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Print ISSN: [3006-2497](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20067856) Online ISSN: [3006-2500](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20067856)Platform & Workflow by: [Open Journal Systems](https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20067856)<https://doi.org/10.5281/zenodo.20067856>**Kautilya's Alliance Policy: An Analysis of Indian Strategic Alliance Diplomacy in the 21st Century****Muhammad Wajeesh Shahrukh**

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[masood.rehman@iiui.edu.pk](mailto:masood.rehman@iiui.edu.pk)**Abstract**

*This article examines the enduring relevance of Kautilya's classical theory of alliance formation to India's contemporary diplomatic and strategic practice. Drawing on the Arthashastra's two foundational frameworks: the Mandala theory of concentric state relations and the Sadgunya Siddhanta, this study argues that Kautilyan statecraft offers a coherent analytical lens through which India's 21st-century alliance behaviour can be interpreted. Rooted in a realist conception of international anarchy, Kautilya posited alliances as instrumental, conditional, and subject to revision in accordance with shifting power configurations; a logic that prefigures modern structural realism while retaining its own distinctive pragmatic character. This article applies this framework to India's evolving network of strategic partnerships, encompassing its relationships with Russia, the United States, Israel, European powers, the QUAD, and ASEAN states. Across these cases, a consistent pattern emerges of flexible, interest-driven coalition-building oriented towards military modernisation, technological self-reliance, and countering Chinese assertion in the Indo-Pacific - all consonant with Kautilyan prescriptions of Vijigishu statecraft and enemy encirclement. The article contributes to scholarship recovering non-Western classical traditions as substantive theoretical resources for international relations, arguing that the continuities between ancient Indian strategic thought and contemporary Indian grand strategy are neither incidental nor merely rhetorical.*

**Keywords:** Arthashastra; Mandala Theory; Sadgunya Siddhanta or Six-Fold Policy; Alliances; International Relations; Realism; Statecraft; Diplomacy.

**1. Introduction**

Alliances, within the complex and competitive realm of global politics, have historically served as pivotal instruments for ensuring a nation's survival, influence, and security. The enduring principles of power politics are evident in the formation of alliances, from ancient empires to contemporary nation-states, where cooperation arises primarily from converging interests rather than shared ideals. Kautilya's Arthashastra offers the earliest and most refined conceptualization of statecraft as *Samsrya* (alliances), articulated through the *Mandala* and *Sadgunya Siddhanta* (Six-Fold Policy), framing alliances as dynamic and pragmatic strategies that enable states to bolster security amidst an anarchic global environment. Alliances are acknowledged for their capacity to alter the balance of power and influence state behaviour at the international level. Generally, alliances are defined as formal or informal agreements centred on defence, security, or economic cooperation among two or more states, and may take the form of strategic

partnerships, treaties, or coalitions of convenience. Stephen M. Walt (1987) characterizes an alliance as “*a formal or informal arrangement for security cooperation between two or more states,*” whereas G. H. Snyder (1997) emphasizes that “*alliances are essential promise of mutual support and condition,*” highlighting their conditional and contractual characteristics while distinguishing them from other forms of interstate cooperation. The advent of unipolarity in the post-Cold War era challenged the relevance of Cold War-era alliances; however, various initiatives to establish new security arrangements emerged. The rise of traditional and non-traditional security challenges further spurred the development of innovative alliances. Consequently, G. John Ikenberry (2001) asserts that the liberal international order established in the post-Cold War era underscores alliances as a dependable source of state security, resilient even amid emerging challenges in great-power competition.

Kautilya offers a fundamentally realist strategic worldview, emphasizing the flexibility of states to navigate between allies and adversaries within the anarchic international system. His pragmatic perspective on alliance formation suggests that such arrangements are neither sacred nor permanent but are instead contingent measures undertaken to mitigate threats and enhance power. He discusses the Samsrya policy in Sadgunya Siddhanta as a strategic approach to achieving political stability and maximizing power through diplomatic means, particularly when the state must choose between neutrality and conflict to neutralize threats, secure resources, and strengthen its influence without direct confrontation. Conversely, his Mandala Theory postulates that distant states may serve as potential allies, whereas neighbouring states are inherently seen as natural enemies. This theory remains highly relevant in the contemporary world, given the multifaceted security challenges, regional rivalries, and the resurgence of great-power competition that are currently shaping state interactions. India's strategic trajectory reflects this relevance, as it relies on strategic alliances for diplomatic leverage, military modernization, economic resilience, and technological advancements – opting for issue-based, flexible alliances rather than rigid coalitions. In the 21st century, India has expanded its alliances across multiple domains and regions through strategic partnerships, bilateral defence agreements, and multilateral forums, thereby enhancing its geopolitical influence. This approach affirms the enduring utility of alliances as a traditional policy of influence and power, illustrating a continuum between ancient strategic thought and contemporary pragmatism.

## **2. Significance of Alliances in IR**

In the domain of international relations, alliances occupy a central role, serving as a vital instrument for pursuing states' strategic objectives and managing the balance of power and insecurity within an anarchic system lacking a preeminent authority. They facilitate deterrence, collective defence, and the maximization of power. Classical realism regards alliances as responses to threats aimed at maintaining the balance of power, whereas liberalism perceives their significance in fostering institutional stability and cooperation. The importance of alliances in global politics cannot be overstated, as they play a critical role in statecraft and provide essential opportunities necessary for the survival of states. Primarily, alliances enhance the power and security of their member states through the collective utilization of military capabilities, thereby aiding in defence against adversaries. NATO exemplifies an alliance that has adapted to the contemporary global realities by expanding its membership to address emerging challenges. Alliances offer a counterbalance to power projection and tend to prevent the hegemony of any single state (Waltz, 1979). Additionally, alliances contribute to the design of the international order, as multilateral alliances are not solely formed to coordinate military actions but also to establish new norms for intelligence sharing, shared values, and interoperability mechanisms. Ikenberry emphasizes that alliances embedded within multilateral

institutions foster a flexible and enduring order and encourage adherence to rules, thereby constraining unilateral actions (Ikenberry, 2001). The institutional dimension of alliances is particularly significant in the contemporary era, given the emergence of issues such as terrorism, nuclear proliferation, and cyber threats, which necessitate collective responses, as no single state can act independently. Moreover, alliances play a crucial role in managing great-power competition, acting as balancers and ultimately preventing conflict. The re-emergence of rivalries among the United States, China, and Russia has once again become a focal point in international discourse. The QUAD and AUKUS alliances exemplify the growing importance of partnerships aimed at countering China's regional dominance. According to Mearsheimer, in an anarchic international system, states can only rely on themselves for survival, underscoring the significance of alliances in contemporary global politics (Mearsheimer, 2001).

