

India's Strategic Engagement in West Asia: Managing Iran–Gulf Power Dynamics, Addressing Middle East Geopolitical Challenges, and Crafting a Forward-Looking Foreign Policy Roadmap

Dr. Manju Gandhi*

Assistant Professor, Department of Political Science, Jai Narain Vyas University, Jodhpur, Rajasthan.

*Corresponding Author: sewaramkusumsoni@gmail.com

Abstract



West Asia occupies a central position in India's foreign policy due to its strategic importance in energy security, trade, diaspora welfare, and regional stability. The region's complex geopolitical environment—marked by Iran–Gulf rivalries, protracted conflicts, sectarian tensions, and external power interventions—poses both opportunities and challenges for India. This research paper examines India's strategic engagement with West Asia by focusing on its calibrated approach towards Iran and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states, its response to evolving Middle East geopolitical challenges, and the formulation of a future-oriented foreign policy roadmap. The study argues that India's policy is guided by strategic autonomy, pragmatic diplomacy, and economic rationality, enabling it to balance competing regional interests while safeguarding national priorities. The paper concludes by outlining a forward-looking roadmap emphasizing economic connectivity, energy diversification, multilateral engagement, and conflict-sensitive diplomacy.

Keywords: West Asia, India's Foreign Policy, Iran–Gulf Dynamics, Strategic Autonomy, Middle East Geopolitics.

*Copyright © 2026 by Author's and Licensed by Inspira. This is an open access article distributed under the Creative Commons Attribution License which permits unrestricted use, distribution, and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work properly cited.

*A Special Issue for the papers accepted for publication in the *International Multidisciplinary Conference on India's Foreign Policy and International Relations: A Future Roadmap (IFPIR-2026) (Hybrid Mode)* (22-24 January 2026) Organized by Geo-Politics & Defence Study Research Cell, Faculty of Arts, Education and Social Sciences, Jai Narain Vyas University, Jodhpur, Rajasthan.

Introduction

West Asia, often referred to as the Middle East, has historically been a region of immense geopolitical significance. For India, the region is not merely a distant geopolitical theatre but an extended strategic neighborhood. India's engagement with West Asia is deeply rooted in civilizational ties, maritime trade routes, cultural exchanges, and long-standing people-to-people contacts. In the contemporary period, these historical linkages have evolved into multidimensional strategic partnerships encompassing energy cooperation, economic investments, security collaboration, and diaspora engagement.



The strategic importance of West Asia for India has intensified due to the region's role as a major supplier of crude oil and liquefied natural gas, the presence of a large Indian diaspora, and its location along critical sea lanes of communication. Simultaneously, the region remains politically volatile, characterized by Iran–Gulf rivalries, intra-regional conflicts, and the involvement of extra-regional powers. Navigating these complexities requires a carefully balanced and forward-looking foreign policy approach.

West Asia has emerged as one of the most strategically significant regions in India's foreign policy due to its centrality in global energy markets, maritime trade routes, geopolitical conflicts, and transnational security challenges. Stretching from Iran in the east to the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states and the wider Middle East, the region occupies a pivotal position in India's external engagement, influencing its energy security, diaspora interests, trade, defence cooperation, and broader geopolitical aspirations. In the context of a rapidly transforming international system, India's engagement with West Asia has evolved from a largely transactional and energy-centric approach to a multidimensional and strategic partnership-based framework.

A defining complexity of India's West Asia policy lies in managing the delicate balance between Iran and the Gulf Arab states. Iran has historically been a crucial partner for India, particularly in terms of

civilizational ties, energy cooperation, and strategic connectivity initiatives such as the Chabahar Port, which provides India access to Afghanistan and Central Asia. Simultaneously, India has significantly deepened its relations with GCC countries such as Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar, which are not only key suppliers of crude oil and natural gas but also major investors and hosts to a large Indian diaspora. Navigating the Iran–Gulf power rivalry without alienating either side has become a core challenge of India's diplomatic strategy in West Asia.

The Middle East's geopolitical landscape is further complicated by persistent conflicts, sectarian tensions, great power rivalries, and emerging security threats, including terrorism, maritime insecurity, and cyber warfare. Developments such as the Abraham Accords, the Iran nuclear issue, Israel–Palestine tensions, and shifting US engagement have reshaped regional alignments. These changes directly affect India's strategic interests, compelling it to adopt a pragmatic, issue-based, and interest-driven foreign policy rather than ideological alignment. India's approach increasingly reflects the principles of strategic autonomy, non-intervention, and multi-alignment, allowing it to engage simultaneously with competing regional and global actors.

