

## India's Strategic Autonomy in a Multipolar World

*GS-II – International relations - India's foreign policy: Evolution, principles, priorities, strategic partnerships and alliances; India's role in global governance.*

### Why in news?

*The 2025 Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) Summit in Tianjin unfolded under the shadow of shifting power equations.*

### What is strategic autonomy?

- **Definition** – It refers to a nation's ability to make sovereign decisions in foreign policy and defence without being constrained by external pressures or alliance obligations.
- **Implies independence** – It is not synonymous with isolationism or neutrality rather, it implies flexibility, independence and the capacity to engage with multiple powers on one's own terms.
- **Middle path** – Strategic autonomy offers a middle path between rigid bloc politics and passive disengagement.
- It demands deft diplomacy, institutional resilience, and a clear-eyed understanding of national interest.
- **Pursuit of strategic autonomy** – It is no longer a theoretical aspiration whereas, it's a daily diplomatic practice, fraught with complexity and consequence.
- Autonomy need be redefined — not as isolation, but as resilience and adaptability.

### What are the challenges for India in maintaining strategic autonomy?

- **Accelerating global power shifts** – As global power shifts accelerate and traditional alliances fray, India finds itself navigating a delicate path between competing giants: the United States, China and Russia.
- **Fragmented world order** – The unipolar moment of American dominance

has given way to a fragmented world order.

- **Fluid and unpredictable environment** - China's assertiveness, Russia's revisionism and the West's internal divisions creates a fluid and unpredictable environment.
- **Issues with US** - The Trump administration's erratic trade policies, followed by stinging tariffs and sanctions in his second term, have strained economic ties.
- **Disputes with China** - Aggressive actions, particularly along the shared border, its dominated regional order and economic competition directly threaten India's national security and sphere of influence.
- **Concerns with Russia** - Growing closeness to Beijing and its global isolation following the Ukraine conflict making it harder for India to maintain a balanced relationship with the West.
- **Domestic factors** - Political polarisation, economic vulnerabilities and institutional constraints can limit the effectiveness of autonomous decision-making.
- **Technological interdependence** - The global economy is increasingly interdependent, and technological ecosystems are dominated by a few players that will leads to overdependence on foreign countries.

### What are the approaches followed by India?

- **Measured response** - It continues to engage with the U.S., maintains independent positions on global conflicts and insists on the primacy of national interest over ideological alignment.
- **Cautious engagement and firm deterrence** - It strengthens border infrastructure, deepens ties with Indo-Pacific partners, and invests in indigenous defence capabilities.
- **Resisting confrontation and capitulation** - By asserting sovereignty and refusing to be another country's counterweight by controlling Chinese access to the Indian economy and simultaneously keeping channels of communication open.
- **Preserve freedom** - From Nehru's non-alignment during the Cold War to the Modi government's "multi-alignment" in the current era -
- The successive governments have sought to preserve India's freedom of action while adapting to changing geopolitical realities.
- **Hedging** - India employs a "hedging" strategy, engaging with multiple powers to minimize risks and retain diplomatic independence rather than fully aligning with one power.

***Hedging**, here, refers to a foreign policy strategy where a state cultivates a middle-ground, flexible position to avoid choosing between competing great powers, instead seeking to maximize benefits from all sides by forming a combination of cooperation and caution*

- **Technological and digital** – It encompasses data sovereignty, digital infrastructure and supply chain security.
- India's recent efforts to build indigenous platforms, secure critical minerals and assert its voice in global tech governance are some of the steps in this direction.

### **What need to be done for maintaining India's strategic autonomy?**

- **Multi-alignment** – Rather than isolation, India pursues a multi-alignment strategy, building partnerships with diverse countries to enhance its agency and influence in a multipolar world.
- **Clear definition of national interest** – India could consistently articulate its core interests – territorial integrity, economic growth, technological advancement, and regional stability and ensure all foreign engagements align with these.
- **Engaging with global forums** – It participates in multilateral forums such as BRICS, SCO, IMEC, Quad, etc. and engaging with multiple nations play a balancing role without engaging into errands.
- **Need for stronger capabilities** – To maintain its standing, India need to make investment in its domestic defence production and deep-tech start-ups to secure its borders and assert its interests.
- **Economic and technological resilience** – Diversify trade partnerships and promote digital sovereignty by investing in indigenous tech infrastructure to avoid overdependence on foreign countries.
- **Cultural and soft power projection** – Leverage India's rich heritage, democratic values and global diaspora to shape narratives and build goodwill.
- **For shifting global order** – India needs to continue steadily to walk the tightrope — engaging with the U.S. without becoming a vassal, deterring China without provoking war, and partnering with Russia without inheriting its isolation.

### **Conclusion:**

- Strategic autonomy is not just a slogan. It is a strategy – the art of

navigating a turbulent world without losing one's bearings.

- In doing so, India does not reject the world — it reclaims its agency within it.
- Strategic autonomy is not about standing alone; it is about standing straight, and standing tall.

## Reference

[The Hindu | India's strategic autonomy in a multipolar world](#)

