



Energy Diplomacy as a Tool of Strategic Autonomy in India

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ABSTRACT

Energy diplomacy has emerged as a key instrument in determining the strategic independence of India in the ever-changing world order. Being one of the fastest-developing large economies, India experiences an increased demand in the energy sector and the high reliance on foreign supply, especially crude oil and natural gas. Such structural dependence subject the country to geopolitical risks, supply shocks and price shocks, particularly in strategically sensitive countries like West Asia and emerging alliances like Russia. In this article, we explore the ways India uses energy diplomacy as a tool to manage the conflicting geopolitical pressures and at the same time protect its national interests. We look at major aspects such as India's reliance on West Asia - especially via the Strait of Hormuz - and its changing relationship with Russia as a new energy partner. Besides, we look into the means of energy diplomacy that include diversification, securing long-term agreements, and building up strategic reserves. Moreover, the article identifies the risks of geopolitical instability, maritime weaknesses and relying on few suppliers. It claims that the measured strategy of India, comprised in the combination of balancing relations with various partners without being over-dependent, is the key to being able to preserve the strategic autonomy. The paper indicates that the key factors that are needed to ensure the energy security and national resilience remain strong in the long run are diversification, better coordination between institutions, and



Introduction

In the modern world, energy has evolved from an economic factor to a critical factor that determines the power and foreign policies of nations and their geopolitical relationships. In the case of a growing economy such as India, access to a reliable and cheap source of energy is not only an important factor for the economy but also an important factor for national security. In the context of growing energy needs and limited energy production, India is now one of the world's leading energy importers.

There are three interlinked energy crisis issues: (1) supply disruptions, (2) price hike and volatility, and (3) geopolitical conflicts. And all of these issues can have direct implications for a country's inflation rate, its budgetary/fiscal stability, and economic growth. In fact, energy security is so closely linked to national security that both are almost inseparable. Scholars note that energy insecurity for importing countries may lead to limiting their foreign policies and loss of their strategic autonomy (Cherp & Jewell, 2014; Goldthau & Westphal, 2019).

In this regard, energy diplomacy has become an important instrument that India uses in the management of its external vulnerabilities. India hopes to achieve its energy requirements by interacting with other suppliers and keeping its international relations at par without compromising its decision-making power. This paper suggests that energy diplomacy is the key to India seeking the strategic independence, especially in manoeuvring its reliance on the West Asia and its changing energy relationship with Russia.

Conceptual Framework: Energy Diplomacy and Strategic Autonomy

Energy diplomacy is all about using diplomacy and strategic partnerships and working with others around the world to ensure that energy supplies are reliable and affordable. Energy transactions are not like any other trade because they are heavily politicised, long-term oriented, and supportive of strategic ambitions (Goldthau & Westphal, 2019).

Strategic autonomy or the capacity of a country to act independently without being subject to external influences, is a fundamental notion in India's foreign policy. Although previously associated with non-alignment, the idea has transformed into a more adaptable model of multi-aligning in today's world.

The issue of energy diplomacy and strategic autonomy is of special importance to countries that are dependent on imports. The high dependence on foreign sources of energy may leave states with structural



vulnerabilities, which may make them vulnerable to geopolitical coercion and restrict diplomatic ability in terms of choices (Cherp and Jewell, 2014). On the contrary, diversified energy associations create resilience and bargaining power.

Therefore, energy diplomacy will be like a balance between the need to attain economic sustainability and the strategic autonomy in order to realise the complex world with protecting the national interests of India.

India's Energy Dependence and Strategic Constraints

The energy landscape of India is characterised by a high level of importation, especially on crude oil, whereby 80-85 per cent of the total consumption is imposed by imports (MoSPI, 2025). The increased industrial and urban demand is also a major component of the energy mix because of natural gas imports.

A large portion of these imports is supplied by the West Asian region and it is a very crucial part of the energy security of India. Furthermore, a significant percentage of these shipments is transited via the Strait of Hormuz, which is amongst the most strategic chokepoints of the world sea. Any disturbance in this pathway such as conflict, blockages, or geopolitical conflicts can seriously affect the energy supply in India.

This, in turn, creates a number of strategic limitations, as changes in oil prices affect inflation, the budget, and the balance of payments, including the current account deficit (Dadwal, 2009). More alarmingly, the limited number of suppliers can impact the scope of foreign policy, as countries in the energy-importing group face a certain degree of influence in their foreign policy decisions.