### 3. Alliances

Chanakya Kautilya is regarded as a prominent political realist who has argued that states inherently seek to maximize their power and to pursue their national interests. This perspective underscores the key characteristic of realism: the absence of morality in global politics. Kautilya stated, *"An ally looks to the securing of his own interests in the event of simultaneity of calamities and in the event of the growth of the enemy's power"* – Arthashastra 8.1.59 (Boesche, 2003, p. 81). Furthermore, he also proposed, *"When a king is so fortunate as to have a powerful friend in front and a powerful ally (ákranda) in the rear, both with brave and loyal subjects, while the reverse is the case with the enemies both in front and in the rear, and when he finds it possible for his friend to hold his frontal enemy in check, and for his rear-ally to keep his rear-enemy (párshnigráha) at bay, then he may march after proclaiming war against his frontal enemy"* – Arthashastra 7.4.12 (Shamasastri, 2013, p. 383).

According to the Kautilyan school of thought, if any kingdom decides to wage war or maintain peace, the sole reason behind this can be strategic advantages associated with it. Furthermore, he suggests that states do not enter into alliances out of goodwill or ethical considerations; rather, they act on the basis of mutual benefits that enhance their power. He describes that states only consider those as allies who possess the capacity to contribute to and advance their shared interests, exemplified by the statement, *"When one has an army, one's ally remains friendly, or (even) the enemy becomes friendly"* – Arthashastra 8.1.56 (Boesche, 2003, p. 81). The above statement underscores Kautilya's recognition that international relations are inherently volatile, as circumstances can swiftly transform peace into conflict and longstanding allies into adversaries, given that these entities act according to their strategic calculations. Burton Stein (1988), a notable historian, observes that the Kautilyan foreign policy framework reflects the realities faced by smaller states, which are often embroiled in conflicts rather than larger empires such as the Mauryan dynasty. Kautilya emphasized that achieving indefinite stability is challenging for any empire, except a peaceful one, noting that smaller states have historically been more susceptible to conflict. This understanding underscores the relevance of Kautilya's strategic principles for comprehending the dynamic, evolving nature of global power politics.

#### 3.1 Kautilya's Policy of Alliance

One of the most longstanding and credible diplomatic measures within the realist school of thought is the *"Mandala Theory,"* which posits that a state's immediate neighbours are inherently its enemies. Kautilya states that *"enemy of my enemy is my friend"* (Boesche, 2003, p. 4). He has depicted the states in the form of a circular model, representing a wheel in which the central state is the hub, and all other states are connected to the spokes; however, they are not connected to each other – Arthashastra 6.2.39 (Boesche,

2003, p. 82). According to Kautilya's Mandala Theory, states occupying odd-numbered positions are allies (namely, the 1st: itself; 3rd, and 5th), while those at even-numbered positions are enemies (2nd, 4th, 6th, and so forth). The theory asserts that "one with proximate territory is the natural enemy" (Arthashastra 6.2.19), and "with respect to the middle king, the third and fifth constituents are friendly elements. The second, the fourth, and the sixth are unfriendly elements" – Arthashastra 7.18.1 (Boesche, 2003, p. 82).

The Arthashastra, regarded as a universal and timeless doctrine, explicitly emphasizes the integral role of economic, political, and military interests in shaping a state's conduct in accordance with its self-interest. It mandates that political and military leaders maintain goodwill with neighbouring states while remaining vigilant to ground realities and potential worst-case scenarios to avert inevitable destruction. This pragmatic approach, attributed to Kautilya, ensures state stability and survival through strategic foresight by outlining a comprehensive set of instruments for alliance formation, which are vital in a hostile and competitive geopolitical environment. The Mandala, or the circle of states, constitutes a normative framework within the Arthashastra, offering guidance for establishing political interactions that balance pragmatism with the sustenance of stability and harmony in international relations (Bisht, 2020). Moreover, the theory describes states as interconnected via a central hub- referred to as the 'Vijigishu' or aspiring conqueror- positioned at the core of the circle, surrounded by allies and rivals. The framework categorizes adversaries into various types: the weak foe, devoid of alliances and incapable of supporting the hub; the vulnerable enemy, lacking sufficient internal strength; the born enemies, inherently opposed to the hub state; neighbouring states, natural enemies by proximity; and rivals, competing over material interests. Allies are classified into three categories: kinship-based allies, territorial neighbours sharing borders with Vijigishu, and those united by mutual interests. Kautilya also identifies two additional actors- 'Madhyama' (Middle King), positioned between Vijigishu and rivals to mediate based on circumstances, and 'Udasina' (Neutral King), located near conflict zones, capable of supporting or suppressing Vijigishu. The placement of these actors delineates Kautilya's nuanced approach to managing complex interstate relations. Furthermore, his framework categorizes states by their strengths and weaknesses and explores the relationship among happiness, power, and success to maintain a strategic position within the Mandala model. He states, "Thriving with the seven Prakritis, the king becomes superior; reduced in these, inferior; with equal powers, equal." (Arthashastra 6.2.6.2.35-37, Bisht, 2020, p. 108). These traits are essential for enhancing the ruler's power or could weaken the state, emphasizing the importance of coordination within the intricate Mandala system.

Kautilya's foreign policy approach treats bargaining strategies as equally important, as they can be employed by both less and more powerful states. Kautilya regards power as a multifaceted force that necessitates a versatile diplomatic toolkit. He underscores that power can be augmented through alliances and agreements, thereby ensuring stability and enabling dominance within the Mandala system. This reflects the complex relationship between state power and negotiations inherent in Kautilya's philosophical framework.

