



India's Balancing Act in the Israel-Palestine Conflict: Challenges and Opportunities

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ABSTRACT

The Israel-Palestine conflict has long served as a litmus test for how non-Western states navigate the uneasy terrain between normative commitments and strategic necessity. India's engagement with this conflict offers a particularly instructive case. Since independence, New Delhi has maintained formal solidarity with the Palestinian cause — rooted in its anti-colonial ideological inheritance and its role within the Non-Aligned Movement — while simultaneously cultivating, from 1992 onward, an increasingly substantive bilateral partnership with Israel spanning defence procurement, agricultural technology, cybersecurity, and industrial research. This paper examines how India has managed that apparent contradiction through what it terms a de-hyphenation strategy: the deliberate treatment of its Israeli and Palestinian relationships as independent diplomatic tracks, insulated from one another rather than rendered mutually exclusive. Drawing on qualitative analysis of diplomatic records, multilateral voting behaviour, and the secondary scholarly literature on Indian foreign policy and Middle East politics, the study identifies the principal structural pressures that bear on this posture — geopolitical expectations from major powers, the domestic political salience of a large Muslim electorate, energy supply vulnerabilities, and the credibility risks inherent in principled equidistance — alongside the strategic opportunities the approach generates, including expanded defence-technology collaboration, a credible mediatory role in West Asian diplomacy, and enhanced soft power through cultural and academic exchange. The paper's central argument is that India's approach is analytically coherent rather than merely opportunistic, though its long-term viability depends on diplomatic conditions that cannot be assumed as the conflict intensifies.

Keywords: India foreign policy; Israel-Palestine conflict; strategic autonomy; de-hyphenation strategy; West Asia diplomacy; middle power; non-alignment



There are conflicts that are primarily regional in their consequences, and there are conflicts whose gravitational pull reshapes international politics far beyond their immediate geography. The Israeli-Palestinian dispute belongs unambiguously to the second category. Its effects on alliance structures, multilateral institutions, domestic politics across dozens of states, and the normative architecture of the international order have been felt continuously since 1948, and show little sign of diminishing. For scholars of international relations, the conflict presents an enduring analytical challenge: it concentrates within a small territory an almost exhaustive range of questions about sovereignty, self-determination, international law, the role of religion in political identity, and the capacity — or incapacity — of external actors to influence deeply entrenched disputes. For the states that must actually formulate foreign policy toward it, the challenge is rather more immediate.

India's position in this landscape is unusual, and arguably underexplored in the scholarly literature. From the outset of its independence, India committed itself to the Palestinian cause in terms that were far from merely rhetorical: it voted against the UN Partition Plan for Palestine in 1947, recognised the PLO as the legitimate representative of the Palestinian people in 1974 — the first non-Arab state to do so (MEA, 2020) — and sustained formal diplomatic support for a two-state solution across successive governments of markedly different ideological orientations. That record of solidarity is not in serious dispute. What is analytically interesting is that India simultaneously built, from 1992 onward, one of its most consequential strategic partnerships — with Israel. Full diplomatic relations were established only in 1992, a turn of events facilitated by the changed global geopolitical environment in the aftermath of the end of the Cold War and the desire on the part of India to enlarge its circle of relationships (Rubinoff, 1992). Since then, the India-Israel relationship has blossomed to cover fields as diversified as defence, cooperation, agriculture, and technology (MEI, 2023). The question of how India has sustained both tracks simultaneously — and at what cost, and with what strategic return — has received less systematic attention than it deserves.

Existing work by Kumaraswamy (2010) and Blarel (2015) has traced the historical evolution of these bilateral relationships with considerable care, and Tharoor (2012) has situated them within the broader arc of Indian foreign policy. What is largely missing, however, is a critical analysis that holds the two relationships in view simultaneously, examining the internal logic of the balancing strategy, its structural vulnerabilities, and the opportunities it creates. This paper addresses that gap. Three research questions organise the inquiry: How has India's historical engagement with both Israel and Palestine shaped its current diplomatic posture? What are the principal challenges India faces in sustaining this balance? And what opportunities does its positioning generate for enhanced regional influence and a credible mediatory role?



