-india-china-border/>) and diplomatic-military mechanisms. **Connectivity:** development partnerships, lines of credit, HADR and vaccine diplomacy as instruments of regional leadership. **Concepts:** multi-alignment (<https://ujivari.com/vocab/multi-alignment/>), balance of power, buffer states, security dilemma, Global South leadership.***

## THE DEBATE

**Argument for rewiring toward autonomy:** A recalibrating US risks reducing India to an aligned subordinate; India preserves its interests best by leading its region through delivery, diversifying partners and grounding autonomy in indigenous capability.

**Argument for deeper US alignment:** With an assertive China, closer alignment offers India security guarantees, technology and market access it cannot generate alone, and rigid autonomy could leave India exposed when hard-power balances tilt against it.

**Balanced verdict:** Partnership and autonomy are not opposites. India should work closely with the US and the Quad on shared concerns while refusing subordination, keeping multiple options open and its territorial and strategic red lines firm. Autonomy backed by capability, not isolation, is the goal.

## HOW TO THINK ABOUT THIS (TRANSFERABLE SKILL)

*Foreign policy is rarely a choice between two camps; it is a set of issue-by-issue positions along a spectrum from independence to alliance. Ask, for each issue (trade, technology, security, the neighbourhood), where a country's interest places it, and whether it retains exit options. India's strength is refusing to collapse that spectrum into a single choice, keeping partnerships deep but reversible.*

## DIAGRAM-IN-WORDS

US overstretch -> reduced appetite to contain China alone -> India recast from strategic partner toward aligned junior partner -> both US and China court India's neighbours -> India's regional primacy no longer automatic -> rewire: Neighbourhood First delivery +

multi-alignment (Quad, Europe, ASEAN, Global South) + indigenous capability -> strategic autonomy preserved, territorial red lines firm

## THE WAY FORWARD

- 1 **Lead the neighbourhood by delivery.** Outcompete rivals on connectivity, development partnerships and reliability so regional leadership is earned.
- 2 **Diversify partnerships.** Balance the Quad, Europe, ASEAN, West Asia and the Global South so no single power is indispensable.
- 3 **Invest in indigenous capability.** Build defence, technology and manufacturing depth so autonomy has material backing.
- 4 **Engage the US as a partner among many.** Deepen trade and technology ties while refusing subordination.
- 5 **Hold territorial and strategic red lines.** Maintain India's official position on Aksai Chin, Arunachal Pradesh and PoK, and manage the LAC firmly.

## THE TAKEAWAY BOX

*Explain the US recalibration and its risk of demoting India, then argue for rewiring regional leadership through Neighbourhood First delivery, multi-alignment and indigenous capability, keeping strategic autonomy and territorial red lines firm.*

*“Great-power recalibration is an opportunity as much as a risk, if India leads its region through delivery rather than drifting into dependence.”*

*Quad, BIMSTEC, IORA, ASEAN centrality, SAGAR, Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative; strategic autonomy; Neighbourhood First and Act East; India's stand that Aksai Chin, Arunachal and PoK are integral.*

*How does a rising power lead its neighbourhood by trust and delivery rather than dominance? Where is the line between pragmatic (<https://ujivari.com/vocab/pragmatic/>) partnership and loss of autonomy?*

*UPSC has asked on India's strategic autonomy, the Indo-Pacific and Neighbourhood First. This editorial connects them to a shifting US posture.*

*strategic autonomy, Indo-Pacific, Quad, Neighbourhood First, India-US and India-China relations, Global South leadership, balance of power.*

**Sources:** *Indian Express* (<https://indianexpress.com/section/opinion/>), *Ministry of External Affairs* (<https://www.mea.gov.in>), *PIB* (<https://pib.gov.in>)

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● **KEY ARGUMENTS AT A GLANCE**

Washington's recalibration of its Asia policy, driven by overstretch, risks shifting India from a valued strategic partner to an aligned junior partner even as both the US and China court India's neighbours, so India must proactively rewire its regional leadership to secure strategic autonomy in the Indo-Pacific.

✓ **SUPPORTING**

- Costly commitments elsewhere have reduced US appetite to bear the full cost of containing China, nudging Washington to treat India more as a market and aligned partner than a co-equal strategic anchor.
- Both major powers are simultaneously courting India's neighbours, so India cannot assume automatic primacy in South Asia and must earn it through delivery and connectivity.
- Strategic autonomy, not alignment, has long served India's interests, and a neighbourhood-first, issue-based approach preserves freedom of manoeuvre.

⚠ **COUNTER**

Some argue that deeper alignment with the US, given a rising and assertive China, offers India security and technology it cannot generate alone, and that strict autonomy risks leaving India isolated when hard power balances tilt against it.

→ **WAY FORWARD**

Deepen Neighbourhood First and connectivity delivery, diversify partnerships across the Quad, Europe, ASEAN and the Global South, invest in indigenous capability, and engage the US as a partner among many while firmly guarding strategic autonomy and India's territorial position.


**MAINS ANSWER FRAMEWORK**

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**QUESTION**

*"As the United States recalibrates its Asia strategy amid overstretch, India must proactively rewire its regional leadership to preserve strategic autonomy." Critically examine India's options in the Indo-Pacific. (250 words)*

**INTRODUCTION**

India's foreign policy has long rested on strategic autonomy, the freedom to partner without subordination. As Washington recalibrates its Asia strategy under the weight of overstretch, that autonomy faces a subtler test than open pressure: a quiet redefinition of India's role.

**BODY**

The shift is driven by cost. Commitments in Europe and West Asia have reduced American appetite to bear the full economic and military burden of containing China, and Washington increasingly treats Beijing as a competitor to be managed rather than only contained.

In that frame, India risks being recast from a central Indo-Pacific strategic partner into a large market and an aligned junior partner, valuable but subordinate, even as trade and technology ties deepen.

Complicating matters, both the US and China are actively courting India's neighbours, so New Delhi cannot assume automatic primacy in South Asia.

India's answer must be to rewire, not retreat. That means doubling down on Neighbourhood First through credible delivery, connectivity and development partnerships that outcompete rivals on reliability; diversifying across the Quad, Europe, ASEAN and the Global South so no single partner is indispensable; and investing in indigenous defence and technology so autonomy has material backing.

Throughout, India's official position on its territory, that Aksai Chin, Arunachal Pradesh and Pakistan-occupied Kashmir are integral parts of India, remains non-negotiable. The counter, that a rising China makes deeper US alignment prudent, has force, but partnership need not mean subordination; India can align on issues while keeping its strategic independence.

**CONCLUSION**

Great-power recalibration is an opportunity as much as a risk. If India leads its region through delivery, diversifies its partnerships and grounds autonomy in real capability, it converts a shifting order into strategic space rather than strategic dependence.


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