

The Samanvaya Doctrine: Coordinated Statecraft and India's Strategy for Influence in the Indo-Pacific

¹Hariom Singh Sisodia

¹Research Scholar

¹Department of Political Science,

¹Barkatullah University, Bhopal, India

Abstract: This paper advances the Samanvaya Doctrine as a coordination-centric strategic approach to interpret and analyse the growing influence of India in the Indo-Pacific and the wider world under conditions of material constraint. Moving away from accumulation-oriented and alliance-oriented approaches to power, this research defines Samanvaya, inspired by Indian philosophical and strategic thought, as the deliberate harmonisation of military, economic, diplomatic, and normative instruments to achieve maximum effect without provoking escalation. Employing a mixed-methods research design, this paper combines quantitative data (trends in defense spending, trade volumes, naval deployments, institutional engagement) with qualitative analysis (strategic discourse, partner country perceptions, policy documents) to examine how India seeks to leverage limited resources to achieve strategic effect.

The findings suggest that constraint functions not as a liability but as a strategic variable that incentivises efficiency, sequencing, and orchestration. The Indian strategy in maritime security, unilateral politics, ASEAN engagement, humanitarian assistance, and norm-setting shows how influence can be achieved through reassurance rather than coercion. Comparison with the United States' alliance-focused strategy and China's coercive integration approach underscores the relative advantages of Samanvaya in terms of legitimacy, risk management, and acceptance in the region, while also pointing to weaknesses in undercommitment and coordination problems.

The paper argues that Samanvaya constitutes a distinct middle-power theory of strategy, offering transferable insights for other states operating in a multipolar order defined by uncertainty, interdependence, and constrained capabilities.

Keywords: Samanvaya Doctrine; Indo-Pacific; Indian foreign policy; middle powers; soft power; unilateralism; resource constraint.

I. Introduction

The Indo-Pacific has emerged as the principal arena of contemporary geopolitical competition, marked by intensifying great-power rivalry, contested maritime spaces, and overlapping economic and security interests. As China expands its influence through coercive and incremental strategies, and the United States continues to rely on alliance-centric arrangements, the regional order is increasingly shaped by approaches that privilege dominance, deterrence, or bloc formation. Within this evolving strategic environment, India occupies a distinctive position: a major Indo-Pacific actor with expanding interests, yet operating under clear material, institutional, and political constraints.

Conventional theories of power projection, rooted in alliance consolidation or overwhelming military superiority, offer only partial explanations for India's behaviour. Despite the absence of formal alliances, limited defence expenditure relative to major powers, and a cautious approach to coercion, India has steadily enhanced its regional influence (Sasidhar, 2024)¹. This apparent paradox raises a central question: Can coordinated multi-domain statecraft compensate for material constraints in the pursuit of strategic influence? Addressing this question requires moving beyond models that equate power with accumulation and instead examining how states orchestrate diverse instruments of influence.

This paper advances the Samanvaya Doctrine as an indigenous and analytically distinct framework for understanding India's Indo-Pacific strategy. Derived from the concept of *samanvaya*—meaning coordination or harmonisation—the doctrine conceptualises power as the deliberate alignment of military, economic, diplomatic, and normative tools to generate cumulative strategic effects. Much like an Indian platter that combines diverse flavours to create a coherent and satisfying whole, the Samanvaya approach seeks to maximise impact through integration rather than excess. It reflects India's strategic culture of autonomy, restraint, and legitimacy-seeking, while offering a practical response to contemporary geopolitical pressures.

By comparing *Samanvaya* with the Chinese model of coercive integration and the US alliance model, the article examines the effectiveness and limitations of joint statecraft. In this regard, it contends that *Samanvaya* not only symbolises the Indian strategic response to constraint but also a framework that can be applied by middle powers in an emerging multipolar international order.

II. Conceptual Foundations of the *Samanvaya* Doctrine

Samanvaya in Indian Strategic and Philosophical Thought - The concept of *Samanvaya* occupies a significant place in Indian philosophical and strategic traditions, denoting coordination, harmonisation, and purposeful convergence among diverse elements. Unlike hierarchical control or rigid alignment, *samanvaya* implies balance, adjustment, and contextual integration. In strategic terms, it reflects an approach that values the alignment of means with circumstances rather than the pursuit of absolute dominance. This idea finds resonance in classical Indian thought, particularly in Kautilya's *Arthashastra*, which advocates pragmatic statecraft rooted in situational awareness, flexibility, and calibrated use of power. Kautilyan pragmatism does not prescribe fixed alliances or permanent enmities; instead, it emphasises adaptability, layered engagement, and the judicious combination of tools. Over time, this philosophical inclination has translated into a strategic culture marked by civilisational restraint and pluralism, where influence is pursued through accommodation and convergence rather than coercion or exclusion.