The argument is that India's approach is best understood as deliberate calibrated equidistance — a posture rooted in the doctrine of strategic autonomy — rather than as diplomatic confusion or unexamined continuity. This posture is not without internal tensions, and the paper is attentive to where those tensions generate real risks. The analysis proceeds through a reconstruction of the conflict's historical background, an account of India's evolving bilateral diplomacy, and parallel discussions of the challenges and opportunities that characterise its current position.

. HISTORICAL BACKGROUND OF THE ISRAEL-PALESTINE CONFLICT

2.1 Origins and the Collision of Nationalisms

Palestine's importance to three of the world's major religious traditions is not incidental to understanding the conflict; it is constitutive of the depth and intractability of the competing claims. For Jews, the land represents the ancestral homeland of biblical promise, with Jerusalem's Temple Mount carrying a weight of collective memory that centuries of diaspora did not erode. Christians regard it as the terrain of Christ's ministry, crucifixion, and resurrection. For Muslims, it is home to the Al-Aqsa Mosque, the site from which Prophet Muhammad is believed to have ascended to heaven during the Night Journey (Esposito, 2002). These attachments are not simply instrumental; they are constitutive of communal identity in ways that purely political or territorial analyses tend to underestimate, and any serious account of the conflict's persistence must grapple with them. The Zionist movement emerged in the late nineteenth century from a specific European context — accelerating anti-Semitism, failed liberal emancipation, and the collapse of the Enlightenment promise of Jewish civic equality. Theodor Herzl's *Der Judenstaat* (1896) gave systematic political expression to the conclusion that Jewish safety required a state of one's own, and Palestine was identified as the natural location for that state (Laqueur, 2003). The immigration waves that followed — the First Aliyah (1882–1903) and the Second Aliyah (1904–1914) — brought thousands of Jewish settlers into a land already populated by an Arab community with its own political aspirations (Khalidi, 2006). The resulting tensions were not slow in manifesting violently. The Jaffa riots of 1921 and the Hebron massacre of 1929 — in which sixty-seven Jews were killed amid disputes over religious sites (Morris, 2001) — indicated that what had begun as demographic competition was acquiring the character of communal war.

2.2 The British Mandate and Its Consequences

Britain's acquisition of the League of Nations mandate over Palestine after the First World War placed it at the centre of a contradiction it had partly manufactured. The Balfour Declaration of 1917 — expressing support for "the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people," while stipulating that "nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities"

Incorporated into the mandate's terms, the declaration gave formal international sanction to the Zionist project while generating among the Arab population a sense of colonial betrayal that proved a permanent political resource for Palestinian nationalism.

The Mandate period (1920–1948) saw accelerating Jewish immigration, significant land transfers, and deepening communal hostility. The Arab Revolt of 1936–1939 represented the most sustained Palestinian resistance of the period — directed against both British administration and Jewish immigration — and was suppressed by military force. The 1939 White Paper, which restricted Jewish immigration, reflected Britain's attempt to appease Arab opposition while managing its imperial interests in the region (Shlaim, 2000), but satisfied nobody and left the fundamental contradictions of the mandate unresolved. By 1947, Britain referred the question to the United Nations, which proposed partition. Jewish leaders accepted the plan; Arab leadership rejected it. On 14 May 1948, David Ben-Gurion declared the establishment of Israel, and the following day's invasion by neighbouring Arab states initiated the war that would permanently reshape the region's political geography. Approximately 700,000 Palestinian Arabs were displaced — an event Palestinians call the Nakba, or catastrophe (Khalidi, 1997) — generating a refugee crisis whose resolution remains among the most contested elements of any prospective peace settlement. The wars of 1956, 1967, and 1973 compounded these territorial and demographic transformations, extending Israeli control over the West Bank, Gaza Strip, and East Jerusalem.

2.3 The Peace Process and the Contemporary Impasse

The Oslo Accords of 1993 represented something genuinely new in the conflict's history: direct negotiation between Israel and the PLO, mutual recognition, and the creation of the Palestinian Authority as a framework for limited Palestinian self-governance in parts of the West Bank and Gaza. The optimism that briefly attended this development has, with the benefit of hindsight, a slightly elegiac quality. The fundamental issues — the status of Jerusalem, the right of return for Palestinian refugees, and the final borders of any Palestinian state — were explicitly deferred rather than resolved, and the political conditions for their resolution deteriorated steadily. The assassination of Prime Minister Yitzhak Rabin in 1995, continued settlement expansion, and the outbreak of the Second Intifada (2000–2005) together dismantled the political infrastructure that Oslo had constructed.