### 3.1.1 Allies and Treaties

The teachings of Kautilya indicate that alliances and treaties are essential to the seven *prakritis*, as they form a fundamental foundation of statecraft. These treaties and alliances symbolize a state's stability and progress, which can be harnessed to consolidate power and maintain dominance. However, such achievements are contingent upon a thorough understanding of other states' capabilities. When a state adopts either an active or passive approach, it is referred to as the "*Sadgunya*" approach, which is further categorized into *Sandhi* (peace) and *Vigrah* (war). If a state's adversary's strength is accurately assessed, it can develop an effective strategy to counter its rivals; thus, awareness is crucial to ensuring that alliances

and treaties yield maximum benefit. He identifies four "*Upayas*": *sama*, *dana*, *bheda*, and *danda*, which are vital for a conqueror's power, as *sama* and *dana* enhance engagement among allies, while *bheda* and *danda* serve to weaken adversaries.

### 3.1.2 Alliance Formation

Kautilyan school of thought positions allies (*mitra*) at the forefront of statecraft. He cites, "*Of two powerful kings who are on amicable terms with each other, a king shall make an alliance with one of them who likes him and whom he likes; this is the best way of making alliance.*"— *Arthashastra* 7.2.6 (Shamasastri, 2013, p. 376). He emphasizes the importance of defining objectives and methods aligned with *Vijigishu's* interests, and establishes stringent criteria for selecting allies while considering associated risks. The role of geography further delineates allies from enemies based on territorial proximity; however, geography alone is a limited criterion and should not overshadow other considerations. Kautilya provides foundational insights for assessing the intentions of potential allies and adversaries, including natural allies, by evaluating their strategic alignment and uncovering underlying motives, thereby facilitating effective alliance formation.

### 3.1.3 Actors and Intentions

Kautilya delineates five principal actors: the conqueror (*vijigishu*), the enemy, the ally, the middle king (*Madhyana*), and the neutral king (*Udasina*). Furthermore, other states are characterized by relations with allied and enemy states. The classification of four of these actors is crucial for diplomacy, and their categorization can be assessed using seven constituent elements, as states that wield significant influence in these elements are better positioned to survive in a strategic environment. Kautilya emphasizes that power must be harnessed to maximize success, thereby increasing happiness. In this context, choosing ideal allies is vital, as they can augment and help maintain state power. Weaker states should employ conditional treaties and utilize pretense to exploit enemy vulnerabilities. He states, "*Wishing to overreach the enemy, who is vicious, hasty, contemptuous, slothful, or ignorant, he should create confidence with a treaty, saying, 'We are in alliance,' and after identifying the enemy's weak points, strike at him*" (*Arthashastra* 7.6.13) (Kangle, 1972, p. 393). This underscores Kautilya's strategic insight into alliance formation and warfare.

#### 3.1.3.1 Ally's Features

Kautilya has delineated certain essential traits for allies, specifically mutual interests, beliefs, and norms that are prerequisite for alliance formation. These include the provision of material resources, such as financial assistance, soldiers, and land, particularly during strategic periods. Kautilya distinguishes between two types of allies: one who is consistent yet uncontrollable, and another who is inconsistent yet controllable. He advocates for the latter, stating, "*As long as he helps, he becomes an ally; for the feature of an ally is conferring benefit*" (*Arthashastra* 9.9.11, Kangle, 1972, p. 549). Additionally, critical characteristics of an ally encompass internal stability, and unwavering support during difficult times is regarded as highly valuable. Kautilya emphasizes this point by asserting that "*for help given in misfortune renders friendship very firm*" (*Arthashastra* 7.9.3, Kangle, 1972, p. 404). Regarding other attributes, Kautilya underscores the paramount importance of consistency, as evidenced by his statement.

*"a long-standing friend of limited prospects is better, in as much as a temporary friend of large prospects is likely to withdraw his friendship on account of material loss in the shape of help given, or is likely to expect similar kind of help in return; but a long-standing friend of limited prospects can, in virtue of his long-standing nature, render immense service in the long run"* – *Arthashastra* 7.9.9 (Kangle, 1972, p. 405).

This comprehensive approach emphasizes that Kautilya's assertiveness lies in synthesizing short- and long-term interests, and recommends that the ruler should not rely on a one-dimensional criterion for alliance

selection. Instead, it advocates for an evaluation based on interests, relative power, strong support, and combat readiness.

### 3.1.3.2 Types of Allies

To elaborate further on allies, Kautilya has divided them into three categories: dangerous allies, best allies, and worthy allies. Intent and motivation serve as primary criteria for evaluating the credibility and worthiness of allies. Among these types, the most credible is the best ally, described as one who possesses exemplary qualities. The relationships among these types of allies can be understood as reliable, controllable, and aligned in interests. Kautilya has defined the best ally as one with extraordinary capabilities, i.e., one who can amass forces and shares beliefs and values. He explains, *“that friend who maintains friendship with disinterested motives and merely for the sake of friendship and by whom the relationship acquired of old is kept intact, is a long-standing friend”* – Arthashastra 7.9.26 (Kangle, 1972, p. 408). Having an ally at the disposal of any king is a very critical factor. Therefore, categorizing allies by their usefulness is necessary, as those with more resources and greater flexibility are critical. The capabilities of an ally, i.e., land, fiscal means, and troops, allow it to provide aid on multiple fronts. According to Kautilya, allies shall have distinctive qualities that reflect their interests and represent loyalty, thereby adding strategic value to *Vijigishu’s* capacities and resources.

