

Multi-Alignment, Indo-Pacific Orientation, and the Recalibration of Indian Strategic Culture: Implications for Pakistan

Abdul Karim¹, Dr Amir Khan²

Abstract

This article examines how India's strategic culture has evolved through the adoption of multi-alignment and an Indo-Pacific orientation under the Narendra Modi government. It argues that India has moved beyond its traditional doctrine of strategic autonomy toward a flexible strategy of issue-based partnerships while preserving decision-making independence. This recalibration reflects the interaction of domestic ideological transformation, geopolitical competition with China, technological modernization, and India's aspiration for major power status. The article employs the Strategic Culture framework developed by Johnston (1995) and Katzenstein (1996) to explain how enduring cultural preferences interact with leadership, institutions, and changing international structures. Using qualitative analysis of official policy documents, strategic literature, and secondary academic sources, the study assesses the implications of India's evolving strategic culture for Pakistan. It concludes that India's multi-alignment has expanded its diplomatic, military, and technological capabilities without abandoning strategic autonomy, thereby strengthening its regional influence. Simultaneously, the Indo-Pacific framework has shifted India's strategic attention from a predominantly continental outlook toward a broader maritime orientation while maintaining pressure along the Pakistan front. These developments have significant implications for Pakistan's security planning, deterrence posture, regional diplomacy, and maritime strategy. The article recommends that Pakistan pursue calibrated balancing through strategic partnerships, maritime capability enhancement, economic resilience, diplomatic diversification, and crisis-management mechanisms to preserve strategic stability in South Asia.

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Introduction

India's strategic behaviour has undergone a significant transformation during the last decade. While post-independence Indian foreign policy was largely characterized by non-alignment and later strategic autonomy, contemporary India increasingly practices "multi-alignment," simultaneously strengthening partnerships with the United States, Japan, Australia, France, Russia, the Gulf States, and Southeast Asian countries while avoiding formal military alliances. Rather than replacing strategic autonomy, multi-alignment has become its modern

¹ PhD Scholar, Department of International Relations & Political Science, Qurtuba University of Science & Information Technology, Email: karimzia178@yahoo.com.pk

² Assistant Professor, Department of International Relations & Political Science, Qurtuba University of Science & Information Technology, Email: aamiroperiday@gmail.com

operational expression. Unlike the Cold War policy of non-alignment, which sought to preserve India's sovereignty amid bipolar rivalry, contemporary multi-alignment is characterized by proactive and differentiated partnerships with competing global actors. India simultaneously strengthens strategic cooperation with the United States, Japan, Australia, France, and several European states while maintaining long-standing defence relations with Russia, participating actively in BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation (SCO), expanding engagement with Gulf countries, and preserving selective diplomatic engagement with China despite persistent strategic competition. This diversified approach enables New Delhi to maximize diplomatic influence, technological access, defence cooperation, and economic opportunities without accepting the obligations associated with formal military alliances. Consequently, multi-alignment has emerged not as a departure from strategic autonomy but as its contemporary operational manifestation under conditions of an increasingly multipolar international system.

A parallel transformation has occurred through India's adoption of the Indo-Pacific strategic framework. Whereas Indian strategic thinking historically concentrated on continental security challenges arising from Pakistan and China, contemporary security planning increasingly integrates maritime security, supply-chain resilience, technological partnerships, connectivity initiatives, and naval modernization within a broader Indo-Pacific vision. India's expanding participation in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), logistics agreements with strategic partners, enhanced maritime domain awareness, and sustained naval deployments across the Indian Ocean illustrate this strategic reorientation. Importantly, Indian policymakers consistently portray the Indo-Pacific as an inclusive geopolitical and economic framework rather than an exclusive military alliance directed against any single state. Nevertheless, the cumulative effect of these initiatives substantially enhances India's strategic capabilities and geopolitical influence throughout the wider Indo-Pacific region.

The strategic recalibration evident under the Modi government cannot be understood solely through structural realist explanations emphasizing shifts in the distribution of power. Although China's rapid military modernization, expanding naval presence in the Indian Ocean, and increasingly assertive regional behaviour have undoubtedly accelerated India's strategic adjustments, domestic ideational factors have also played an important role. The rise of Hindu nationalism, stronger executive leadership, growing public support for military modernization, technological self-reliance under the *Atmanirbhar Bharat* initiative, and aspirations for major-power status have collectively contributed to reshaping India's strategic outlook. These domestic transformations interact with historical experiences, institutional preferences, and geopolitical constraints, producing both continuity and change within India's strategic culture. Such developments reinforce the argument that strategic behaviour cannot be adequately explained through material capabilities alone but must also incorporate ideational and institutional variables. The implications of these developments extend well beyond India's own foreign policy. As South Asia's predominant military power, India's evolving strategic culture directly influences the regional balance of power, deterrence dynamics, crisis stability, maritime competition, technological modernization, and diplomatic alignments. Enhanced defence cooperation with technologically advanced partners has

strengthened India's conventional military capabilities, intelligence-sharing arrangements, surveillance systems, precision-strike potential, cyber capabilities, and maritime reach. Simultaneously, India's expanding diplomatic influence across multilateral institutions increases its capacity to shape regional norms and international agendas while enhancing its credibility as an emerging global actor. These developments collectively create new strategic challenges for Pakistan's security planning and regional diplomacy.

For Pakistan, understanding India's evolving strategic culture has become increasingly important because conventional military indicators alone no longer capture the broader transformation taking place within India's external behaviour. India's growing technological partnerships, defence-industrial cooperation, maritime modernization, economic diplomacy, and institutional engagement increasingly influence South Asia's strategic environment alongside traditional military capabilities. Consequently, Pakistan's strategic assessment must incorporate these multidimensional developments while evaluating their implications for deterrence stability, maritime security, crisis management, and regional diplomacy.

This article therefore examines how India's adoption of multi-alignment and the Indo-Pacific framework has recalibrated its strategic culture between 2014 and 2025. Drawing on the complementary theoretical perspectives of Johnston (1995) and Katzenstein (1996), the study argues that India's contemporary strategic behaviour reflects the interaction between enduring cultural preferences, changing domestic political dynamics, and evolving international structures. While strategic autonomy remains the normative core of Indian strategic culture, its operational expression has become increasingly pragmatic, externally engaged, technologically oriented, and geopolitically ambitious. The study further evaluates the implications of these developments for Pakistan's security environment and proposes policy options for responding to India's evolving strategic orientation.

Literature Review

The literature on India's strategic culture has expanded considerably during the past three decades, yet important differences remain regarding the sources of continuity and change in Indian strategic behaviour. Early scholarship concentrated primarily on whether India possessed a coherent strategic culture at all, whereas more recent studies increasingly examine how domestic political transformation, changing geopolitical conditions, and great-power competition have reshaped India's strategic outlook. One influential strand of scholarship argues that India's strategic behaviour has historically been characterized by strategic restraint, preference for diplomatic solutions, and preservation of strategic autonomy. Johnston (1995) conceptualizes strategic culture as durable assumptions regarding the legitimate use of force that shape strategic decision-making over time. Applying this perspective to India suggests that despite significant changes in external circumstances, long-standing preferences regarding independent decision-making and policy flexibility continue to influence Indian security policy. Katzenstein (1996), however, broadens the analytical framework by emphasizing the importance of identity, political norms, domestic institutions, and national culture in shaping security behaviour. Together, these approaches provide a comprehensive

framework for explaining both continuity and transformation within India's strategic culture. Multi-Alignment.