The situation as of 2025 is characterised by structural deadlock. Israeli settlements in the West Bank and East Jerusalem continue to expand, a process widely regarded as a violation of international law, as affirmed by United Nations Security Council Resolution 2334 (2016), and as progressively foreclosing the





territorial basis of a viable Palestinian state. Hamas has governed Gaza since 2007 under conditions of Israeli-Egyptian blockade, with periodic escalations — most catastrophically in 2014, 2021, and 2023 — generating mass civilian casualties. The political division between Hamas and the Palestinian Authority has further fragmented Palestinian diplomatic representation. The United Nations has passed numerous resolutions, and the United States has historically occupied the role of primary mediator through frameworks such as the Camp David Accords (1978) and the Oslo process, though the credibility of American even-handedness has been persistently and, one might argue, reasonably questioned.

3. INDIA'S DIPLOMATIC BALANCING ACT

3.1 The Origins of India's Pro-Palestinian Posture

To understand why India voted against the UN Partition Plan for Palestine in 1947, one needs to understand the ideological coordinates of the Nehruvian foreign policy project. Non-alignment was not merely a tactical hedge against Cold War bipolarism; it expressed a substantive set of commitments — to anti-colonialism, to self-determination, to the proposition that the international order should be restructured rather than simply inherited from the European powers that had designed it. Within that framework, the Palestinian cause was legible as a variant of the struggles with which India identified most deeply. India was active in support of decolonization and self-determination processes, identifying itself with those nationalist movements seeking independence from colonial masters (Tharoor, 2012), and the Palestinian struggle was understood as belonging to that same tradition (Kumaraswamy, 2010).

India's early diplomatic positions reflected this reading. Alongside its 1947 vote against partition, India advocated a federal solution that would provide for Arab-Jewish coexistence within a single political structure (Gopal, 2014) — a position shaped partly by the conviction, born of India's own traumatic partition, that ethnic and religious division was a colonial instrument rather than a legitimate political solution. The recognition of the PLO in 1974 as the sole authentic representative of the Palestinian people, followed by the establishment of the PLO office in New Delhi in 1975 and its elevation to full diplomatic status in 1980, institutionalised this solidarity in concrete diplomatic terms. India's engagement within the NAM and its advocacy in multilateral forums reinforced a posture that was, during this period, genuinely expressive of its foreign policy identity rather than simply instrumental.

3.2 The 1992 Normalisation and the Construction of a Parallel Track

The establishment of full diplomatic relations with Israel in 1992, under Prime Minister P.V. Narasimha Rao's government, was not accompanied by any formal revision of India's position on Palestine —



and that is precisely what makes it analytically interesting. What changed was not India's stated commitments but its willingness to act on strategic interests that those commitments had previously obscured. The end of the Cold War dissolved the ideological constraints that had made an open relationship with Israel diplomatically costly within the non-aligned framework. India's defence requirements — acute and growing, particularly in counter-terrorism, surveillance technology, and advanced weapons systems — created powerful incentives to access Israeli capabilities that alternative suppliers could not match (Blarel, 2015). Joint military exercises and counter-terrorism cooperation have further bolstered defence ties (MEA, 2023).

The economic trajectory of the relationship tells a parallel story of deepening interdependence. From bilateral trade of roughly \$200 million at the point of normalisation, the two states built a commercial relationship that exceeded \$5 billion within two decades (Pande, 2014), reaching approximately \$7.5 billion by early 2023. Israeli expertise in drip irrigation, cybersecurity architecture, and renewable energy found direct application in Indian development challenges, while joint institutional frameworks — most notably the India-Israel Industrial R&D and Technological Innovation Fund (I4F), capitalised at \$40 million — gave collaborative research a formal infrastructure (MEA, 2023). Prime Minister Narendra Modi's 2017 visit to Israel, the first by an Indian head of government, marked the public consolidation of what had become a genuinely strategic partnership rather than a quietly tolerated bilateral convenience. India has, throughout this period, maintained its formal commitment to Palestinian statehood. It has consistently articulated support for a two-state solution — an independent Palestinian state on pre-1967 borders, with East Jerusalem as its capital — in international forums, and in 2024 reaffirmed its backing for Palestine's full membership in the United Nations, stressing that lasting peace can only be achieved through a two-state solution. A particularly significant feature of this dual track is the Barak-8 air and missile defence system, jointly developed by Israel Aerospace Industries and India's Defence Research and Development Organisation — a programme that signals the depth of defence cooperation while India simultaneously votes for Palestinian rights in New York. This is not contradictory in the sense of being logically incoherent; it is contradictory in the sense of combining commitments that sit in productive tension, generating both diplomatic leverage and reputational risk. India's voting record at the United Nations illuminates the mechanics of this management. While India has supported resolutions affirming Palestinian rights, it has abstained from votes that explicitly condemn Israeli military conduct — notably the 2014 abstention on a UN Human Rights Council resolution to investigate Israel's actions in Gaza. Such abstentions are calculated rather than accidental: they preserve access to the bilateral relationship without compelling a formal break with the Palestinian solidarity bloc. India's approach to the Israel-Palestine conflict reflects its broader foreign policy doctrine — balancing moral principles with pragmatic interests — and its preference for maintaining enough diplomatic distance from both sides to avoid being captured entirely by either.