### 3.1.3.3 Treaty making

In the Arthashastra, Kautilya elucidates that mutual agreements are procedures designed to enhance collaboration and cooperation within strategic partnerships. In contemporary discourse, the process of treaty signing encompasses several phases: pre-negotiation, negotiation, ratification, implementation, and renegotiation. Kautilya integrates these methodologies into a comprehensive framework for alliance formation, achieved through treaties, aimed at sustaining partnerships and maintaining a balance of interests. This approach is critical in defining the standing of such treaties within the Mandala framework. According to Kautilya's framework, peace may be acknowledged when treaties or pacts are formed. Kangle (1972) translates this concept as *panabandhan*, denoting that Standard Operating Procedures (SOPs) are constituted through formal agreements that include specific clauses. Likewise, Georg Müller (1886) describes this concept as an alliance. Olivelle (2011) challenges this interpretation, equating it to *samdhi*, which he states is analogous to a formal treaty. He contends that the concept of *samdhi* characterizes *“a temporary and focused contract between two parties, aimed at achieving specific goals, such as collaborating against a common enemy”* (p. 132). This perspective emphasizes the rationality of agreements in Kautilya's diplomatic philosophy. Furthermore, signed treaties are intended to serve and enhance a state's relative power within the geopolitical landscape. The fundamental criterion for entering into treaties revolves around the nature of trade-offs and their capacity to foster trust among monarchs. Kautilya views these treaties as essential tools for mutual confidence-building, utilizing mechanisms such as peace negotiations, non-intervention, or other means, all of which contribute to the ultimate goal of establishing interstate trust and stability. Kautilya has emphasized two significant categories of treaties: unconditional and conditional. The former are designed for adversaries whose motives are either ambiguous or potentially deceptive, enabling states to engage in dual practice, cultivating trust while concurrently manipulating circumstances to advance their own interests. These treaties function as a façade that selectively endorses allies, thereby safeguarding the strategic value of alliances in supporting *Vijigishu’s* interests.

### 3.1.3.4 Renegotiation of Treaties

Kautilya identified the fourth significant aspect as the renegotiation of treaties; a strategic and adaptable process grounded in principles of equality and rationality. He recognized alliances as a vital pillar of foreign policy and emphasized that treaties forged between allies must be grounded in mutual trust and justice, with the flexibility to adapt to evolving geopolitical landscapes. He asserted, *“When, by making use of conciliation and other forms of stratagem and the like, a new agreement of peace is made and the rights of equal, inferior, and superior powers concerned in the agreement are defined according to their respective positions”* – Arthashastra 7.6.16 (Shamasastri, 2013, p. 392). For renegotiations to be effective, it is imperative to understand adversaries' motives and beliefs, as these must align with the strategic and moral considerations of the state seeking to modify the terms. In this context, negotiation serves as a decisive factor, significantly influenced by the state's internal cohesion, relative strength, and stability. Such factors not only command respect but also confer a strategic advantage at the negotiation table, embodying the integration of domestic strength and international diplomatic resilience. This collaboration is essential to supporting beneficial yet flexible treaties that bolster the state's long-term strategic interests.

### 3.1.3.5 Unequal Treaties

Kautilya elucidates that bargaining power is a crucial element in making political decisions and achieving both short- and long-term benefits. He emphasizes that *“When the profit accruing to kings under an agreement, whether they be of equal, inferior, or superior power, is equal to all, that agreement is termed peace (Sandhi); when unequal, it is termed defeat (Vikrama). Such is the nature of peace and war”* – Arthashastra 7-8-14 (Shamasastri, 2013, p. 403). He advocates balanced alliances that are mutually beneficial regardless of power asymmetry or equality. Conversely, unequal alliances (*Vikrama*) are less advantageous, as they compromise the parties' power and interests; such alliances are strategically employed to weaken opponents. Moreover, in specific circumstances, short-term interests may be subordinated to long-term strategic advantages, analogous to Robert Keohane's (1986) concepts of specific and diffuse reciprocity. The former pertains to the idea of Tit for Tat, while the latter anticipates future gains through sustained trust and cooperation rather than immediate equality of benefits. This approach aligns with Kautilya's emphasis on expanding relative power through optimal bargaining within a competitive global landscape.

## 3.2 Indian Quest for Joining and Forming of Alliances

In the contemporary era, India's foreign policy objectives exemplify its aspiration to broaden its strategic alliances to enhance its regional and global influence. India has actively engaged in alliance-building with a variety of countries and partners, as evidenced by its participation in the QUAD, which signifies its strategic stance and ambitions to attain status as a major world power. The multifaceted relationship between India and great powers has historically supported its military modernization efforts, with Russia, the USA, Japan, Australia, ASEAN, and European nations recognizing India as a significant actor in the emerging multipolar international order. These alliances denote relative power and influence, positioning India as a net security provider within the Indian Ocean region (Mukherjee, 2014). This strategy reflects Kautilyan principles, whereby alliances serve to consolidate power through encircling rivals and exploiting opportunities, achieved through guarantees of autonomy, diversification, and flexibility to maintain geopolitical leverage and balanced relations.

### 3.2.1 Indo-Russian Strategic Partnership

The bilateral relations between India and Russia have remained cordial since the Cold War and beyond. The Soviet-era fighter jets and weaponry have historically constituted the backbone of the Indian military; to this day, India continues to import military equipment worth billions of dollars from Russia. This strategic partnership has been further reinforced through technical collaboration amidst a rapidly evolving global environment. The Soviet-era T-90 Main Battle Tanks (MBTs), acquired in 2001 via an \$800 million agreement that permits the indigenous production of 1,000 units, serve as the main armoured vehicles of the Indian army. India depends on these tanks for their demonstrable performance in challenging environments such as mountains and deserts, thereby bolstering the nation's offensive capabilities along its northern and western borders ("T-90S Main Battle Tank, Russia," 2017). The Indian Air Force (IAF) maintains a fleet of approximately 272 SU-30 MKI multirole fighter jets, produced under a technology transfer program with Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), ensuring precise strike capabilities for both offensive and defensive operations (Peri, 2024). Additionally, co-development efforts such as the BrahMos missile project with Russia have expanded India's strategic reach in the Indo-Pacific region. The procurement of the S-400 Triumf air defence system, valued at \$5.43 billion, significantly enhances India's capacity to defend against cruise missiles, ballistic missiles, and hypersonic targets (Ahmed, 2022). The United States has granted India exemptions from the Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act (CAATSA) owing to the robust bilateral relations. Russia has also leased its nuclear-powered submarine, INS Chakra, to India (Thomas, 2020), and collaborative development continues with projects such as the BrahMos-NG cruise missile (BrahMos Aerospace, n.d.) and research in the Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle, with India conducting tests of scramjet technology (Defense Research and Development Organization, 2020). Furthermore, the MiG-29UPG fighters are undergoing upgrades to extend their operational lifespan, and T-72 tanks are being equipped with night-vision capabilities (Ministry of Defense, 2023). Beyond defence, India articulated its ambitions in the resource-rich Arctic region through its 2022 Arctic policy paper, highlighting cooperation with Russian companies such as Rosneft and Novatek for access to Arctic shipping routes and hydrocarbon exploration (Ministry of External Affairs, 2022). The multifaceted cooperation between India and Russia plays a pivotal role not only in defence but also in the fields of global energy and technological development.