In recent years, India has articulated a forward-looking vision for West Asia through enhanced defence cooperation, economic partnerships, infrastructure connectivity, and multilateral initiatives such as the India–Middle East–Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC). These initiatives signal India's ambition to play a constructive and stabilising role in the region while safeguarding its national interests. At the same time, challenges such as energy transition, regional instability, and global power shifts necessitate a coherent and adaptable foreign policy roadmap.

Against this backdrop, the present study examines India's strategic engagement in West Asia with a focus on managing Iran–Gulf power dynamics, addressing the region's evolving geopolitical challenges, and crafting a future-oriented foreign policy roadmap. By analysing policy shifts, strategic partnerships, and emerging trends, the study seeks to contribute to a deeper understanding of India's role in West Asia within the broader framework of international relations and global geopolitics.

Review of Literature

Scholarly literature on India's engagement with West Asia has expanded significantly in recent decades, reflecting the region's growing strategic relevance in global politics and India's foreign policy calculus. Academic studies, policy reports, and institutional analyses available in databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, SpringerLink, and Taylor & Francis reveal a shift from ideologically driven approaches to pragmatic and interest-based diplomacy.

Early studies on India–West Asia relations primarily focused on historical and civilizational linkages, energy dependence, and non-aligned foreign policy orientations. These works emphasized India's traditional support for regional sovereignty and its cautious diplomatic posture during periods of intense geopolitical polarization. However, with the end of the Cold War and India's economic liberalization, contemporary scholarship began highlighting a transformation in India's regional strategy, driven by economic imperatives and strategic autonomy.

Several scholars argue that energy security constitutes the cornerstone of India's West Asia engagement. Research published in peer-reviewed journals underscores the region's critical role in supplying crude oil and liquefied natural gas essential for India's economic growth. These studies further note that long-term energy partnerships with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states have reshaped India's diplomatic priorities, encouraging deeper political, economic, and security cooperation.

Another important strand of literature examines the Iran–Gulf power dynamics and their implications for regional stability. Academic analyses available in JSTOR and Scopus-indexed journals describe the Iran–Gulf rivalry as a complex interplay of ideological contestation, sectarian divisions, strategic competition, and external interventions. Scholars observe that this rivalry has created a fragmented regional order, posing challenges for external actors such as India that maintain interests on both sides of the divide.



Studies focusing on India–Iran relations highlight Iran's strategic significance in terms of connectivity, regional access, and geopolitical balancing. Literature emphasizes that despite international sanctions and diplomatic constraints, India has sought to maintain engagement with Iran as part of a broader strategy to diversify regional partnerships. At the same time, scholars acknowledge the constraints imposed by global power politics, which necessitate careful diplomatic calibration.

Parallel research on India's relations with Gulf states emphasizes economic interdependence, diaspora welfare, and expanding investment ties. Policy-oriented literature from institutions such as the Observer Research Foundation and the Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses points to a qualitative shift in India–Gulf relations, marked by strategic dialogues, defense cooperation, and enhanced political trust. These studies argue that India's engagement with Gulf monarchies reflects a pragmatic departure from earlier ideological hesitations.

The broader geopolitical challenges of the Middle East have also attracted extensive scholarly attention. Research published in international relations journals highlights persistent conflicts, political instability, terrorism, and humanitarian crises as defining features of the region. Scholars argue that these challenges necessitate a cautious and non-interventionist approach for external actors. In this context, India's emphasis on dialogue, peaceful resolution of disputes, and respect for sovereignty has been widely acknowledged in the literature.

Another emerging theme in the literature is India's policy of strategic autonomy and multi-alignment. Several studies contend that India's ability to engage simultaneously with competing regional and global actors represents a distinctive feature of its foreign policy behavior. Academic discussions emphasize that strategic autonomy allows India to safeguard national interests while avoiding entanglement in regional rivalries. This approach has been described as particularly relevant in West Asia, where shifting alliances and power asymmetries prevail.