4.1 The Major Power Dilemma

India's capacity to sustain its equidistant posture is shaped by the structural expectations of the major powers with whom it maintains consequential relationships. The United States has strengthened its strategic partnership with India, particularly through initiatives like the Quad, which also includes Japan and Australia (Pant & Joshi, 2020) — a security architecture whose Indo-Pacific framing does not fully conceal its engagement with the broader question of American alliance management in the post-unipolar moment. Washington's support for Israel is deep and institutionalised; it shapes the diplomatic environment within which any other state's Middle East policy must operate, and it creates at least implicit expectations that India's partnership with the United States should translate into greater alignment on questions where American and Israeli interests converge.

Russia's position complicates this further. India's longstanding defence partnership with Russia necessitates a careful diplomatic approach to avoid alienating Moscow while engaging with Israel and Palestine (Ramani, 2022). Russia maintains substantive relationships with Iran and Syria, whose positions on Palestinian questions are among the most antagonistic to the Israeli-American framework. The war in Ukraine has sharpened these tensions, placing India's refusal to condemn Russian military action in friction with the expectations of Western partners who would prefer to see New Delhi align more clearly with the transatlantic position. China's growing presence in the Middle East, highlighted by its Belt and Road Initiative, demands that India navigate its policies carefully to safeguard its interests without exacerbating regional rivalries (Panda, 2019); Beijing's 2023 brokering of the Saudi-Iranian rapprochement demonstrated a regional diplomatic ambition that poses a direct challenge to India's aspirations for influence in West Asia.

The Gulf Cooperation Council states constitute a further layer of competing pressure. India's relationships with Gulf Cooperation Council countries, particularly Saudi Arabia and the UAE, are vital for energy security and economic cooperation (Kaura, 2018). The large Indian diaspora in the Gulf, whose remittances constitute a significant component of the Indian economy, adds a people-to-people dimension to what is also a state-level energy and investment relationship. India's traditional support for the Palestinian cause has long resonated with Arab nations, but its deepening partnership with Israel necessitates a nuanced diplomatic approach to preserve regional goodwill (Kumaraswamy, 2010). The partial normalisation of Israeli-Gulf relations under the Abraham Accords eased some of this pressure, but the October 2023 Gaza conflict re-energised Arab popular solidarity with Palestine and rendered the diplomatic arithmetic more complicated once again.



No account of India's Israel-Palestine policy is adequate without serious attention to its domestic political dimensions. The large Indian Muslim population, estimated at over 200 million, has traditionally expressed strong solidarity with the Palestinian cause (Kumaraswamy, 2010), and foreign policy decisions on this question are scrutinised with unusual intensity. This is not simply a matter of electoral calculation, though that calculation is real enough; it reflects a deeper question about how India's democratic framework manages the relationship between a religiously diverse citizenry and a foreign policy that increasingly privileges strategic partnership with a state whose treatment of a Muslim population is the subject of sustained international condemnation. The challenge for the government lies in balancing strategic relations with Israel, particularly in defence and technology sectors, while addressing domestic concerns advocating for Palestinian rights (Kumaraswamy, 2010).