### 3.2.2 Indo-US Strategic Partnership

In the global political landscape, it is essential that states collaborate to ensure their survival, uphold shared democratic norms, and advance mutual strategic interests. India adopted a policy of neutrality during the Cold War, which constrained its relations with the United States; however, since the disintegration of the USSR, both nations have increasingly allied and cooperated in modernizing the Indian military through arms sales, joint military exercises, technology co-development, and intelligence sharing to enhance interoperability. To project its image as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean, India has procured P-81 Poseidon drones, MH-60R Seahawk helicopters, and advanced radars, thereby enhancing over-the-horizon capabilities. India conducts regular military drills with Australian and Japanese forces to bolster its military readiness within the Indo-Pacific security framework. To expand its heavy lift capacity, India has acquired C-17 Globemaster and C-130J Super Hercules aircraft, as well as Chinook helicopters, with future collaborations including the procurement of F-35 fighter jets and the co-development of next-generation combat technologies. Additionally, key components of Apache and Chinook helicopters are produced in India through collaboration between Boeing and the Indian TATA Group. *The Defense Trade and Technology*

*Initiative (DTTI)* and the localized assembly of M777 ultra-light howitzers facilitate cooperation between Indian and U.S. firms (Behera & Balachandran, 2018). Both nations also collaborate in secure communication, cybersecurity, and AI-driven defence applications to remain relevant in modern digital warfare (Ebert, 2020), along with joint military satellite programs and enhanced battlefield awareness (Khalid, 2021).

The assertiveness of China in the Indo-Pacific has challenged the existing regional stability, prompting both India and the United States to endeavour to balance regional power dynamics. The signing of the Indo-U.S. Civil Nuclear Agreement marked a significant development in bilateral relations (Pant, 2011). Subsequently, collaborations such as the Air-Launched Unmanned Aerial Vehicle (ALUAV) project and joint jet engine manufacturing for the Tejas aircraft have further deepened this cooperation (Lou, 2024). The acquisition of 22 AH-64E Apache helicopters and 15 CH-47 Chinook helicopters, valued at USD 3 billion in 2015, has enhanced India's military capabilities. More recently, the approved procurement of MQ-9B Predator drones provides enhanced over-the-horizon surveillance capabilities over Indian-administered Kashmir and near the Line of Actual Control (Kweera, 2023). Logistics constitute a vital component in any conflict, and agreements such as the *Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA - 2016)* have institutionalized joint access to air and naval bases. Additionally, the *Communications Compatibility & Security Agreement (COMCASA - 2018)* expands secure communication channels, while the *India-U.S. Basic Exchange & Cooperation Agreement (BECA - 2020)* facilitates intelligence sharing and disaster response initiatives (Nisar, 2023). Joint military exercises, including Yudh Abhyas, Malabar, and Vajra Prahar, are conducted among the armed forces of India, Australia, and Japan. Collaboration between NASA and ISRO is also evident, with both agencies working on the *NASA-ISRO Synthetic Aperture Radar (NISAR)* satellite. Furthermore, the Indo-U.S. Cyber Dialogue Framework aims to counter cyber threats ("Joint Statement: 2016 United States-India Cyber Dialogue," 2016). The 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue launched in 2018 emphasizes strategic priorities such as safeguarding classified defence technologies ("Joint Statement on the Fifth Annual India-U.S. 2+2 Ministerial Dialogue," 2023). The United States remains a vital partner in India's pursuit of self-sufficiency in defence production and the modernization of its indigenous industrial base. Meanwhile, regional dynamics and global politics are significantly influenced by both nations' prioritization of Indo-Pacific security.

### **3.2.3 Indo-Israel Strategic Partnership**

Since the formalization of diplomatic relations between both states in 1992, the Indo-Israel partnership has evolved into a robust defence collaboration due to shared concerns such as regional instability and terrorism, thereby fulfilling Indian requirements for innovative and revolutionary technology through legalized frameworks (Blarel, 2017). The military engagement between the two nations was formalized through the *Bilateral Defense Cooperation Agreement* of 1998 and was subsequently reinforced in 2014. The *2002 India-Israel Joint Working Group (JWG)* on Defense, established to co-develop, procure, counter terrorism, and share intelligence, further deepened these relations. The relationship was elevated to a strategic partnership during Prime Minister Modi's 2017 visit to Israel ("India-Israel Joint Statement," 2017). India's strong interest in manufacturing equipment under the "*Made in India*" initiative is reflected in collaborations such as the development of the Barak-8 surface-to-air missile system by the *Defense Research and Development Organization (DRDO)* and *Israel Aerospace Industries (IAI)*. Additionally, the acquisition of Spike Anti-Tank Guided Missiles (ATGMs), along with the procurement and subsequent induction of Heron UAVs, Heron TP, and Searcher drones in 2021, has significantly enhanced Indian military intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) capabilities ("India Buys 50 Herons in \$500M IAI Deal," 2019). Over the years, military cooperation has expanded to include systems such as Phalcon AWACS, Green Pine radar, and MF-STAR naval