Coordination versus Accumulation of Power - At the core of the *Samanvaya* Doctrine lies a fundamental distinction between coordination and the accumulation of power. Traditional power-centric models tend to equate influence with the quantitative expansion of military or economic capabilities. Coordination, by contrast, is not the mere aggregation of assets but their deliberate orchestration to achieve effects greater than the sum of individual parts. It prioritises efficiency over scale, sequencing over simultaneity, and alignment over redundancy. For a state operating under resource constraints, such as India, coordination allows limited instruments to be deployed in mutually reinforcing ways—naval presence supporting trade flows, diplomacy amplifying economic engagement, and normative positioning enhancing strategic credibility. *Samanvaya* thus reframes power as a function of integration and timing rather than sheer magnitude.

Limits of Alliance-Centric and Coercive Models - The *Samanvaya* approach also emerges from the recognised limitations of dominant strategic models in the Indo-Pacific. Alliance-centric frameworks, while effective for collective defence, often suffer from structural rigidity, entanglement risks, and reduced strategic autonomy. They can constrain policy choices and impose obligations misaligned with national priorities. Conversely, coercive influence strategies—characterised by incremental pressure, economic leverage, or military intimidation—carry significant escalatory risks and tend to generate resistance, balancing behaviour, and legitimacy deficits. For a region as diverse and politically sensitive as the Indo-Pacific, such approaches can undermine long-term stability. *Samanvaya* offers an alternative path that avoids binding alliances and overt coercion, relying instead on flexible partnerships and coordinated signalling to shape outcomes.

India's Strategic Culture: Autonomy, Restraint, and Flexibility - India's strategic culture provides fertile ground for the *Samanvaya* Doctrine. Historically, India has sought to preserve strategic autonomy while engaging broadly with competing power centres. This has fostered a preference for restraint, patience, and calibrated assertiveness rather than rapid escalation or forceful dominance. India's foreign policy behaviour reflects a consistent emphasis on legitimacy, consent, and reassurance, particularly among smaller states (Bhatia et al.2024)ⁱⁱ. Flexibility remains central: partnerships are issue-based, commitments are adjustable, and responses are proportionate. *Samanvaya* codifies this cultural inclination into a coherent strategic logic, translating long-standing practices into a systematic framework for contemporary statecraft.

Analytical Framework and Theoretical Positioning - Analytically, the *Samanvaya* Doctrine intersects with, yet remains distinct from, established international relations theories. Realism highlights power and security but tends to privilege material accumulation and zero-sum competition. Liberal Institutionalism underscores cooperation and institutions, often assuming deeper economic integration than India is willing or able to pursue. Constructivism captures the role of norms and identity but offers limited guidance on operational strategy. *Samanvaya* integrates selective insights from each while departing from their core assumptions. It is best understood as a coordination-centric middle-power theory, where influence is generated through the

intentional alignment of diverse instruments under conditions of constraint. In doing so, it provides a theoretically grounded and context-sensitive lens to explain India's evolving role in the Indo-Pacific and beyond.

III. Resource Constraint as a Strategic Variable in Indian Foreign Policy

India's defence posture in the Indo-Pacific is shaped by persistent budgetary and capability constraints when viewed in comparative perspective. Although India remains among the world's top defence spenders in absolute terms, its expenditure as a proportion of GDP remains modest relative to major military powers operating in the region (Sasidhar, 2024)ⁱⁱⁱ. This fiscal reality limits large-scale force projection and sustained overseas deployments. Consequently, India has prioritised selective capability development—particularly in maritime surveillance, naval presence, and interoperability—over expansive power projection. Emphasis on exercises, access agreements, and capacity-building partnerships reflects a strategic choice to maximise operational impact without incurring the costs associated with permanent basing or alliance-driven commitments.

India's economic engagement with the Indo-Pacific further underscores the importance of constraint as a strategic variable. The region accounts for a substantial share of India's trade, energy imports, and supply-chain linkages, rendering maritime stability a critical national interest (Amrutrao, 2025)^{iv}. Dependence on seaborne commerce, especially for hydrocarbons and critical inputs, exposes India to vulnerabilities along key sea lines of communication. At the same time, India's cautious approach to deep trade integration and free trade agreements limits its ability to wield economic influence through market access alone. These conditions necessitate a strategy that secures economic interests indirectly through stability, reassurance, and coordination rather than overt economic coercion or dominance.