India's democratic framework ensures that foreign policy decisions undergo public debate and political contestation (Gopal, 2014). Different parties, civil society organisations, and media actors bring divergent ideological, ethical, and strategic perspectives to this debate, and the government must navigate these disagreements without allowing them to crystallise into the kind of sustained public controversy that would constrain its diplomatic manoeuvrability. The political management of this domestic dimension requires not merely clear communication of policy rationale but ongoing demonstration that India's commitment to Palestinian rights is substantive rather than purely rhetorical — a demonstration that becomes harder to make the more visible the defence partnership with Israel becomes.

4.3 Energy Security and Regional Stability

India's energy security is structurally dependent on oil and gas imports from the Middle East, with Gulf Cooperation Council countries serving as primary suppliers (Kaura, 2018). The Israel-Palestine conflict's periodic escalations generate instability whose effects on regional energy flows are material and immediate. Rising energy prices and supply disruptions during conflict episodes impose direct economic costs on India, reinforcing the case for diplomatic engagement in conflict management that goes beyond normative preference. The prolonged Israel-Palestine conflict exacerbates regional instability, posing potential security concerns for India that extend beyond the energy domain (Pant & Joshi, 2020). Extremist ideology, cross-border militant recruitment, and the potential for ideological spillover into India's own internal security environment are concerns that inform New Delhi's counter-terrorism calculus and shape its interest in the conflict's resolution — not merely its management.



Perhaps the deepest challenge confronting India's balancing strategy is what one might call the credibility paradox inherent in its approach. The flexibility that makes de-hyphenation strategically advantageous also renders it vulnerable to accusations of principled incoherence from multiple directions simultaneously. India's diplomatic strategy often involves a balancing act — advocating for Palestinian statehood in international forums while simultaneously strengthening bilateral ties with Israel. For Palestinian advocates and Arab governments, India's status as one of Israel's largest defence clients — its acquisition of UAV systems, missile technologies, and intelligence-sharing arrangements — raises legitimate questions about whether formal solidarity with Palestine constitutes genuine commitment or diplomatic convention. For Israel and its Western partners, India's consistent abstentions in multilateral forums and its maintenance of relations with Palestinian representatives create uncertainty about the depth and reliability of the partnership. India's involvement in peacekeeping missions and mediation efforts reinforces its reputation as a responsible global actor committed to resolving conflicts peacefully, but reputation-building in multilateral forums carries limited weight when the major powers who ultimately determine the conflict's trajectory have their own, less ambiguous positions.

5. STRATEGIC OPPORTUNITIES

5.1 Defence, Technology, and Economic Cooperation

Since the formalization of full diplomatic relations in 1992, India and Israel have experienced a remarkable increase in bilateral trade, and the trajectory of that growth indicates that the relationship has considerable further room to develop. Israel's expertise in agricultural technologies, particularly in arid-zone farming, offers valuable insights for boosting India's agricultural productivity (Blarel, 2015) — an observation whose significance is heightened by India's growing water security challenges and the agricultural stress associated with climate change. Israel's reputation as a 'Start-Up Nation' reflects a genuine ecosystem of technological innovation that India has systematic reasons to engage. The India-Israel Industrial R&D and Technological Innovation Fund (I4F), established with a combined investment of \$40 million, is designed to support collaborative industrial R&D projects between companies from both nations, co-developing advanced technologies including cybersecurity solutions and medical devices (MEA, 2023). These arrangements give the bilateral relationship an institutional depth — and a set of mutual interests — that makes it considerably more resilient than a purely state-to-state political relationship could be.



India's historical connections with both Israel and Palestine provide it with a distinctive opportunity to act as a mediator in the protracted conflict (Tharoor, 2012). This claim deserves more than ritual assertion. Mediator credibility depends on a specific combination of attributes — sustained relationships with both parties, a track record of diplomatic even-handedness, sufficient material weight to back any agreement with tangible incentives, and the institutional capacity to participate in complex multilateral negotiations. India's historical relationship with the Palestinian national movement, its growing strategic partnership with Israel, its established presence in multilateral forums, and its increasingly significant economic weight in the regional system collectively position it as a more credible potential interlocutor than most analyses acknowledge.

India's active engagement in multilateral platforms, such as the United Nations, enables it to advocate for comprehensive peace initiatives in the Middle East (Kumaraswamy, 2010). This is not a trivial asset. The capacity to shape the terms of multilateral discussion — to propose frameworks, build coalitions, and signal credible commitment to implementation — constitutes a form of diplomatic influence that has historically been undervalued in analyses focused primarily on bilateral relationships. As American mediator credibility faces increasing scepticism from Palestinian and Arab actors, space opens for alternative or complementary frameworks in which India could play a meaningful, if necessarily modest, role.