Nevertheless, Russia has become a key energy ally to India, particularly when the international supply of oil and other energy resources is disrupted. But India has slowly cut back on its reliance on Russian oil which is a strategic step to diversification and not dependence.

Instruments of India's Energy Diplomacy

India uses several tools to ensure its energy interests. Supplier diversification is one of the most crucial strategies that help to avoid any dependency on a specific region and increase resilience to geopolitical shocks. Through its involvement with West Asia and Russia, India is guaranteed a wider and more diverse energy portfolio.



Long-term energy contracts are one of the main methods of providing supply stability and price predictability. They minimise the risk of sudden market price changes in the short term, while also giving more assurance for planning over the long term.

Besides, strategic petroleum reserves (SPRs) are yet another important tool, which can be considered as stocks for supply interruptions. Government intervention can thus be averted by deploying SPRs during a crisis (Mara et al., 2022).

Moreover, Indian energy diplomacy depends on the continuous dialogue and cooperation with energy supplier nations through bilateral interactions and partnerships. This continuous process enables the maintenance of energy relations, even in the face of geopolitical uncertainty.

Energy Diplomacy in Practice: Balancing Global Powers

The energy diplomacy of India can be seen in terms of its capacity to strike a balance in its relations with various international players. Its interaction with West Asia is very important because of geographical proximity and the dependency on supply, especially in the Strait of Hormuz. Meanwhile, its relations with Russia show a sensible attitude toward getting cheap energy in times of instability in the world arena.

Importantly, India has not allowed itself to become heavily dependent on one partner only. Russia turned out to be quite a big supplier in recent years, but India quite naturally modified its importing system to keep the country diverse. This measured move shows that the energy choices taken by India are based on national interest as opposed to identification with a particular geopolitical bloc.

This kind of balancing helps India to enjoy strategic independence so that it can react to a crisis in the world in a flexible way without affecting its economic and security interests.

Challenges to India's Energy Diplomacy

India has many challenges in its energy diplomacy despite the strategy efforts it has adopted.

Firstly, its further reliance on West Asia will subject India to geopolitical instability. The recent wrangles in the area have proved how any kind of disturbance can not only be detrimental to the energy sources but also the entire trade systems. A heavy portion of Indian imports such as fertilisers and petrochemical imports are also associated with this region, which increases vulnerability.



Secondly, the Strait of Hormuz continues to be the main strategic bottleneck. The energy supply side of India would be adversely affected immediately and to a large extent if any such disruption occurs here.

Thirdly, interaction with Russia brings about a whole new set of issues to deal with, especially against the backdrop of world sanctions and freezing of financial resources. Those aspects might hinder the trade channels and cause insecurities regarding the long-term energy partnership.

Lastly, the international price fluctuations still represent a source of risk and make it difficult to have energy supplies that are both stable and reasonably priced.

Strategic Responses and Policy Solutions

To overcome such challenges, India has to develop a smart and forward-thinking strategy.

The most useful tool to lessen vulnerability would always be diversification. The diversification of suppliers is the guarantee of a higher resiliency and bargaining power.

Increasing strategic petroleum reserves can offer a cushioning effect in case of short-term disturbances so that the policy can react.

It is necessary to protect maritime routes, in particular, Strait of Hormuz, by strengthening the naval forces, as well as by employing international collaboration to ensure continuous supply.

The coordination between the energy, defence and foreign policy agencies within the institution is also important. Planning energy security within the framework of the country security will enhance the crisis preparedness and response (Kumar, 2016).

The adoption of renewable energy, which would have been reinforced, in the long run, would decrease the reliance on imported fossil energy. But this change should be handled with a lot of care so as not to generate new forms of dependency.

Conclusion

A key part of the plan to remain strategically autonomous in an increasingly unpredictable world is energy diplomacy. With a lot of imports, especially from West Asia, and new relationships like the one with Russia, energy security has now become an important part of national security.



India's way of looking at things is quite realistic, they want to get energy at a low cost but at the same time, they don't want to rely too much on just one seller. They change their sources, keep good relationships, and are ready to change with the world politics in order to keep their decision making independent.

Nevertheless, changing world processes, such as regional wars and stock market fluctuations, remain very difficult. The solution to these challenges is a long-term and a coordinated plan that incorporates the energy policy and national security goals.

Finally, the idea of energy diplomacy is not only one of the requirements of the economy but also one of the strategy. Its successful adoption will spell the difference between India being able to be sustained in growth, remain stable and be able to state its independence in a fast evolving world order.

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