Diplomatically, India compensates for limited alliance depth with a broad and dense network of partnerships. Its foreign policy emphasises institutional engagement, dialogue mechanisms, and issue-based cooperation rather than formal security alliances. This results in high network density but relatively shallow binding commitments. Forums such as the Quad, ASEAN-led institutions, and various minilateral arrangements provide platforms for coordination without constraining autonomy (Leonova & Khatri, 2023)^v. India's diplomatic footprint thus reflects a preference for flexibility and reach over exclusivity, enabling it to remain engaged across competing strategic spaces while avoiding entanglement.

India's Indo-Pacific Defence Posture

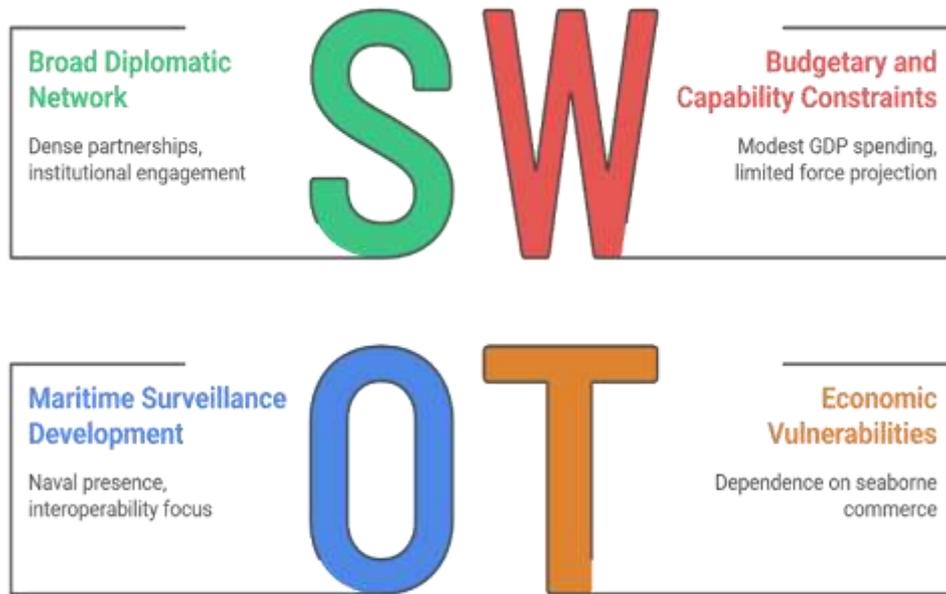


Figure 1: Defence posture of India in the Indo-Pacific

Taken together, these constraints generate a distinctive strategic logic in Indian foreign policy. Scarcity of resources discourages dominance-oriented strategies and incentivises coordination across military, economic, and diplomatic domains. Rather than being a liability, constraint functions as a catalyst for strategic innovation, encouraging India to seek leverage through alignment, sequencing, and convergence of instruments. The Samanvaya Doctrine emerges from this logic, transforming limitation into advantage by prioritising coherence over capacity and influence over intimidation. In this sense, resource constraint is not merely a background condition but a central driver of India’s coordinated approach to the Indo-Pacific.

IV. Military–Economic Samanvaya in the Indo-Pacific

Maritime security constitutes the central axis of India’s military–economic Samanvaya in the Indo-Pacific. India’s naval deployments increasingly align with critical Sea Lines of Communication that underpin its trade, energy imports, and supply chains. Rather than seeking persistent forward basing or dominance, India employs a pattern of presence through patrols, exercises, and coordinated maritime surveillance in the Indian Ocean and adjoining Indo-Pacific waters. This alignment reflects a strategic calculus in which naval activity is directly linked to economic exposure, reinforcing stability along routes vital to India’s commercial and strategic interests.

India’s pursuit of port access and logistics agreements exemplifies the dual-use logic of Samanvaya. Arrangements for reciprocal access, refuelling, and maintenance—often framed as logistical cooperation—serve both security and commercial objectives. These agreements enhance naval reach while simultaneously supporting trade connectivity, disaster response, and capacity building. By embedding military access within broader economic and infrastructural engagement, India reduces perceptions of militarisation and presents its presence as facilitative rather than coercive. This form of diplomacy allows security cooperation to enable commerce without provoking strategic anxiety among regional partners.

Maritime stability generated through India’s naval engagement functions as an indirect but significant economic signal. A predictable and secure maritime environment reassures investors, trading partners, and smaller coastal states whose economic lifelines depend on uninterrupted sea-borne flows. India’s emphasis on freedom of navigation, anti-piracy operations, and humanitarian assistance contributes to its image as a

stabilising actor. In this sense, security provision operates as a public good, enhancing India’s economic credibility and reinforcing its role as a responsible stakeholder in regional order.

From a quantitative perspective, correlations can be observed between the frequency of India’s naval exercises and engagement activities and the expansion of trade with Indo-Pacific partners. Increased participation in multilateral and bilateral maritime exercises coincides with deeper commercial interaction and logistical connectivity. Similarly, shipping volumes through maritime corridors where India maintains an active presence highlight the economic relevance of its security posture. While causality remains complex, these patterns suggest a reinforcing relationship between naval engagement and economic integration.