radars, thereby strengthening Indian maritime and aerial security (Rafiq, 2021). The partnership also encompasses the production of Israeli small arms, including the Negev NG-7 light machine gun (LMG) and Israeli Yavor assault rifles, which are utilized by Indian Special Forces. Both nations have agreed to collaborate on shared areas of interest in military hardware and software development, including potential cooperation on hypersonic missile systems, the Barak missile family, AI-driven combat systems, drone swarms, and space satellite systems (Rajiv & Samuel, 2022). Furthermore, both countries cooperate within the I2U2 group (India, Israel, the United States, and the United Arab Emirates), often referred to as the “West Asia Quad,” which focuses on space, energy, health, and various other sectors. The inaugural meeting of this group was held in 2022. As part of this initiative, the UAE has committed to investing \$2 billion in India for land acquisition aimed at enhancing food security, while private enterprises from Israel and the United States will invest in projects that aim to improve agricultural yields, reduce food wastage, and conserve freshwater resources (Joint Statement of the Leaders of I2U2, 2022, July 14).

### **3.2.4 Indo-European Strategic Partnerships**

In the post-Cold War era, the Indo-European strategic alliances have emerged as a crucial component of Indian foreign policy, exemplified by multifaceted partnerships in economic, military, and technological domains. These alliances enhance defence capabilities and foster mutual security, exemplifying a shared dedication to addressing regional threats, safeguarding global stability, and advancing an inclusive Indo-Pacific agenda.

#### **3.2.4.1 Indo-French Strategic Partnership**

The Indo-French Strategic Partnership Agreement, formalized in 1998, has been further strengthened over the decades through joint ventures that have deepened military cooperation. The dynamic nature of this partnership has enabled India and France to bolster indigenous production and enhance strategic autonomy within the region. This alliance safeguards strategic stability by facilitating tri-service drills and training Indian fighter pilots to operate French aircraft, including the Rafale, Jaguar, and Mirage 2000, under the supervision of French pilots. Additionally, it grants the Indian Navy access to French naval facilities, thereby fostering greater maritime collaboration (Peri, 2019). Over the years, this cooperation has positioned France as a leading supplier of advanced military equipment to India (Racine, 2016). Given the evolving security landscape, both nations are advancing collaboration in joint military exercises, space cooperation, maritime security, and aerospace, thereby making France a vital partner in India’s indigenous military modernization efforts (Roger, 2007). The *2016 Intergovernmental Agreement (IGA)* for the procurement of 36 Dassault Rafale fighter jets, complemented by maintenance support and technology transfer provisions, marked a significant milestone in enhancing India's aerial capabilities, thereby narrowing the gap in military modernization vis-à-vis China. Furthermore, both countries signed the Mutual Logistics Support Agreement in 2018, permitting reciprocal access to each other's military installations (Political relations and strategic partnership, 2022). The agreements for the joint production of fighter jet engines, advanced artillery systems, and long-range submarines were formalized on May 4, 2022, during the Indian Prime Minister’s visit to France, thereby signalling a commitment to long-term bilateral cooperation (India–France Joint Statement, 2022).

Naval modernization is at the centre of India-French partnership with India consolidating its blue-water competencies by focusing on French assistance in providing technical and material assistance in submarine modernization, prospective development of aircraft carrier, and ASW systems. The P-75 Scorpene submarines with France’s Naval group, which allows indigenous production of six submarines at Mazagon

Dock Shipbuilders Limited, and also allows the co-production of P-751, providing self-sufficiency in naval defence arrangements (Sinha, 2023). In the aerospace sector, SAFRAN has collaborated with HAL to produce fighter jet engines for the AMCA and Tejas Mk2 programs, thereby reducing reliance on foreign engine manufacturers (Gupta, 2022). This collaboration also spans in enhancing defence, reconnaissance and intelligence capabilities, which shall bolster India's preparedness against regional adversaries. The development of Small Modular Nuclear Reactors (SMRs) is also a potential arena of bilateral technological cooperation (Sen, Singh & Nussbaum, 2024). Moreover, France supports India's inclusion in the Non-Proliferation Treaty and strong export control regimes, the Missile Technology Control Regime (MTCR), and India's bid to join the Nuclear Suppliers Group, the Wassenaar Arrangement, and the Australia Group (Ullah, 2024). Military drills are an important component of Indo-French military cooperation, enhancing interoperability and increasing troops' combat readiness. Varuna and Garuda are annual military exercises held to strengthen maritime capabilities and coordination, with a focus on the Indo-Pacific, as both states share common interests (Bharti & Singh, 2023).

#### **3.2.4.2 Indo-UK Strategic Partnership**

The international landscape has observed significant advancements in Indo-UK relations over recent years, with defence production, military modernization, and technology transfer serving as the primary pillars of bilateral cooperation. These mechanisms were further fortified following the signing of the *India-UK Defence & International Security Partnership (DISP)* in 2015. In 2021, collaboration areas such as advanced military technology, cybersecurity, and maritime security were prioritized by reinforcing the India-UK Roadmap 2030 (Davison, 2023). The United Kingdom actively supports India's efforts to domestically produce military equipment; for instance, Rolls-Royce and India's DRDO are engaged in negotiations to manufacture next-generation fighter jet engines, in conjunction with the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) program ("Rolls Royce in talks with DRDO for AMCA engine," 2022). Currently, the UK is transferring defence technology and engaging in joint manufacturing of defence equipment with India, exemplified by collaborations between BAE Systems and MBDA, British and Indian defence firms respectively, in the production of maritime technologies, artillery, and missile systems.

The anticipated co-development of the 6th-generation fighter jet under India's Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft (AMCA) program signifies substantial collaboration, as technology transfer will enhance India's capabilities in AI-driven warfare and stealth technology. ("India and UK Discuss Co-Development of New-Generation Engine for AMCA Fighter Jet," 2023). India's land warfare capabilities are expected to be augmented through potential UK collaboration in the development of India's Future Infantry Combat Vehicle (FICV) and Future Ready Combat Vehicle (FRCV) programs (Dhananjayan, 2024). The United Kingdom's strategic realignment towards the Indo-Pacific region, as outlined in its 2021 Integrated Review, has intensified the Indo-UK strategic partnership, emphasizing military modernization, particularly in aerial capabilities and maritime security. This has led to joint military exercises such as Ajeya Warrior (army exercise), INDRA Dhanush (air exercise), and KONKAN (naval exercise), aimed at enhancing interoperability in counterterrorism and maritime security efforts (Tasadduq & Mustafa, 2024).