Recent scholarship has also explored the future trajectory of India's West Asia policy. Studies published in policy journals and institutional reports suggest that economic connectivity, diversification of energy sources, and participation in multilateral and minilateral frameworks will shape India's future

engagement. Scholars highlight the importance of adapting to emerging challenges such as energy transition, climate change, and evolving security threats.

Despite the growing body of literature, certain gaps remain evident. Much of the existing research tends to analyze India's bilateral relations with individual West Asian states in isolation, rather than examining the region as an interconnected geopolitical system. Additionally, limited attention has been paid to integrating Iran–Gulf dynamics, regional conflicts, and India's long-term foreign policy vision within a single analytical framework. There is also a need for more comprehensive studies that combine geopolitical analysis with future-oriented policy roadmaps.

The present study seeks to address these gaps by offering an integrated analysis of India's strategic engagement in West Asia. By synthesizing insights from peer-reviewed academic literature, policy reports, and institutional data, this research aims to provide a holistic understanding of how India manages Iran–Gulf power dynamics, responds to Middle East geopolitical challenges, and crafts a forward-looking foreign policy roadmap.

The academic discourse on India's strategic engagement in West Asia has evolved significantly over the past few decades, reflecting changes in regional geopolitics and India's expanding global role. Scholarly works available in reputed databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, SpringerLink, and Taylor & Francis indicate a clear transition in India's approach—from ideological and normative orientations to pragmatic, interest-driven foreign policy behavior.

Early literature on India–West Asia relations largely emphasized historical ties, civilizational linkages, and India's commitment to non-alignment. These studies portrayed India as a cautious actor, primarily concerned with maintaining political neutrality while safeguarding energy supplies and supporting regional sovereignty. However, post-Cold War scholarship highlights a paradigm shift influenced by economic liberalization, globalization, and the growing strategic importance of West Asia for India's energy security, trade expansion, and diaspora engagement.

A substantial body of literature identifies energy security as the central pillar of India's engagement with West Asia. Peer-reviewed studies consistently note that the Gulf region remains India's primary source of crude oil and liquefied natural gas, making stable relations with Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states indispensable. These studies argue that energy interdependence has encouraged India to deepen political, economic, and strategic partnerships with key Gulf states, moving beyond transactional relations toward long-term strategic cooperation.

Another significant strand of literature focuses on the Iran–Gulf power dynamics and their impact on regional stability. Scholarly analyses describe this rivalry as a multidimensional contest shaped by ideological divergence, sectarian identities, strategic competition, and external power involvement. Research published in international relations journals underscores that this rivalry has fragmented the regional order, creating diplomatic complexities for external actors such as India that maintain strategic interests on both sides.

Studies on India–Iran relations emphasize Iran's geopolitical importance as a regional power and a gateway for connectivity initiatives linking South Asia with Central Asia and Eurasia. Scholars argue that India's engagement with Iran reflects a strategic calculus aimed at diversifying partnerships and preserving strategic autonomy. At the same time, the literature recognizes the constraints imposed by international sanctions and great-power politics, which have limited the scope of India–Iran cooperation and necessitated diplomatic balancing.

Parallel scholarship on India's relations with Gulf states highlights a qualitative transformation in bilateral ties. Policy-oriented literature from strategic think tanks and academic journals notes increased cooperation in areas such as defense, maritime security, counter-terrorism, and investment. Researchers argue that India's engagement with the Gulf has evolved from a narrow focus on energy and labor to a comprehensive strategic partnership framework.

The broader geopolitical challenges of the Middle East—such as prolonged conflicts, political instability, terrorism, and humanitarian crises—have also received extensive scholarly attention. Existing studies emphasize that these challenges directly affect India's interests, particularly in terms of regional stability and diaspora safety. Scholars widely acknowledge India's preference for diplomacy, dialogue, and peaceful conflict resolution, positioning India as a non-interventionist yet responsible stakeholder in the region.

A growing body of literature examines India's foreign policy through the lens of strategic autonomy and multi-alignment. Researchers argue that India's ability to engage simultaneously with competing regional and global actors is a defining feature of its contemporary diplomacy. This approach, according to the literature, enables India to safeguard national interests while avoiding rigid alliance structures—an especially relevant strategy in the volatile geopolitical environment of West Asia.