Rajesh Basrur (2022) further refines the debate by distinguishing between "deep strategic culture" and "mutable strategic culture." According to Basrur, India's enduring commitment to strategic autonomy and international status constitutes the deep foundations of its strategic culture, whereas operational approaches to military intervention, strategic partnerships, and foreign policy remain adaptable to changing circumstances. This distinction helps explain why India's adoption of multi-alignment represents adaptation rather than abandonment of its historical strategic principles. Another major body of literature focuses on India's transition from non-alignment toward strategic autonomy and subsequently to multi-alignment. Scholars argue that this evolution reflects neither alliance formation nor policy inconsistency but rather a pragmatic effort to maximize strategic flexibility under conditions of increasing multipolarity. India's expanding network of strategic partnerships enables New Delhi to obtain technological cooperation, defence modernization, intelligence sharing, economic opportunities, and diplomatic influence while avoiding dependence upon any single major power. Multi-alignment therefore functions as an advanced form of strategic hedging that enhances India's room for manoeuvre within an increasingly competitive international system.

A growing literature also examines India's Indo-Pacific strategy. Liu and Jamali (2021) argue that India's Indo-Pacific policy represents pragmatic balancing between the United States and China rather than exclusive alignment with either power. Similarly, Doyle and Rumley (2019) demonstrate that India's contemporary Indo-Pacific vision incorporates enduring geopolitical traditions while simultaneously adapting to emerging maritime realities. These studies collectively emphasize that India's maritime strategy combines security cooperation, economic connectivity, diplomatic engagement, and technological collaboration within an integrated regional framework rather than a purely military strategy. Recent scholarship increasingly links India's strategic transformation to the rise of China and intensifying great-power competition. China's expanding naval presence in the Indian Ocean, the Belt and Road Initiative, border disputes, and broader geopolitical rivalry have encouraged India to strengthen defence partnerships, modernize military capabilities, and deepen participation in regional security institutions. Rather than replacing strategic autonomy, these initiatives seek to preserve India's freedom of action while improving its ability to shape regional security outcomes.

Despite these valuable contributions, three important gaps remain in the existing literature. First, many studies examine either multi-alignment or the Indo-Pacific independently, without analysing their combined influence on India's evolving strategic culture. Second, relatively few studies integrate Johnston's and Katzenstein's complementary theoretical perspectives to explain the interaction between enduring strategic preferences and changing domestic and international contexts. Third, scholars have often examined the implications of India's evolving strategic culture for Pakistan primarily through military or realist frameworks, with insufficient attention to the broader interaction among identity, institutions, strategic culture, diplomacy, technological modernization, and maritime strategy.

This article addresses these gaps by integrating strategic culture theory with contemporary analyses of India's foreign policy transformation. It argues that India's adoption of multi-alignment and the Indo-Pacific framework represents a recalibration rather than a replacement of its traditional strategic culture. Furthermore, it demonstrates how this recalibration has altered the strategic environment confronting Pakistan and identifies policy options for preserving strategic stability in South Asia

Theoretical Framework

The study employs the complementary perspectives of Johnston (1995) and Katzenstein (1996). Johnston conceptualizes strategic culture as durable assumptions regarding the legitimate use of force that influence strategic decision-making. Katzenstein broadens this understanding by emphasizing the role of identity, norms, domestic institutions, and political culture in shaping national security behaviour. Strategic culture emerged as an important concept in security studies to explain why states possessing similar material capabilities often pursue markedly different security policies. The concept challenges purely realist assumptions that strategic behaviour is determined exclusively by distributions of power or military capabilities. Instead, strategic culture emphasizes the influence of historically developed beliefs, collective identities, institutional practices, strategic traditions, and political norms upon national security decision-making (Gray, 1999; Johnston, 1995; Lantis, 2009).

Johnston (1995) defines strategic culture as an integrated system of symbols, historical assumptions, strategic preferences, and beliefs regarding the legitimate use of force that shapes how political and military leaders perceive threats and formulate security policies. These deeply embedded assumptions influence strategic choices by narrowing the range of policy options considered legitimate or appropriate. Although strategic culture does not determine behaviour mechanically, it creates enduring predispositions that guide decision-makers when confronting external challenges. Consequently, strategic culture serves as an intervening variable between the external strategic environment and observable policy outcomes (Johnston, 1995). Applied to India, Johnston's framework suggests that several enduring elements have consistently shaped Indian strategic behaviour despite changes in governments and international conditions. These include the preservation of strategic autonomy, reluctance to enter formal military alliances, emphasis upon sovereign decision-making, preference for strategic flexibility, pursuit of regional influence, and gradual modernization of national military capabilities. These enduring characteristics have remained visible across successive administrations even as India's operational strategies have evolved.

However, Johnston's approach alone cannot adequately explain the significant ideational and institutional changes that have occurred during the Modi administration. For this reason, Katzenstein's (1996) broader conception of strategic culture complements Johnston's framework by emphasizing that security behaviour is equally influenced by identity, political norms, domestic institutions, historical narratives, and national values. Katzenstein argues that national security policies are socially constructed through interactions

among political institutions, societal beliefs, elite perceptions, and collective identities rather than being determined solely by external threats. This perspective is particularly relevant for analysing India's strategic transformation after 2014. The rise of the Bharatiya Janata Party (BJP), the growing influence of Hindutva ideology, increasing public nationalism, stronger executive leadership, institutional reforms, defence modernization initiatives, and aspirations for global leadership have collectively reshaped India's strategic outlook. These developments illustrate how domestic political and ideational changes influence external security behaviour while remaining embedded within longer-term strategic traditions.

The integration of Johnston's and Katzenstein's perspectives therefore provides a comprehensive analytical framework capable of explaining both continuity and change in Indian strategic culture. Johnston explains why India's commitment to strategic autonomy remains remarkably durable despite changing geopolitical circumstances, whereas Katzenstein explains how domestic ideological transformation, institutional evolution, and changing national identity have recalibrated the operational expression of that strategic autonomy. Rather than replacing historical traditions, India's strategic culture has adapted to new geopolitical realities while preserving its fundamental preference for independent strategic decision-making. Within this theoretical framework, India's adoption of multi-alignment represents an important illustration of strategic continuity through policy adaptation. India continues to reject formal alliance commitments while simultaneously expanding defence cooperation, technological partnerships, intelligence sharing, economic engagement, and diplomatic cooperation with multiple major powers. Consequently, multi-alignment represents neither abandonment of strategic autonomy nor alignment with any single power bloc; instead, it reflects the evolution of India's strategic culture in response to contemporary geopolitical competition.

Similarly, India's Indo-Pacific orientation demonstrates how traditional strategic preferences have been recalibrated rather than fundamentally altered. Historically, India's strategic outlook concentrated predominantly upon continental security challenges involving Pakistan and China. Contemporary strategic planning, however, increasingly integrates maritime security, regional connectivity, supply-chain resilience, naval modernization, technological partnerships, and broader engagement throughout the Indo-Pacific region. This transformation illustrates how enduring strategic objectives have expanded to accommodate emerging geopolitical realities without abandoning the foundational principles of strategic autonomy.