#### **3.2.4.3 Indo-German Strategic Partnership**

The Indo-German strategic partnership was established in 2001 and has evolved over the years. It was further fortified with the signing of a *Joint Declaration of Intent on Defence Cooperation* in 2022, which delineated expanded industrial and military collaboration aimed at enhancing defence exchanges, interoperability, and joint training initiatives (Jain, 2023). Germany, as a leading innovator in defence and

the fifth-largest arms exporter to India, has contributed to the modernization of the Indian military through joint production, technology transfer, and indigenous weapon manufacturing endeavours. India has recognized Germany's expertise in blue-water maritime capabilities as vital for its naval vessels and submarines, including sonars, fire and navigation control systems, and submarine technology for the P-75I program, as well as components for combat jets, helicopters, tanks, and other military vehicles. In 2016, German firm *ThyssenKrupp Marine Systems (TKMS)* secured a \$38.4 million contract to upgrade two Indian 209/1500 diesel-electric attack submarines. Indian efforts towards indigenization challenge foreign exporters, exemplified by the Indian approval of TKMS's \$5.5 billion bid for Type 218 Invincible-Class submarines equipped with air-independent propulsion in 2021, followed by the subsequent withdrawal of this bid as it was deemed a liability, and the preference for indigenous development under P-75I. This development raised concerns among France and Russia. Additionally, Germany's proactive engagement with the Indo-Pacific security framework, aimed at promoting an open and free maritime environment, has facilitated Indo-German maritime collaboration, including joint naval exercises. This collaboration benefits India by leveraging Germany's capabilities in electronic warfare, cyber defence, and military logistics, thereby strengthening India's military readiness (Wagner & D'Souza, 2022).

### **3.2.5 Quad Strategic Partnership**

The United States, Japan, Australia, and India established the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue as a fundamental pillar of the Indo-Pacific security framework, demonstrating a commitment to an open and free Indo-Pacific region. Although it is an informal military alliance, its focus is on defence interoperability, maritime security, and technological cooperation among its major member states to address emerging regional challenges through key initiatives such as military exercises, joint training sessions, information sharing, and coordination (Rafique & Shah, 2024). India's expanding military influence and burgeoning economy position it as a vital partner within the Quad, as exemplified by the Malabar naval exercise, which involves all Quad members and serves as a cornerstone of their maritime collaboration against China's naval expansion in the Indian Ocean. Their improved tactical, operational, and strategic coordination in areas such as Anti-submarine Warfare (ASW), Network-Centric Warfare (NCW), and Carrier Battle Group operations signifies a unified stance against coercive maritime tactics in the contested regions of the Andaman Sea and East China Sea. Likewise, secure communications and enhanced logistical support among Quad partners have been facilitated through bilateral and trilateral agreements, including *BECA*, *COMCASA*, *the India-Japan Acquisition & Cross-Servicing Agreement (ACSA)*, and *LEMOA*. Furthermore, the recent *India-US Initiative on Critical & Emerging Technologies (iCET)* has strengthened Indian capabilities and military preparedness in the fields of Artificial Intelligence, advanced defence electronics, space-based military applications, and cyber defence (Kumar, 2024). Given the evolving nature of warfare, collaborations in the production of missile defence systems, Unmanned Aerial Systems (UAS), and undersea drones have also been initiated in India with support from Australia and Japan. These efforts aim to reduce reliance on external suppliers, stabilize supply chains, and bolster technological security.

#### **3.2.5.1 Indo-Japanese Strategic Partnership**

The Indo-Japanese strategic partnership has significantly evolved over the past decade, marked by the establishment of the *India-Japan Special Strategic and Global Partnership* in 2014. This relationship was further consolidated through the *Agreement on Cooperation for the Supply of Services and Logistics (ACSA)* in 2020, facilitating seamless services and logistics between their armed forces (Atanassova-Cornelis & Sato, 2023). The institutionalization of high-level defence collaboration was achieved with the initiation of *the 2+2*

*Ministerial Dialogue* on November 30, 2019, which was the first of its kind, aimed at enhancing cooperation in defence technology sharing, joint exercises, and regional security initiatives (“Joint Statement – First India-Japan 2+2 Foreign & Defense Ministerial Meeting,” 2019). The Japan-India Maritime Exercise (JIMEX), conducted from 2012 to 2024, has contributed to improving interoperability among the naval forces of both nations (John, 2024). Additionally, interoperability between Indo-Japanese ground forces has been strengthened through annual Dharma Guardian army exercises since 2018, focusing on jungle warfare and counter-terrorism (Nandy, 2024).

The Indo-Japanese collaboration in Indo-Pacific infrastructure development, aimed at countering China’s *Belt & Road Initiative (BRI)*, specifically through initiatives such as the *Asia-Africa Growth Corridor (AAGC)* to enhance capacity building, digital connectivity, and sustainable infrastructure in Africa, exemplifies their shared commitment to a rules-based regional order (Tripathi, 2021). Additionally, the Indo-Japanese partnership has targeted projects including Bangladesh’s Matarbari Deep Sea Port and Sri Lanka’s Colombo Port Terminal to mitigate Chinese regional influence (“India-Japan parries Chinese influence with Matarbari deep-sea port,” 2023). The *2023 Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF)*, involving fourteen nations, emphasizes a connected economy, a digital and equitable economy, and a clean and resilient environment. India has secured funding from Japan for the Northeast Connectivity Initiative to enhance regional economic integration (Kasai, 2024).