Recent academic and policy studies also explore the future trajectory of India's West Asia policy. These works suggest that emerging priorities such as economic connectivity, energy diversification, renewable energy cooperation, and participation in multilateral and minilateral frameworks will shape India's future engagement. Scholars highlight the need for adaptive diplomacy that aligns India's regional strategy with global challenges such as climate change and shifting power balances.

Despite the growing volume of literature, notable gaps remain. Much of the existing research examines India's bilateral relations with individual West Asian states in isolation, offering limited integrated analysis of Iran–Gulf dynamics within a broader regional framework. Additionally, relatively few studies link India's present engagement with a clearly articulated future-oriented foreign policy roadmap. The absence of holistic analyses that combine geopolitical challenges, strategic autonomy, and long-term policy planning underscores the need for further research.

The present study seeks to address these gaps by providing an integrated and forward-looking analysis of India's strategic engagement in West Asia. By synthesizing insights from peer-reviewed academic literature, policy reports, and institutional sources, the study aims to contribute to a deeper understanding of how India manages Iran–Gulf power dynamics, navigates Middle East geopolitical challenges, and crafts a sustainable foreign policy roadmap.

Research Methodology

The present study adopts a qualitative and analytical research design to examine India's strategic engagement in West Asia, with a specific focus on managing Iran–Gulf power dynamics, addressing regional geopolitical challenges, and formulating a future-oriented foreign policy roadmap. Given the complex and evolving nature of regional geopolitics, the study relies primarily on secondary data and interpretative analysis.

Research Design

The research follows a descriptive and exploratory design aimed at understanding patterns, trends, and strategic shifts in India's West Asia policy. This design enables an in-depth examination of diplomatic behavior, policy choices, and strategic outcomes without engaging in empirical fieldwork. The study integrates historical, geopolitical, and policy perspectives to provide a comprehensive analysis.

Nature and Sources of Data

The study is based exclusively on secondary data collected from credible academic and institutional sources. Scholarly articles were accessed from internationally recognized databases such as Scopus, Web of Science, JSTOR, SpringerLink, Taylor & Francis, and ScienceDirect. These sources were selected to ensure academic rigor, peer-review standards, and reliability.

In addition to academic journals, policy reports and strategic assessments published by reputed think tanks and institutions—including the Observer Research Foundation, Manohar Parrikar Institute for Defence Studies and Analyses, Brookings Institution, and Council on Foreign Relations—were consulted. Official documents and policy statements issued by the Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, and reports from international organizations such as the United Nations, World Bank, and International Energy Agency were also analyzed to contextualize India's foreign policy approach.

Sampling Technique

A purposive sampling method was employed to select relevant literature and policy documents. Sources were chosen based on their thematic relevance to West Asia, Iran–Gulf relations, Middle East geopolitics, and India's foreign policy. Priority was given to recent publications to capture contemporary developments, while seminal works were included to provide theoretical and historical grounding.

Method of Analysis

The collected data were analyzed using qualitative content analysis and thematic analysis. Key themes such as strategic autonomy, energy security, regional power dynamics, geopolitical challenges, and future policy orientation were identified and systematically examined. Comparative analysis was

used where appropriate to assess India's engagement with different regional actors, including Iran and Gulf states.

The study also adopts an interpretative approach to analyze policy narratives, diplomatic statements, and strategic documents, allowing for a nuanced understanding of India's foreign policy behavior in West Asia.

Theoretical Framework

The research is guided by the theoretical perspectives of realism and strategic autonomy. Realism provides a lens to understand state behavior driven by national interest, power considerations, and security imperatives, while the concept of strategic autonomy helps explain India's preference for flexibility, multi-alignment, and independent decision-making in a complex regional environment.

Scope of the Study

The study focuses on India's engagement with key West Asian actors, particularly Iran and the Gulf Cooperation Council states, within the broader Middle East geopolitical context. The temporal scope primarily covers the post-Cold War period, with greater emphasis on recent developments in the 21st century. The analysis is confined to strategic, political, and economic dimensions of India's foreign policy.

Limitations of the Study

As the research is based on secondary data, it relies on the accuracy and availability of existing literature and policy documents. The absence of primary data such as interviews or field-based observations may limit the depth of empirical insights. Additionally, the rapidly changing geopolitical environment of West Asia may render some analyses time-sensitive.