The combined theoretical framework also provides important insights into India's evolving use of military power. Traditional Indian strategic behaviour emphasized restraint, limited use of force, and preference for diplomatic solutions. During the Modi administration, however, India has demonstrated greater willingness to employ calibrated military coercion, exemplified by the 2016 Uri surgical strikes and the 2019 Balakot airstrike. Rather than indicating a complete departure from previous strategic traditions, these developments may be interpreted as adaptations within India's evolving strategic culture, influenced by changing domestic political expectations, technological capabilities, institutional confidence, and shifting perceptions of acceptable strategic risk. The interaction between domestic political

transformation and external geopolitical competition therefore occupies a central position within the analytical framework of this study. Rising Chinese power, intensifying great-power rivalry, expanding maritime competition, technological change, and the emergence of the Indo-Pacific have created powerful external incentives for strategic adjustment. Simultaneously, domestic ideological change, institutional reforms, economic modernization, military modernization, and national identity have influenced how Indian leaders interpret these external developments and formulate corresponding policy responses. Johnston and Katzenstein collectively provide the conceptual tools necessary to explain this interaction.

Accordingly, this article conceptualizes India's evolving strategic culture as comprising three interconnected dimensions. The first consists of enduring strategic preferences rooted in historical traditions of autonomy and independent decision-making. The second encompasses domestic ideational and institutional transformation associated with leadership, nationalism, and political identity. The third involves adaptation to an increasingly competitive international strategic environment characterized by China's rise, technological competition, maritime security, and multipolarity. Together, these dimensions explain why India's contemporary foreign policy exhibits substantial operational innovation while preserving fundamental strategic continuity.

Research Methodology

This study adopts a qualitative descriptive-analytical research design to examine the evolution of India's strategic culture during the Narendra Modi administration and to assess the implications of this transformation for Pakistan's security environment. A qualitative approach is particularly appropriate because the research seeks to interpret changes in strategic thought, foreign policy behaviour, institutional developments, political narratives, and national security practices rather than to establish statistical relationships among quantifiable variables. Such an approach facilitates an in-depth examination of ideational, historical, institutional, and geopolitical factors that collectively shape strategic culture. The study is based primarily upon documentary analysis of secondary sources. These include official Indian foreign policy documents, government statements, defence policy publications, strategic doctrines, speeches by senior political leaders, reports issued by international organizations, academic books, peer-reviewed journal articles, policy papers, and publications produced by recognized strategic think tanks. These materials provide the empirical foundation for analysing the evolution of India's strategic culture and its contemporary manifestations through multi-alignment and Indo-Pacific engagement. Multi-Alignment.

The analytical framework is guided by Johnston's (1995) conception of strategic culture and Katzenstein's (1996) constructivist understanding of national security. These complementary theoretical perspectives enable systematic examination of how enduring strategic traditions interact with changing domestic political conditions, institutional developments, ideological transformation, and international structural change. Rather than treating strategic culture as static, the framework recognizes that historical continuity and strategic adaptation frequently coexist within national security policy. The research further

employs a descriptive-analytical method to organize and interpret evidence. The descriptive component identifies major developments in India's foreign and security policy, including the evolution of multi-alignment, the adoption of the Indo-Pacific framework, defence modernization, technological cooperation, maritime strategy, and expanding diplomatic partnerships. The analytical component subsequently evaluates these developments through the conceptual lenses provided by Johnston and Katzenstein to explain the broader transformation of India's strategic culture.

Although the study draws extensively upon contemporary policy developments between 2014 and 2025, it also incorporates historical context where necessary to explain continuity in India's strategic behaviour. This historical perspective enables identification of those elements of strategic culture that have remained relatively stable alongside those that have undergone substantial transformation. The scope of the research is deliberately confined to analysing India's evolving strategic culture and its implications for Pakistan. While developments involving China, the United States, Russia, Japan, Australia, ASEAN, Europe, and Gulf states are examined, they are considered only insofar as they influence India's strategic recalibration and regional security dynamics. The study does not seek to provide a comprehensive assessment of all aspects of India's foreign policy but instead focuses specifically on the interaction between strategic culture, multi-alignment, Indo-Pacific orientation, and South Asian strategic stability.

Finally, the findings presented in this article are interpretive rather than predictive. Strategic culture evolves continuously in response to changing domestic and international circumstances. Consequently, the conclusions offered here represent an analytical assessment of contemporary trends rather than deterministic predictions regarding India's future behaviour. Nevertheless, by integrating strategic culture theory with recent geopolitical developments, the study provides a robust framework for understanding the evolving nature of Indian strategic behaviour and its implications for Pakistan and the wider South Asian security environment.

Evolution from Strategic Autonomy to Multi-Alignment

India's adoption of multi-alignment represents one of the most consequential developments in its contemporary foreign and security policy. Although often portrayed as a significant departure from earlier traditions of non-alignment and strategic autonomy, a closer examination suggests that multi-alignment is better understood as the evolution of India's strategic culture rather than its replacement. The enduring objective of preserving sovereign decision-making has remained intact; however, the instruments through which India pursues this objective have been fundamentally recalibrated to accommodate the realities of an increasingly multipolar and competitive international system. Multi-Alignment.

Historically, India's strategic outlook emerged from the unique political circumstances surrounding independence in 1947. Under Prime Minister Jawaharlal Nehru, Indian foreign policy emphasized non-alignment, anti-colonial solidarity, peaceful coexistence, and strategic independence. Rather than joining either the United States or Soviet blocs during the Cold

War, India sought to maximize its diplomatic autonomy while maintaining flexibility in responding to international crises. This policy reflected both pragmatic geopolitical considerations and deeply embedded normative beliefs regarding sovereignty, independent decision-making, and resistance to external domination (Perkovich, 1999; Subrahmanyam, 1999). Although the Cold War ended and India's economy underwent substantial liberalization during the 1990s, the principle of strategic autonomy continued to shape foreign policy. Successive governments gradually expanded defence cooperation with multiple countries, strengthened economic engagement with global markets, modernized military capabilities, and pursued closer diplomatic relations with major powers. Nevertheless, India consistently avoided entering formal military alliances that might constrain its freedom of strategic decision-making. This continuity demonstrates the persistence of strategic autonomy as one of the defining characteristics of India's strategic culture.

The emergence of multi-alignment under Prime Minister Narendra Modi did not therefore constitute a rejection of strategic autonomy but rather reflected its adaptation to changing international circumstances. Instead of maintaining equal political distance from competing powers, India increasingly adopted differentiated partnerships based upon issue-specific cooperation. This approach enables New Delhi to collaborate with different states across defence, technology, maritime security, trade, energy, infrastructure, intelligence, and regional diplomacy while preserving complete autonomy over its national security decisions. Consequently, multi-alignment represents a strategy of maximizing strategic opportunities without accepting alliance obligations.

From Johnston's (1995) perspective, this evolution illustrates continuity within strategic culture. The underlying strategic preference for independent decision-making has remained remarkably durable despite substantial changes in India's external behaviour. Multi-alignment therefore represents operational adaptation rather than normative transformation. Katzenstein's (1996) framework further explains how domestic political change, institutional evolution, and national identity have facilitated this adaptation by encouraging more confident and activist external engagement without undermining India's traditional strategic principles.