### **3.2.5.2 Indo-Australian Strategic Partnership**

The Indo-Australian strategic partnership has transitioned from economic cooperation to military collaboration, driven by shared interests in multifaceted threats, maritime security, and regional stability in the Indo-Pacific. The signing of the *India-Australia Comprehensive Strategic Partnership (CSP)* marked a significant milestone for enhanced military cooperation, complemented by the Mutual Logistics Support Arrangement (MLSA), which facilitates improved naval interoperability, humanitarian missions, shared access to military bases, and joint operations (Jha & Star, 2021). The *2+2 Ministerial Dialogue*, established in 2012, formalized military cooperation, including cybersecurity, strategic issue collaboration, and defence technology transfer (Saha & Singh, 2022). Furthermore, the Royal Australian Navy and Indian Navy have conducted joint naval exercises, notably the biennial AUSINDEX drills in the Bay of Bengal since 2015, with the scope expanding to include live-fire drills, surface combat exercises, and anti-submarine warfare (Jha & Star, 2021). Both nations have deployed advanced warships to counter Chinese assertiveness in the Indo-Pacific, as these exercises align with QUAD objectives, exemplified by Australia’s participation in the Malabar exercises since 2020.

### **3.2.6 Indo-ASEAN Strategic Partnership**

Southeast Asia and India share profound cultural and historical linkages that have evolved into multidimensional relations. These developments reflect shifts in the Indo-Pacific’s economic, strategic, and geopolitical landscape. All Southeast Asian states regard India as a dependable partner in countering China’s military expansion within the Indo-Pacific region. Consequently, they prioritize maintaining a regional balance of power through collaborative efforts such as capacity-building initiatives, maritime security, defence exports, and joint military exercises. This trend underscores the growing influence of Southeast Asia in India’s foreign policy considerations, alongside India’s “*Act East Policy*”, which was articulated in 1992.

In the ASEAN region, Vietnam is considered a natural ally of India due to its dispute with China over South China Sea claims; consequently, India has strengthened its defence relations with Vietnam. To strengthen Vietnamese defences in the South China Sea, a US\$700 million agreement for the purchase of BrahMos

supersonic cruise missiles was finalized between the two nations (“India-Vietnam 700M BrahMos Deal,” 2024). The Memorandum of Understanding concerning “UN Peacekeeping Operations” has facilitated the initiation of the *Vietnam-India Bilateral Army Exercise 2025 (VINBAX)*, exemplifying strategic partnership, solidarity, and mutual learning aimed at regional stability and peace (Vietnam - India Bilateral Army Exercise 2025 kick-started, 2025).

India-Singapore strategic relations have been enhanced through regular military exercises such as the Singapore-India Maritime Bilateral Exercise (SIMBEX) naval drills and the Bold Kurukshetra armoured vehicle exercises. These annual military collaborations primarily emphasize information sharing, Anti-Submarine Warfare (ASW), capacity development, and air defence coordination, thereby underscoring the technological expertise and sophistication inherent in this partnership. For example, SIMBEX 2022, held from 26 to 30 October in Visakhapatnam, involved Singapore’s RSS and the Indian INS Shivalik, focusing on tactical coordination in maritime conflict zones such as the Indian Ocean and the South China Sea. This has reinforced India’s position as a vital hub for Singaporean naval deployments and defence diplomacy. (Singapore and Indian Navies Conclude Annual Singapore-India Maritime Bilateral Exercise, 2022).

Indonesia and Malaysia have initiated maritime security collaboration with India to safeguard vital sea lanes such as the Strait of Malacca. In 2023, India and Indonesia launched the “*Shared Vision on Maritime Cooperation*,” which was institutionalized through joint patrols, intelligence-sharing, professional exchanges, and anti-piracy operations targeting threats to commercial shipping. India and Malaysia conduct *coordinated patrols (CORPAT)* under their 2021 military defence framework to address transnational crimes, illegal fishing, and piracy in the Andaman Sea. Additionally, through the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS), both Malaysia and Indonesia actively contribute to multilateral maritime security dialogues (Saha, 2023).

The Indo-ASEAN strategic partnership has gained momentum, with military cooperation as a fundamental pillar, anchored in shared interests in maritime security, counterterrorism, regional stability, and freedom of navigation. These relationships are institutionalized through mechanisms including the *ASEAN-India Defense Ministers’ Meeting (ADMM-Plus)*, which facilitates interoperability, intelligence sharing, and joint operations (Pandey, 2023). India’s alignment with the ASEAN Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP) further integrates its objectives with regional frameworks that emphasize peace and stability (Gill, 2023). Furthermore, India has broadened its defence agreements with ASEAN member states, with a focus on capacity building, naval diplomacy, and counterterrorism initiatives. Notable joint exercises, such as SIMBEX, CORPAT, and VINBAX, enhance collaboration in areas including anti-piracy, search-and-rescue operations, and maritime domain awareness. Additionally, defence logistics agreements with the Philippines, Indonesia, and Vietnam strengthen India’s presence within the Indo-Pacific Region and the South China Sea by facilitating mutual access to facilities, repair services, training, and coordination capabilities.

### **Conclusion**

This analysis demonstrates that alliances remain a fundamental pillar of international relations, deeply embedded in both classical strategic thought and contemporary geopolitical pragmatism. Kautilya’s insights articulated in the Arthashastra provide a timeless framework for understanding the logic of alliance formation, emphasizing pragmatism, adaptability, and the primacy of self-interest. His conception of alliances as instrumental and fluid arrangements continues to resonate within the modern strategic environment, where states navigate complex networks of competition and cooperation. India’s evolving alliance strategy reflects the enduring relevance of these principles, as it has expanded its influence,

enhanced its strategic capabilities, and positioned itself as a key player in global politics by forging diverse, multi-layered partnerships. India's engagement with regional actors and major powers highlights a calculated effort to secure advantages, balance threats, and shape the strategic environment in its favour. To conclude, this paper underscores that alliances are not merely tools of convenience but are essential instruments of statecraft, whose effectiveness lies in their ability to adapt to changing circumstances and align with long-term strategic objectives. In an era characterized by competition and uncertainty, the lessons of Kautilya remain profoundly relevant, offering valuable insights into the enduring dynamics of power, cooperation, and conflict in international relations.

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