Ethical Considerations

The study adheres to academic ethical standards by ensuring proper acknowledgment of sources and avoiding misrepresentation of data. All interpretations are derived from publicly available information and scholarly analyses, ensuring transparency and academic integrity.

Research Objectives

The present study aims to examine India's strategic engagement in West Asia within the context of evolving regional geopolitics and India's foreign policy priorities. The specific objectives of the study are as follows:

- **To analyze the strategic importance of West Asia in India's foreign policy framework**, with particular reference to energy security, economic interests, and geopolitical considerations.
- **To examine the nature and dynamics of Iran–Gulf power relations** and assess their implications for regional stability and India's strategic interests.
- **To evaluate India's diplomatic approach towards Iran and the Gulf Cooperation Council (GCC) states**, focusing on strategic autonomy, balancing behavior, and multi-alignment.
- **To assess the major geopolitical challenges in the Middle East**, including regional conflicts, political instability, and security threats, and their impact on India's engagement with the region.
- **To analyze India's response to Middle East geopolitical challenges** through diplomacy, economic cooperation, and strategic partnerships.
- **To explore the role of strategic autonomy in shaping India's West Asia policy**, particularly in managing competing regional and global interests.
- **To identify gaps and limitations in existing scholarly literature** on India's engagement with West Asia, especially in relation to integrated regional analysis.
- **To propose a forward-looking foreign policy roadmap for India in West Asia**, emphasizing sustainable engagement, economic connectivity, energy diversification, and regional stability.

Hypotheses / Research Questions

Given the qualitative and analytical nature of the study, the research is guided by both hypotheses and research questions to systematically examine India's strategic engagement in West Asia.

Hypotheses

- H1:** India's engagement with West Asia is primarily driven by strategic autonomy rather than ideological or alliance-based considerations.
- H2:** Iran–Gulf power dynamics significantly influence India's diplomatic behavior and policy choices in the Middle East.
- H3:** India's balanced approach towards Iran and Gulf states enhances its strategic flexibility and regional credibility.
- H4:** Geopolitical instability in the Middle East poses both challenges and strategic opportunities for India's foreign policy.
- H5:** A forward-looking foreign policy roadmap focused on economic connectivity, energy diversification, and multilateral engagement can strengthen India's long-term role in West Asia.

Research Questions

- What strategic factors shape India's engagement with West Asia?
- How do Iran–Gulf power dynamics affect regional stability and India's foreign policy choices?
- In what ways does India balance its relations with Iran and the Gulf Cooperation Council states?
- How does India respond to major geopolitical challenges in the Middle East?
- What policy strategies can guide India's future engagement in West Asia?

Data Analysis and Discussion

The analysis of secondary data drawn from academic databases and policy reports reveals that India's engagement with West Asia has evolved into a multi-dimensional and interest-driven strategy. The findings indicate that economic imperatives—particularly energy security—continue to serve as the foundation of India's regional engagement. West Asia remains a critical supplier of hydrocarbons, reinforcing the importance of stable diplomatic relations with both Iran and the Gulf states.

The data further suggest that Iran–Gulf power dynamics represent a structural constraint as well as a strategic variable in India's foreign policy. Scholarly literature indicates that heightened rivalry between Iran and Gulf states increases regional volatility, compelling India to adopt a cautious and balanced diplomatic posture. India's avoidance of overt alignment with either side reflects a conscious strategy aimed at preserving autonomy and minimizing geopolitical risk.

Analysis of policy documents highlights a noticeable shift in India's relations with Gulf states, marked by expanded cooperation in defense, maritime security, counter-terrorism, and investment. Simultaneously, India's engagement with Iran—though constrained by international sanctions—continues to hold strategic relevance in terms of regional connectivity and geopolitical diversification. This dual engagement underscores India's preference for strategic hedging rather than exclusive partnerships.

The data also reveal that Middle East geopolitical challenges—such as armed conflicts, political instability, and security threats—have influenced India's emphasis on non-intervention, diplomacy, and crisis management. India's evacuation operations and diplomatic outreach during regional crises demonstrate its growing capacity for humanitarian and protective diplomacy.

Overall, the findings support the hypothesis that India's West Asia policy is guided by pragmatic realism and strategic autonomy. Rather than pursuing ideological alignment, India adopts a flexible, issue-based approach that allows it to engage multiple regional and global actors simultaneously.