Drivers of Multi-Alignment. Several interconnected developments have contributed to India's transition towards multi-alignment: -

Changing International Structure. The emergence of an increasingly multipolar international system has created opportunities for middle and major powers to diversify their strategic relationships. Rather than confronting a rigid bipolar structure similar to that of the Cold War, India now operates within a fluid international environment characterized by competition among the United States, China, Russia, the European Union, Japan, and other influential regional actors. Such conditions reward diplomatic flexibility instead of exclusive alignments. India has therefore sought to maximize cooperation with multiple centres of power simultaneously. This approach enhances diplomatic leverage by preventing excessive dependence upon any single strategic partner while allowing India to extract political, economic, military, and technological benefits from diverse relationships. Multi-alignment

thus reflects pragmatic adaptation to contemporary international politics rather than ideological realignment.

Rise of China. China's rapid military modernization, expanding economic influence, growing naval presence in the Indian Ocean, Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), and increasingly assertive regional posture have significantly accelerated India's strategic recalibration. Border confrontations, particularly the Doklam crisis in 2017 and the Galwan Valley clashes in 2020, reinforced Indian perceptions that China constitutes the country's principal long-term strategic competitor. Rather than responding through formal alliance commitments, India adopted a strategy of diversified external balancing. Defence cooperation with the United States, Japan, Australia, France, and several European partners expanded considerably, while diplomatic engagement with Russia continued. Simultaneously, India remained an active participant in BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation despite growing strategic competition with Beijing. This pattern illustrates that India's response to China's rise has emphasized strategic flexibility instead of rigid bloc politics.

Economic Transformation. India's expanding economy has also contributed significantly to the evolution of multi-alignment. As one of the world's largest emerging economies, India increasingly requires diversified markets, investment, advanced technologies, energy supplies, resilient supply chains, and expanded trade partnerships. Economic diplomacy has therefore become an integral component of contemporary strategic policy. Unlike the Cold War period, contemporary strategic influence increasingly depends upon technological innovation, industrial capacity, economic resilience, digital infrastructure, and global supply-chain integration. India's foreign policy consequently seeks to strengthen economic partnerships with advanced industrial economies while simultaneously maintaining productive relationships with developing countries across Asia, Africa, the Middle East, and Latin America.

Leadership under Narendra Modi. Leadership has played a particularly significant role in accelerating India's strategic transformation. Since assuming office in 2014, Prime Minister Narendra Modi has emphasized proactive diplomacy, centralized strategic decision-making, defence modernization, technological self-reliance, and India's emergence as a leading global power. Modi's foreign policy demonstrates considerably greater diplomatic activism than many previous administrations. Frequent high-level bilateral visits, expanding summit diplomacy, greater engagement within multilateral institutions, stronger strategic partnerships, and increased emphasis upon defence cooperation illustrate a leadership style characterized by confidence and external engagement. Although these developments remain broadly consistent with India's historical preference for strategic autonomy, they reflect a more ambitious operational strategy designed to enhance India's international influence.

Multi-Alignment in Practice. India's contemporary foreign policy demonstrates the practical application of multi-alignment across multiple geopolitical theatres: -

United States. Relations between India and the United States have expanded unprecedentedly over the past decade. Cooperation now encompasses defence technology,

intelligence sharing, cyber security, artificial intelligence, critical and emerging technologies, maritime security, counterterrorism, semiconductor production, space cooperation, and supply-chain resilience. Several foundational defence agreements, including the Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA), the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA), and the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA), have substantially enhanced interoperability between the armed forces of both countries. These agreements facilitate logistics support, secure communications, geospatial intelligence sharing, and operational coordination while stopping short of creating a formal military alliance. Importantly, India continues to emphasize that these agreements do not compromise its strategic autonomy. Cooperation remains issue-specific and does not impose treaty obligations that would require automatic military participation in conflicts involving the United States.

Russia. Despite expanding cooperation with Washington, Russia remains one of India's most important strategic partners. Moscow continues to serve as a major supplier of defence equipment, advanced military technology, nuclear energy cooperation, and space collaboration. Even following Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022, India resisted considerable Western pressure to curtail bilateral relations, instead pursuing a policy based upon national interests and strategic autonomy. India's continued engagement with Russia illustrates one of the defining characteristics of multi-alignment: the ability to maintain productive relationships with competing great powers simultaneously. Rather than viewing relations with the United States and Russia as mutually exclusive, Indian policymakers seek to derive strategic advantages from both partnerships while avoiding exclusive dependence upon either.

France and Europe. France has emerged as one of India's closest strategic partners in Europe. Cooperation includes defence production, advanced aerospace technologies, naval modernization, intelligence cooperation, maritime security, and Indo-Pacific coordination. Procurement of Rafale fighter aircraft, joint naval exercises, submarine cooperation, and defence-industrial collaboration illustrate the increasing depth of bilateral security relations. More broadly, India's engagement with the European Union encompasses trade negotiations, digital governance, climate cooperation, critical technologies, clean energy transitions, and resilient supply chains. These expanding partnerships diversify India's external relationships while reinforcing its strategic flexibility.

Japan and Australia. Japan and Australia occupy increasingly important positions within India's Indo-Pacific strategy. Shared concerns regarding maritime security, freedom of navigation, regional stability, infrastructure development, and China's expanding influence have encouraged closer defence cooperation among these countries. Joint military exercises, intelligence exchanges, infrastructure initiatives, and growing naval interoperability demonstrate India's commitment to strengthening regional partnerships without transforming the Quad into a formal military alliance. This approach reflects India's continuing preference for flexible security cooperation rather than treaty-based collective defence arrangements.

Gulf States. India has simultaneously transformed its relations with the Gulf region. Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, and Oman have become increasingly significant partners in energy security, investment, infrastructure development, technology, food security, counterterrorism, and maritime cooperation. This expansion reflects India's recognition that comprehensive national security increasingly depends upon economic resilience and diversified international partnerships alongside traditional military capabilities.

Strategic Significance of Multi-Alignment. Multi-alignment allows India to: -

- Deepen strategic cooperation with the United States through defence technology and intelligence sharing;
- Preserve long-standing defence relations with Russia;
- Expand strategic cooperation with France, Japan, Australia, and ASEAN;
- Strengthen partnerships with Gulf countries and Europe;
- Simultaneously maintain selective engagement with China despite strategic rivalry.

Consequently, India has diversified its strategic options without becoming dependent upon any single great power. This strategy reflects pragmatic balancing rather than alliance politics.

Indo-Pacific Orientation and the Recalibration of India's Strategic Culture

The adoption of the Indo-Pacific framework constitutes one of the most significant manifestations of India's evolving strategic culture during the Modi administration. While India's strategic outlook traditionally focused upon continental security concerns arising from Pakistan and China, the Indo-Pacific has expanded the country's strategic horizon to encompass maritime security, economic connectivity, technological cooperation, regional governance, and great-power competition across a much wider geographical space. Rather than replacing India's traditional security priorities, the Indo-Pacific framework has broadened the strategic environment within which India seeks to secure its national interests. Multi-Alignment. From the perspective of strategic culture, India's Indo-Pacific orientation reflects continuity as well as transformation. The long-standing commitment to strategic autonomy remains intact; however, the geographical scope, diplomatic instruments, and military capabilities through which India pursues this objective have undergone substantial recalibration. This transformation illustrates Johnston's (1995) argument that enduring strategic preferences can generate new policy responses when confronted by changing strategic environments, while simultaneously supporting Katzenstein's (1996) proposition that evolving domestic identities and institutional norms shape national security behaviour.