5.3 Cultural Diplomacy and Soft Power

Beyond the domain of governmental relations, India's engagement with both Israel and Palestine generates opportunities for soft power cultivation through people-to-people exchange and academic collaboration. The growth of tourism between India and Israel, and the expanding academic partnerships between research institutions in both countries — particularly in science, technology, and agriculture — create webs of interpersonal connection that provide social infrastructure for a more resilient bilateral relationship (Blarel, 2015). Israeli universities attract Indian students and researchers, promoting knowledge-sharing and capacity-building in ways that generate long-term human capital returns. Cultural initiatives, including film co-productions and artistic exchange, deepen these connections in ways that purely governmental diplomacy cannot replicate (Kumaraswamy, 2010).

India's cultural engagement extends to the Palestinian community through educational support, humanitarian assistance, and the maintenance of symbolic ties that reinforce its image as a genuine, rather than merely rhetorical, partner in the Palestinian national project. Sustaining this credibility is a prerequisite for preserving India's influence among Arab and Muslim-majority states, and for maintaining the domestic political conditions under which the Israeli partnership can continue.



India's engagement with both Israel and Palestine allows it to maintain a balanced stance in West Asia — a region that holds strategic importance due to its energy resources and geopolitical relevance. The India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), announced in 2023, represents a particularly significant development in this landscape: it offers India a potential infrastructure framework for deepening economic and political engagement across the region in ways that would make its stakes in regional stability more direct and more visible. Defence and counter-terrorism collaborations form a key aspect of the India-Israel partnership, with Israel's expertise in unmanned aerial vehicles and missile defence systems aligning directly with India's security requirements. Joint training exercises and intelligence sharing enhance the ability of both nations to address shared security challenges, including terrorism and cyber threats — dimensions of the relationship that carry strategic value independently of its diplomatic implications for the Israel-Palestine question.

6. CONCLUSION

India's engagement with the Israel-Palestine conflict is not a case study in diplomatic confusion. It is, rather, a practised exercise in the management of structural tension — an attempt to hold together commitments and interests that point in different directions, under conditions of international pressure that periodically threaten to force a choice. That India has managed this for over three decades without either formally abandoning its commitment to Palestinian statehood or sacrificing its strategic partnership with Israel is, by any reasonable measure, a significant diplomatic achievement. Its recognition of the PLO in 1974 and consistent endorsement of a two-state solution reflect a normative commitment that has survived multiple changes of government and considerable shifts in the international environment.

The paper underscores India's ability to maintain this dual approach — supporting Palestinian self-determination while deepening bilateral ties with Israel — but it also takes seriously the structural limits of this posture. India must manage pressures from major powers like the United States, Russia, and China, address domestic sensitivities due to its sizable Muslim population, and mitigate risks linked to energy security and regional instability. As the conflict intensifies and international pressure for explicit positioning mounts, the conditions that have made de-hyphenation viable may become more demanding. Sustaining it will require not just reactive management but proactive investment in the diplomatic relationships and institutional frameworks that give India's equidistant posture its credibility.



India's potential role as a mediator in the Israel-Palestine conflict highlights its aspirations as a responsible global power. Drawing on its historical connections with both sides, India can promote peace initiatives and reconciliation through multilateral platforms like the United Nations — a modest but not negligible contribution to a conflict management process that has suffered from an excessive reliance on American intermediation. Cultural and academic exchanges further bolster its soft power, and the IMEC framework, if it advances, gives India an economic stake in regional stability that could underpin a more active diplomatic role.

Ultimately, what India's approach to the Israel-Palestine issue illustrates is a broader argument about the possibilities and limits of strategic autonomy as a foreign policy doctrine for middle powers in a multipolar world. The doctrine is coherent; it generates real strategic assets; and it enables a degree of diplomatic flexibility that more rigidly aligned states cannot match. But it depends on conditions — continued major power tolerance for equidistance, domestic political sustainability, and the maintenance of credibility on multiple simultaneous tracks — that must be actively cultivated rather than assumed. India's future handling of this issue will be one of the more telling tests of whether strategic autonomy, as practised rather than proclaimed, can deliver on its promise.



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