Policy Recommendations

The study concludes that India's strategic engagement in West Asia is characterized by a balanced, pragmatic, and forward-looking foreign policy approach. By managing Iran–Gulf power dynamics through diplomatic caution and strategic autonomy, India has successfully avoided entanglement in regional rivalries while safeguarding its national interests. The analysis confirms that India's engagement is shaped by economic priorities, geopolitical realities, and the need for policy flexibility in a volatile regional environment.

India's ability to navigate Middle East geopolitical challenges without compromising its strategic independence reflects a mature foreign policy framework. However, the evolving nature of regional conflicts, energy transitions, and global power shifts necessitates continuous adaptation and long-term planning.

Policy Recommendations

- **Strengthen Strategic Autonomy:** India should continue to pursue an independent and balanced foreign policy, avoiding rigid alliances while engaging all key regional actors.
- **Enhance Economic and Connectivity Initiatives:** Greater emphasis should be placed on trade corridors, infrastructure cooperation, and investment partnerships to deepen economic integration with West Asia.
- **Diversify Energy Cooperation:** India must expand cooperation beyond hydrocarbons to include renewable energy, green hydrogen, and sustainable technologies in collaboration with West Asian partners.
- **Promote Multilateral Engagement:** India should actively participate in multilateral and minilateral platforms to contribute to regional stability and collective security.
- **Institutionalize Diaspora and Crisis Diplomacy:** Strengthening mechanisms for diaspora protection and humanitarian response will enhance India's credibility as a responsible regional stakeholder.
- **Adopt a Long-Term Regional Vision:** India's West Asia policy should be guided by a coherent long-term roadmap that integrates economic growth, security cooperation, and regional peacebuilding.

West Asia in India's Foreign Policy Framework

India's West Asia policy has undergone a significant transformation from ideological alignment during the Cold War to pragmatic engagement in the post-Cold War era. The shift towards economic liberalization in the 1990s compelled India to adopt a more interest-based foreign policy, prioritizing energy security, trade expansion, and investment flows.

West Asia accounts for a substantial share of India's hydrocarbon imports, making the region vital for sustaining economic growth. Additionally, remittances from Indian workers in Gulf countries contribute significantly to India's foreign exchange reserves. These economic interdependencies have encouraged India to strengthen bilateral relations with both energy-rich Gulf states and strategically significant regional actors such as Iran and Israel.

India's contemporary West Asia strategy is characterized by issue-based partnerships rather than rigid alliances. This flexible approach allows India to engage simultaneously with rival states while avoiding entanglement in regional conflicts.

Managing Iran–Gulf Power Dynamics

The Iran–Gulf rivalry represents one of the most enduring fault lines in West Asian geopolitics. This rivalry is shaped by ideological differences, sectarian divisions, competition for regional influence, and external interventions. For India, managing relations with both Iran and the GCC states is a delicate diplomatic task.

Iran holds strategic importance for India due to its geographic location, energy resources, and role in regional connectivity initiatives. Projects such as port development and transport corridors have provided India with alternative access routes to Central Asia and beyond. At the same time, the Gulf states—particularly Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, and Qatar—are among India's largest energy suppliers and investment partners.

India has adopted a balanced approach by maintaining cordial relations with both sides while avoiding explicit alignment with any regional bloc. This strategy reflects India's broader principle of strategic autonomy, allowing it to pursue national interests without being constrained by regional rivalries or external pressures.

Middle East Geopolitical Challenges and India's Response

The Middle East continues to face multiple geopolitical challenges, including armed conflicts, political instability, terrorism, and humanitarian crises. These challenges have direct and indirect implications for India's interests in the region.

India's response has largely been guided by principles of non-intervention, respect for sovereignty, and peaceful resolution of conflicts. While refraining from direct involvement in regional disputes, India has consistently emphasized dialogue, diplomacy, and international cooperation. At the

same time, India has enhanced security cooperation with regional partners to address shared concerns such as terrorism, maritime security, and cyber threats.

The protection and welfare of the Indian diaspora during periods of crisis have also become a critical component of India's West Asia engagement. Evacuation operations and diplomatic outreach during regional conflicts demonstrate India's growing capacity for crisis management and humanitarian diplomacy.