Historically, Indian strategic planning concentrated predominantly upon continental threats. The unresolved Kashmir dispute repeated military confrontations with Pakistan, the 1962 Sino-Indian War, and continuing border disputes with China reinforced a land-centric security orientation. Consequently, maritime security traditionally occupied a secondary position within Indian defence planning despite the country's extensive coastline and central

geographical location in the Indian Ocean. During the twenty-first century, however, several geopolitical developments fundamentally altered India's strategic calculations. China's rapid naval modernization, expanding presence in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR), increasing overseas port investments under the Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), development of dual-use infrastructure, and growing maritime influence generated new security concerns within New Delhi. Simultaneously, globalization, dependence upon maritime trade, energy imports, digital connectivity, and supply-chain resilience elevated the strategic significance of the Indian Ocean. These developments collectively encouraged India to broaden its strategic outlook beyond traditional continental security considerations.

The Indo-Pacific concept provided India with an appropriate geopolitical framework for addressing these emerging challenges. Rather than defining security narrowly in military terms, India's Indo-Pacific vision integrates maritime security, economic cooperation, technological innovation, infrastructure development, regional connectivity, disaster relief, environmental sustainability, and diplomatic engagement within a comprehensive strategic architecture. This multidimensional understanding reflects the increasing complexity of contemporary security challenges and demonstrates the evolution of India's strategic thinking beyond traditional military paradigms.

India's Vision of the Indo-Pacific. India officially articulates the Indo-Pacific as an inclusive, open, rules-based, and multipolar regional order founded upon respect for sovereignty, freedom of navigation, peaceful resolution of disputes, adherence to international law, and ASEAN centrality. Indian policymakers consistently reject interpretations portraying the Indo-Pacific as an exclusive military coalition directed against China. Instead, New Delhi emphasizes that the framework seeks to promote regional stability through cooperation, connectivity, sustainable development, and collective security. Nevertheless, the practical implementation of India's Indo-Pacific strategy demonstrates significant strategic balancing. Although India avoids formal alliance commitments, it has steadily expanded defence cooperation with countries sharing similar concerns regarding maritime security and regional stability. Consequently, India's Indo-Pacific policy simultaneously projects inclusivity while enhancing its capacity to balance China's expanding strategic influence.

This duality reflects the essence of India's strategic culture. Rather than adopting rigid ideological positions, Indian policymakers generally prefer flexible arrangements that preserve diplomatic manoeuvrability while advancing national interests. Such behaviour remains consistent with the enduring principles of strategic autonomy even as the operational expression of those principles continues to evolve.

Maritime Reorientation. Perhaps the most visible consequence of India's Indo-Pacific strategy has been the growing importance of maritime power within national security planning. Traditionally, Indian military strategy assigned greater priority to land forces because of persistent continental disputes. Under the Modi government, however, naval modernization has become a central component of India's broader strategic transformation. The Indian Navy has substantially expanded its operational reach through the acquisition of

advanced aircraft carriers, nuclear-powered submarines, maritime patrol aircraft, destroyers, frigates, unmanned surveillance systems, and integrated maritime intelligence capabilities. These investments seek not only to defend India's coastline but also to establish sustained operational presence throughout the wider Indian Ocean Region. Emphasis has been placed upon protecting Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs) that carry the majority of India's international trade and imported energy supplies. Maritime security is therefore increasingly viewed as an essential prerequisite for sustained economic growth, energy security, technological development, and geopolitical influence. This broader conception of national security illustrates the expansion of India's strategic culture from predominantly territorial defence towards comprehensive maritime security.

Strategic Importance of the Andaman and Nicobar Islands. The growing strategic significance of the Andaman and Nicobar Command represents another important dimension of India's Indo-Pacific orientation. Located near the Strait of Malacca, these islands provide India with considerable strategic advantages for monitoring one of the world's busiest maritime chokepoints. Successive modernization initiatives have strengthened surveillance infrastructure, airfields, naval facilities, logistics networks, and operational capabilities across the island chain. These developments enhance India's ability to monitor regional maritime activities, support naval deployments, improve maritime domain awareness, and cooperate more effectively with regional partners. From a strategic culture perspective, investment in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands illustrates India's transition from reactive territorial defence towards proactive regional engagement. Rather than merely responding to immediate security threats, India increasingly seeks to shape the broader strategic environment throughout the Indo-Pacific.

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad). India's participation in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad) has become one of the defining features of its Indo-Pacific strategy. Comprising India, the United States, Japan, and Australia, the Quad has evolved from an informal consultative mechanism into an increasingly institutionalized platform for cooperation in maritime security, disaster relief, cybersecurity, critical technologies, resilient supply chains, vaccine diplomacy, infrastructure development, and emerging technologies. Importantly, India continues to resist transforming the Quad into a formal military alliance. Indian policymakers consistently emphasize that the Quad remains a flexible partnership rather than a collective defence organization comparable to NATO. This distinction is significant because it reflects India's continuing preference for strategic autonomy and its reluctance to accept binding alliance obligations. At the same time, regular naval exercises, expanding interoperability, intelligence exchanges, technological cooperation, and coordinated diplomatic initiatives substantially strengthen India's strategic position. Thus, the Quad exemplifies India's broader strategy of enhancing security cooperation while preserving independent decision-making.

Defence Agreements and Strategic Partnerships. India's Indo-Pacific strategy has also been reinforced through an expanding network of bilateral defence agreements. Foundational arrangements with the United States, including LEMOA, COMCASA, and BECA, have enhanced logistical cooperation, secure communications, geospatial intelligence

sharing, and operational interoperability. Similar defence arrangements with France, Australia, Japan, Singapore, Indonesia, and other regional partners have further strengthened India's maritime capabilities. These agreements collectively increase India's ability to conduct joint exercises, humanitarian assistance operations, anti-piracy missions, maritime surveillance, and coordinated responses to regional crises. Importantly, however, they stop short of imposing formal alliance commitments. This careful balance between expanded cooperation and preserved autonomy illustrates the operational logic of India's evolving strategic culture.

Technology, Supply Chains, and Economic Security. India's Indo-Pacific strategy extends well beyond traditional defence cooperation. Increasingly, technological innovation, digital infrastructure, semiconductor production, artificial intelligence, cyber security, quantum computing, clean energy technologies, and resilient global supply chains are viewed as critical components of national security. The COVID-19 pandemic exposed vulnerabilities within global production networks and accelerated international efforts to diversify supply chains. India has sought to position itself as a reliable manufacturing hub through initiatives such as Make in India, Atmanirbhar Bharat, and expanded cooperation with technologically advanced economies. These initiatives seek simultaneously to reduce strategic dependence, strengthen industrial capacity, attract foreign investment, and enhance long-term economic resilience. Consequently, India's Indo-Pacific strategy increasingly integrates economic security with traditional military planning. Strategic competition is no longer confined to conventional military power but encompasses technological leadership, industrial capacity, digital governance, critical minerals, resilient infrastructure, and innovation ecosystems.

India's Major Power Aspirations. The Indo-Pacific also serves India's broader aspiration to emerge as a leading global power. Indian policymakers increasingly portray the country not merely as a South Asian actor but as a major stakeholder in shaping the future regional and international order. Active participation in the G20, Quad, BRICS, SCO, International Solar Alliance, and numerous multilateral forums reflect India's ambition to influence global governance across economic, technological, environmental, and security domains. This aspiration has become closely linked with the evolution of India's strategic culture. Whereas earlier governments often emphasized preserving autonomy through strategic restraint, contemporary policy increasingly combines autonomy with proactive leadership. India now seeks not simply to avoid external constraints but to shape regional institutions, establish international norms, influence technological governance, and contribute to the management of global challenges. This transition from defensive autonomy to proactive strategic engagement represents one of the defining characteristics of India's contemporary strategic culture.

Implications for South Asian Strategic Stability. India's Indo-Pacific orientation has important consequences for South Asia. Although the framework emphasizes maritime cooperation and regional connectivity, it also contributes indirectly to changes in the regional military balance. Expanded access to advanced defence technologies, intelligence-sharing arrangements, joint military exercises, maritime surveillance capabilities, and defence-

industrial cooperation enhances India's overall strategic capabilities, many of which remain relevant to contingencies within South Asia. Moreover, increasing integration between India's continental and maritime strategies complicates the regional security environment. Rather than viewing land and maritime theatres separately, Indian strategic planning increasingly adopts a multidomain perspective that combines conventional military capabilities with cyber operations, space assets, artificial intelligence, electronic warfare, long-range precision strike systems, and information operations. This integrated approach reflects broader global trends in military modernization and substantially expands India's strategic options during periods of crisis.

From Pakistan's perspective, these developments necessitate a corresponding expansion in strategic assessment. Traditional emphasis upon land warfare and nuclear deterrence alone may no longer provide a sufficiently comprehensive understanding of regional security dynamics. Maritime competition, technological innovation, economic resilience, cyber capabilities, and diplomatic engagement are becoming increasingly important determinants of strategic stability in South Asia. Overall, India's Indo-Pacific orientation illustrates the continuing evolution of its strategic culture. It preserves the enduring principle of strategic autonomy while expanding the geographical scope, institutional engagement, technological capabilities, and diplomatic activism through which India pursues its national interests. Rather than representing a fundamental break with historical traditions, the Indo-Pacific constitutes a contemporary expression of India's broader strategic objective of maximizing national influence, preserving sovereign decision-making, and strengthening its position within an increasingly competitive international order. This transformation, in turn, has generated significant strategic implications for Pakistan, which are examined in the following section.

Strategic Implications for Pakistan

India's evolving strategic culture has significant implications for Pakistan's security environment. The transformation from traditional strategic autonomy towards multi-alignment, coupled with an expanding Indo-Pacific orientation, has reshaped the regional strategic balance in ways that extend beyond conventional military competition. The cumulative effects of India's diplomatic diversification, military modernization, technological advancement, maritime expansion, and growing international partnerships require Pakistan to reassess its national security strategy within a broader and increasingly multidimensional strategic environment.

Changing Conventional Military Balance. One of the most immediate consequences of India's strategic transformation is the continued expansion of the conventional military asymmetry between India and Pakistan. Defence cooperation with technologically advanced partners, including the United States, France, Israel, and several European countries, has facilitated access to sophisticated military technologies, intelligence-sharing mechanisms, precision-guided weapon systems, surveillance capabilities, unmanned platforms, missile defence technologies, and advanced command-and-control systems. These developments enhance India's ability to conduct integrated military operations across multiple

domains while improving its conventional deterrence posture. Simultaneously, India's emphasis on indigenous defence production through initiatives such as *Atmanirbhar Bharat* seeks to reduce dependence on foreign suppliers while strengthening domestic military-industrial capabilities. Expansion of indigenous missile production, naval construction, aerospace technologies, cyber capabilities, and defence innovation reflects a long-term strategy aimed at sustaining military modernization. If these trends continue, Pakistan may increasingly confront a widening technological and industrial gap that extends beyond traditional measures of military strength.

Implications for Nuclear Deterrence and Strategic Stability. India's evolving strategic culture also carries important implications for nuclear deterrence and crisis stability in South Asia. Historically, mutual nuclear deterrence contributed to reducing the likelihood of full-scale conventional war following the nuclear tests of 1998. However, developments during the Modi era indicate greater willingness to employ calibrated conventional military force below the perceived nuclear threshold, particularly following the Uri attack in 2016 and the Pulwama-Balakot crisis in 2019. These developments have generated renewed scholarly debate regarding the stability-instability paradox. Improved intelligence capabilities, precision-strike systems, integrated surveillance, cyber operations, and enhanced conventional forces may increase confidence in conducting limited military operations while assuming that escalation can remain controlled. Such assumptions, however, introduce additional uncertainty into crisis management between two nuclear-armed states.

From Pakistan's perspective, these developments complicate deterrence planning. Strategic stability increasingly depends not only upon nuclear capability but also upon conventional force readiness, crisis communication mechanisms, political signalling, escalation management, and mutual understanding of red lines. Misperception, rather than deliberate aggression, may therefore become an increasingly significant source of strategic risk. Katzenstein's (1996) emphasis upon norms and institutional behaviour further suggests that evolving political narratives and domestic expectations may influence crisis decision-making alongside military capabilities. Nationalist political discourse heightened public expectations, and assertive strategic narratives may reduce opportunities for diplomatic de-escalation during future crises.

Maritime Security and the Indian Ocean. Perhaps the most significant long-term implication of India's Indo-Pacific strategy concerns the growing importance of maritime security. Traditionally, strategic competition between India and Pakistan centred primarily upon land borders and air power. Contemporary strategic competition increasingly extends into the Arabian Sea and the wider Indian Ocean Region. India's expanding naval modernization, maritime surveillance capabilities, aircraft carrier programme, submarine fleet, long-range maritime patrol aircraft, and enhanced partnerships with Indo-Pacific powers substantially strengthen its maritime presence. Simultaneously, greater cooperation with countries such as France, Australia, Japan, Singapore, and the United States enhances interoperability and expands India's operational reach throughout the Indian Ocean.

For Pakistan, maritime security has acquired unprecedented strategic importance. The operational security of **Gwadar Port**, protection of maritime trade routes, safeguarding energy imports, and ensuring the security of the maritime component of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) increasingly constitute essential elements of national security. Consequently, maritime competition can no longer be regarded as peripheral to Pakistan's strategic planning but must instead become an integral component of comprehensive national defence. Multi-Alignment. The Indian Ocean is also emerging as a principal arena of strategic competition among major powers. India's expanding role within this maritime environment requires Pakistan to strengthen naval modernization, maritime domain awareness, coastal surveillance, anti-access capabilities, and regional maritime diplomacy.

Diplomatic Challenges. India's policy of multi-alignment has significantly expanded its diplomatic influence. Simultaneous engagement with the United States, Russia, France, Japan, Australia, ASEAN, the Gulf states, Africa, and Europe have strengthened India's international profile while reducing the diplomatic costs traditionally associated with strategic alignment. India's successful presidency of the G20, active participation in BRICS, the Quad, SCO, and numerous international institutions demonstrates increasing diplomatic confidence. Moreover, India's expanding economic importance has encouraged many countries to deepen strategic engagement despite continuing regional disputes.

For Pakistan, this evolving diplomatic environment presents important challenges. International attention has increasingly shifted towards India's economic growth, technological development, investment opportunities, and expanding geopolitical influence. Consequently, Pakistan faces a more competitive diplomatic environment in advancing its own regional and international priorities. Nevertheless, these developments also present opportunities. The increasingly multipolar international system creates space for Pakistan to diversify diplomatic engagement with China, Türkiye, the Gulf states, Central Asia, ASEAN, Africa, and European partners. Strategic competition among major powers provides middle powers with greater flexibility in pursuing diversified foreign policies based upon national interests.