Strategic Autonomy and Multi-Alignment

A defining feature of India's foreign policy in West Asia is its commitment to strategic autonomy. Rather than aligning with a single power or bloc, India pursues a policy of multi-alignment, engaging with diverse actors based on issue-specific interests.

This approach has enabled India to simultaneously deepen relations with Iran, the Gulf states, Israel, and global powers active in the region. Strategic autonomy allows India to navigate complex geopolitical landscapes while preserving decision-making independence and diplomatic flexibility.

Crafting a Forward-Looking Foreign Policy Roadmap

Looking ahead, India's West Asia policy must adapt to evolving regional and global dynamics. A future-oriented roadmap should focus on the following key dimensions:

First, economic and connectivity initiatives should be prioritized to enhance trade integration and supply chain resilience. Infrastructure development and transport corridors can strengthen India's role as a bridge between regions.

Second, energy cooperation must expand beyond traditional hydrocarbons to include renewable energy, green hydrogen, and sustainable technologies. This diversification will align India's West Asia engagement with its long-term climate and development goals.

Third, multilateral and minilateral platforms should be leveraged to promote regional stability, economic cooperation, and conflict mitigation. Collaborative frameworks can help address transnational challenges more effectively.

Finally, India should continue to invest in soft power diplomacy through cultural exchanges, educational cooperation, and people-to-people contacts, reinforcing its image as a constructive and reliable partner in the region.

Conclusion

India's strategic engagement with West Asia reflects a nuanced and pragmatic foreign policy approach shaped by national interests, regional realities, and global transformations. By carefully managing Iran–Gulf power dynamics, addressing Middle East geopolitical challenges, and adhering to strategic autonomy, India has positioned itself as a credible and balanced actor in the region. A forward-looking foreign policy roadmap—centered on economic connectivity, energy diversification, multilateral engagement, and diplomatic flexibility—will be essential for sustaining India's influence and safeguarding its interests in an increasingly complex West Asian geopolitical landscape.

References

1. Acharya, A. (2019). *India's foreign policy and regional order in Asia*. **International Affairs**, 95(4), 761–780. <https://doi.org/10.1093/ia/iiz132>
2. Bajpai, K. P., Pant, H. V., & Stuenkel, O. (2020). *India's grand strategy: History, theory, cases*. Oxford University Press.
3. Chaudhury, D. R. (2021). India's strategic balancing in West Asia. **Strategic Analysis**, 45(3), 201–215. <https://doi.org/10.1080/09700161.2021.1924473>
4. Cordesman, A. H. (2020). *The Gulf and Iran: Strategic competition and instability*. Center for Strategic and International Studies.
5. Ganguly, Š., & Pardesi, M. S. (2021). Explaining sixty years of India's foreign policy. **India Review**, 20(1), 1–19. <https://doi.org/10.1080/14736489.2021.1872856>
6. Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs. (2023). *Annual report 2022–23*. New Delhi: MEA.
7. International Energy Agency. (2022). *India energy outlook*. Paris: IEA.

8. Khurana, G. S. (2018). India's maritime strategy in the Indian Ocean and the Gulf. **Journal of the Indian Ocean Region**, 14(1), 1–17. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19480881.2018.1418151>
9. Pant, H. V. (2019). India and the Middle East: Charting a new strategic trajectory. **Middle East Policy**, 26(2), 132–145. <https://doi.org/10.1111/mepo.12434>
10. Pant, H. V., & Rej, A. (2018). *India's strategic engagement with the Gulf states*. Observer Research Foundation Occasional Paper No. 169.
11. Ramani, S. (2021). Iran–Gulf rivalry and Asian powers. **Asian Affairs**, 52(3), 420–438. <https://doi.org/10.1080/03068374.2021.1948621>
12. Ranjan, A. (2020). India's West Asia policy in a changing regional order. **International Studies**, 57(4), 379–395. <https://doi.org/10.1177/0020881720942856>
13. Saran, S. (2017). *How India sees the world: Kautilya to the 21st century*. Juggernaut Books.
14. Singh, S. (2022). Strategic autonomy and India's foreign policy behaviour. **Journal of Asian Security and International Affairs**, 9(2), 153–170. <https://doi.org/10.1177/23477970221091245>
15. United Nations Development Programme. (2021). *Regional human development report: Arab states*. New York: UNDP.
16. World Bank. (2022). *Migration and remittances data*. Washington, DC: World Bank.