Technological Competition. Technological competition has emerged as one of the defining characteristics of contemporary strategic rivalry. Artificial intelligence, cyber capabilities, quantum technologies, space systems, autonomous platforms, satellite communications, semiconductor production, digital infrastructure, and advanced manufacturing increasingly influence military effectiveness alongside traditional force structures. India's strategic partnerships have significantly accelerated technological modernization through collaborative research, defence-industrial cooperation, technology transfer, innovation partnerships, and private-sector investment. Indigenous initiatives such as Digital India, Make in India, and Atmanirbhar Bharat further reinforce long-term technological development.

For Pakistan, narrowing the technological gap constitutes a strategic imperative. Sustainable national security increasingly depends upon investment in higher education, scientific research, digital infrastructure, defence innovation, artificial intelligence,

cybersecurity, and indigenous technological capability. Long-term strategic competition will likely be determined as much by technological competitiveness as by conventional military strength.

Economic Security and Strategic Competition. An important feature of India's evolving strategic culture is the increasing integration of economic policy with national security strategy. Economic growth, industrial capacity, infrastructure development, resilient supply chains, digital transformation, energy security, and technological innovation are increasingly viewed as essential foundations of strategic influence. India's expanding global economic partnerships strengthen access to investment, advanced technologies, manufacturing networks, and international markets. These developments reinforce broader strategic objectives by providing the economic resources necessary to sustain military modernization and diplomatic activism. Pakistan's security planning must therefore recognize that economic resilience has become an integral component of national power. Fiscal stability, industrial development, export competitiveness, technological innovation, and sustainable infrastructure increasingly influence long-term strategic capability. Military preparedness alone cannot compensate for persistent economic vulnerabilities.

Information and Cognitive Competition. Contemporary strategic competition increasingly extends into the information domain. Strategic communication, digital diplomacy, media influence, cyber information operations, public diplomacy, and narrative competition shape international perceptions and influence foreign policy outcomes. India has invested significantly in digital diplomacy, international media engagement, diaspora mobilization, and public diplomacy initiatives that reinforce its image as an emerging global power. These instruments complement traditional diplomatic and military capabilities while strengthening India's international influence. Pakistan likewise requires comprehensive strategic communication capabilities that effectively present its perspectives within international forums. Strengthening academic diplomacy, think-tank cooperation, media engagement, and evidence-based policy research can contribute to a more balanced international understanding of South Asian security issues.

Policy Options/Recommendations for Pakistan

India's evolving strategic culture presents Pakistan with a multidimensional strategic challenge that cannot be addressed through conventional military responses alone. The convergence of India's multi-alignment strategy, Indo-Pacific orientation, military modernization, technological advancement, and expanding diplomatic influence requires Pakistan to adopt a comprehensive national security approach integrating defence preparedness, economic resilience, diplomatic diversification, technological innovation, and institutional coordination. Accordingly, Pakistan's policy response should seek not only to preserve strategic stability but also to enhance its own capacity to compete effectively within an increasingly complex regional and international security environment. Multi-Alignment.

Preserve Credible Minimum Deterrence while Enhancing Conventional Capabilities. Pakistan's first strategic priority should remain the preservation of credible

minimum nuclear deterrence. Since overt nuclearization in 1998, nuclear deterrence has significantly reduced the probability of large-scale conventional war between India and Pakistan. Nevertheless, India's increasing emphasis on precision conventional capabilities, integrated battle groups, intelligence-driven operations, and limited military responses necessitates corresponding improvements in Pakistan's conventional deterrence posture. Rather than engaging in an economically unsustainable arms race, Pakistan should prioritize qualitative modernization through precision-guided munitions, integrated intelligence systems, electronic warfare, cyber defence, unmanned aerial systems, air defence modernization, and enhanced command-and-control capabilities. Such investments would strengthen deterrence while remaining consistent with Pakistan's long-standing doctrine of credible minimum deterrence.

Develop a Comprehensive Maritime Strategy. India's Indo-Pacific orientation has substantially increased the strategic importance of maritime security. Consequently, Pakistan should elevate maritime strategy from a supporting component of national defence to a central pillar of its overall national security policy. Priority should be given to strengthening the operational capabilities of the Pakistan Navy through modernization of surface combatants, submarines, maritime patrol aircraft, coastal surveillance systems, unmanned maritime platforms, anti-access and area-denial (A2/AD) capabilities, and integrated maritime domain awareness. Enhanced surveillance across the Arabian Sea would improve the protection of maritime trade routes, offshore infrastructure, and strategic economic assets.

Attention should be directed towards safeguarding Gwadar Port, the maritime component of the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC), and Pakistan's Exclusive Economic Zone (EEZ). Given the increasing significance of sea-based trade and energy transportation, maritime security has become inseparable from national economic security. Pakistan should also expand cooperation with regional maritime organizations to strengthen search and rescue operations, anti-piracy initiatives, disaster response, environmental protection, and maritime confidence-building measures. Such cooperation would reinforce Pakistan's image as a responsible stakeholder in regional maritime governance.

Diversify Strategic Partnerships. India's policy of multi-alignment demonstrates the advantages of diversified diplomacy within an increasingly multipolar international system. While Pakistan's strategic partnership with China remains indispensable, excessive dependence upon any single external partner may limit diplomatic flexibility. Pakistan should therefore broaden engagement with Türkiye, Saudi Arabia, the United Arab Emirates, Qatar, Central Asian Republics, ASEAN member states, the European Union, the United Kingdom, and African partners. Such diversification would expand economic opportunities, technological cooperation, defence collaboration, investment, and diplomatic influence. Simultaneously, Pakistan should continue constructive engagement with the United States wherever mutual interests converge, particularly in trade, higher education, climate resilience, counterterrorism, public health, technology, and regional stability. A diversified foreign policy would strengthen Pakistan's strategic autonomy while reducing vulnerability to shifts in great-power competition.

Accelerate Indigenous Defence and Technological Modernization. Technological innovation has become a defining feature of contemporary strategic competition. Military effectiveness increasingly depends upon cyber capabilities, artificial intelligence, quantum computing, space-based systems, electronic warfare, autonomous platforms, advanced manufacturing, and digital infrastructure rather than solely upon conventional force structures. Pakistan should therefore significantly expand investment in defence research and development, indigenous production of advanced military technologies, cybersecurity, artificial intelligence applications, satellite technologies, secure communications, and defence-industrial innovation.

Enhance Economic Resilience as a Strategic Asset. One of the most important lessons arising from India's strategic transformation is the close relationship between economic strength and national security. Sustainable military modernization, technological innovation, diplomatic influence, and strategic autonomy ultimately depend upon a robust and resilient national economy. Pakistan should therefore treat economic development as an essential component of comprehensive national security rather than merely an economic objective. Fiscal discipline, export diversification, industrial modernization, digital transformation, energy security, infrastructure development, and investment in human capital collectively strengthen the foundations of long-term strategic capability. Special emphasis should be placed upon attracting foreign direct investment, expanding regional trade connectivity, improving industrial competitiveness, and strengthening domestic manufacturing capacity. Economic resilience would increase Pakistan's ability to sustain defence modernization while simultaneously enhancing international credibility and diplomatic influence.

Strengthen National Security Institutions. Contemporary security challenges increasingly transcend traditional institutional boundaries. Military organizations alone cannot effectively address challenges arising from cyber threats, technological competition, economic coercion, climate change, pandemics, supply-chain disruptions, and information warfare. Pakistan should therefore strengthen institutional coordination among civilian ministries, defence organizations, intelligence agencies, economic institutions, diplomatic services, academic research centres, and technological organizations. The National Security Committee should continue functioning as the principal forum for integrating political, military, diplomatic, economic, and technological dimensions of national security.

Expand Strategic Communication and Public Diplomacy. Competition among states increasingly involves the ability to shape international narratives and public perceptions. India's expanding global influence has been reinforced through effective public diplomacy, international media engagement, cultural diplomacy, academic exchanges, and diaspora outreach. Pakistan should correspondingly strengthen strategic communication capabilities by expanding international broadcasting, digital diplomacy, academic partnerships, think-tank cooperation, and evidence-based policy research. Greater participation within international academic forums, policy dialogues, and multilateral institutions would enhance Pakistan's ability to articulate its strategic perspectives before global audiences. Public diplomacy should

emphasize Pakistan's contributions to regional stability, counterterrorism, peacekeeping, humanitarian assistance, climate resilience, and sustainable development, thereby broadening international understanding beyond traditional security narratives.

Adopt a Balanced Indo-Pacific Approach. Although Pakistan is not a member of the Quad or other major Indo-Pacific security arrangements, developments within the Indo-Pacific increasingly influence its economic and strategic interests. Consequently, Pakistan should formulate a clearly articulated Indo-Pacific policy that safeguards national interests without becoming directly involved in great-power confrontation. Such a policy should prioritize freedom of navigation, maritime commerce, regional connectivity, international law, blue economy initiatives, environmental sustainability, and cooperative maritime security. Simultaneously, Pakistan should avoid policies that unnecessarily intensify regional polarization or undermine strategic flexibility. An independent Indo-Pacific policy would complement Pakistan's broader foreign policy objectives while preserving room for constructive engagement with multiple regional stakeholders.

Invest in Human Capital and Strategic Research. Long-term strategic competition increasingly depends upon intellectual resources alongside military capabilities. Pakistan should therefore expand investment in higher education, strategic studies, scientific research, policy analysis, and innovation. Universities should strengthen programmes relating to international relations, defence studies, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, maritime security, space policy, economics, and emerging technologies. Greater collaboration among universities, government institutions, and strategic think tanks would improve evidence-based policymaking while supporting long-term national planning. Additionally, Pakistan should encourage interdisciplinary research integrating political science, economics, technology, military studies, environmental security, and international law to better understand the evolving nature of twenty-first-century strategic competition.

Promote Regional Stability through Constructive Diplomacy. Despite persistent strategic rivalry, durable security in South Asia ultimately depends upon reducing the risks of unintended escalation and promoting mechanisms for crisis management. Pakistan should therefore continue supporting dialogue on nuclear risk reduction, military confidence-building measures, humanitarian cooperation, counterterrorism, environmental security, and regional economic connectivity wherever political conditions permit. Constructive engagement should not be interpreted as strategic accommodation. Rather, sustained diplomatic interaction complements credible deterrence by reducing uncertainty, improving communication, and creating opportunities for managing crises before they escalate into military confrontation.

Overall, Policy Assessment. India's evolving strategic culture demonstrates that contemporary national power increasingly derives from the interaction of military capability, economic resilience, technological innovation, diplomatic influence, institutional effectiveness, and strategic adaptability. Pakistan's response should therefore adopt an equally comprehensive perspective. An exclusive focus on military balancing would overlook the broader transformation taking place within regional strategic competition. Accordingly, Pakistan's long-term national security strategy should integrate credible deterrence with

maritime modernization, technological advancement, economic development, diversified diplomacy, institutional coordination, and strategic communication. Such a multidimensional approach would not only strengthen Pakistan's capacity to respond to India's evolving strategic culture but also contribute to preserving strategic stability in South Asia while enhancing Pakistan's position within an increasingly complex international order.

Conclusion

India's transition from traditional strategic autonomy to contemporary multi-alignment represents one of the most significant transformations in its strategic culture since the end of the Cold War. Rather than abandoning the foundational principles that historically guided its foreign and security policy, India has recalibrated their operational expression in response to profound changes in the regional and international strategic environment. The emergence of an increasingly multipolar international system, China's growing economic and military influence, rapid technological change, maritime competition in the Indian Ocean, and India's aspiration for major-power status have collectively contributed to this strategic transformation. As this study has demonstrated, India's evolving strategic behaviour reflects continuity in strategic objectives alongside considerable innovation in policy instruments and diplomatic practice. Multi-Alignment. The analysis demonstrates that multi-alignment should not be interpreted as a departure from strategic autonomy but rather as its contemporary operational manifestation. India's simultaneous engagement with the United States, Russia, France, Japan, Australia, ASEAN, the Gulf states, Europe, BRICS, and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation reflects a deliberate strategy of maximizing diplomatic flexibility while avoiding exclusive strategic dependence upon any single major power. This diversified foreign policy enables India to pursue defence modernization, technological cooperation, economic partnerships, maritime security, and diplomatic influence without compromising its independent decision-making. Consequently, multi-alignment represents an adaptive strategy designed to enhance India's room for strategic manoeuvre within an increasingly competitive international order.

Similarly, the Indo-Pacific has become an essential component of India's evolving strategic outlook. Historically, Indian security policy concentrated primarily upon continental threats involving Pakistan and China. Under the Modi administration, however, maritime security has assumed unprecedented strategic importance. Expansion of naval capabilities, greater emphasis upon the Indian Ocean Region, increasing participation in the Quad, enhanced defence cooperation with Indo-Pacific partners, and stronger maritime diplomacy collectively illustrate India's broader geopolitical reorientation. This transformation reflects the growing recognition that national security increasingly depends upon maritime trade, secure sea lines of communication, technological cooperation, resilient supply chains, and regional connectivity alongside traditional territorial defence.

For Pakistan, these developments generate significant strategic consequences extending well beyond conventional military competition. India's evolving strategic culture influences regional deterrence dynamics, maritime security, technological competition,

diplomatic alignments, economic connectivity, and crisis stability. Enhanced access to advanced military technologies, expanding defence-industrial cooperation, stronger maritime capabilities, improved intelligence-sharing arrangements, and growing international diplomatic influence collectively strengthen India's overall strategic position. Consequently, Pakistan confronts an increasingly complex security environment in which military preparedness alone is insufficient to address emerging strategic challenges.

In conclusion, India's strategic culture is undergoing significant recalibration rather than fundamental transformation. Multi-alignment and the Indo-Pacific have expanded India's strategic horizons, strengthened its international partnerships, enhanced military and technological capabilities, and reinforced its aspiration for major-power status, while preserving the enduring principle of strategic autonomy. For Pakistan, responding effectively to these developments requires a comprehensive national strategy integrating credible deterrence, diplomatic diversification, technological modernization, maritime capability, economic resilience, and institutional adaptability. Such a multidimensional approach offers the most sustainable basis for preserving strategic stability and promoting peace in an increasingly complex South Asian security environment.

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