Qualitatively, naval diplomacy serves as a powerful tool of strategic communication within the Samanvaya framework. Port calls, joint patrols, and capacity-building initiatives convey intent without escalation, signalling commitment to stability rather than territorial assertion. Regional partners increasingly perceive India as a net security provider—one that enhances maritime order without imposing alignment or extracting concessions. This perception strengthens trust and facilitates deeper economic and diplomatic cooperation, demonstrating how military and economic instruments, when coordinated, can generate durable influence in the Indo-Pacific.

V. Diplomatic–Economic Samanvaya: Institutions and Partnerships

Within the Samanvaya framework, the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue functions less as an alliance and more as a platform for coordinated strategic signalling. The Quad reflects convergence among its members on key principles—maritime security, rule of law, and a free and open Indo-Pacific—without imposing formal defence obligations or collective security commitments. For India, this arrangement preserves strategic autonomy while enabling visible alignment with like-minded partners. The absence of treaty-based constraints allows flexibility in engagement, ensuring that cooperation remains issue-driven and adaptive rather than rigid or escalatory.

Table 1: Active Indo-Pacific Minilateral Groupings (2025)

Grouping Name	Member Composition	Primary Strategic Objective
The Quad	United States, India, Japan, Australia	Countering regional aggression, Provision of Public Goods, Maritime Domain Awareness
I2U2 Group	India, Israel, UAE, United States	Infrastructure development; Food and Energy Security; Economic cooperation
IMEC	India, UAE, Saudi Arabia, EU, United States	Trade corridor resilience: multi-state transit and logistics connectivity
IPMDA	Quad members + Regional partners	Public Goods; Maritime Domain Awareness (MDA); Tracking illegal maritime activity

India’s approach to ASEAN exemplifies its non-threatening institutional posture and commitment to regional reassurance. By consistently affirming ASEAN centrality, India positions itself as a supportive rather than revisionist actor. Economic engagement, connectivity initiatives, and capacity-building efforts are framed to complement existing ASEAN mechanisms rather than supplant them (Singh and Marwah, 2024)^{vi}. This approach reduces anxieties associated with great-power competition and reinforces India’s image as a stabilising presence. Within the Samanvaya logic, diplomatic reassurance and economic cooperation function together to deepen trust without compelling alignment.

Multilateralism occupies a central role in India’s diplomatic–economic coordination. Issue-based coalitions allow India to engage selectively with partners on specific concerns such as supply-chain resilience, maritime domain awareness, or humanitarian assistance (Kumar, 2024)^{vii}. This flexible diplomatic geometry avoids the costs and constraints of comprehensive alliances while enabling targeted cooperation. By calibrating participation according to interests and capacity, India maximises influence while maintaining manoeuvrability across a fragmented strategic landscape.

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue ("the Quad") has evolved from its 2004 ad-hoc coordination following the Indian Ocean Tsunami into the primary vehicle for senior-level U.S.-India strategic engagement. Its resilience as a market-stabilizing force was signaled in January 2025, when Secretary of State Marco Rubio met with Quad counterparts on his first day in office, underscoring the continuity of the partnership as a pillar of regional economic architecture.

Table 2: Comparative Assessment of Regional Initiatives

Framework	Strategic Focus	Operational Delivery	Economic Equity Impact
The Quad	Countering PRC aggression; maintaining a Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP).	Public goods delivery; shared airlift capacity; coordinated maritime patrols.	Acts as a "plurilateral anchor" to stabilize supply chains and secure critical/emerging technology via the Quad Investors Network (QUIN).
I2U2 Group	Middle East-India integration; stabilizing Western Indian Ocean equities.	Launching 2025 initiatives in regional resource management.	Targets direct FDI into energy and food security infrastructure to insulate regional markets from global price shocks.
IMEC	Strategic connectivity linking India, the Middle East, and Europe.	Multi-modal trade corridor development; infrastructure and maritime logistics.	Provides a critical alternative to existing commercial corridors, allowing for the diversification of sovereign risk for global trade.

The "activation" of these frameworks—moving from "talk shop" joint statements to the deployment of shared airlift capacity and maritime patrols—serves as a critical differentiator for regional investors. These assets improve the interoperability of maritime forces, which in turn reduces the risk profile of regional SLOCs. By transitioning to tangible operational delivery, these minilaterals attempt to de-risk the regional commons, although the efficacy of these measures remains tied to the quality of regional awareness.

Empirically, India’s diplomatic–economic Samanvaya is reflected in the growing number of joint initiatives, memoranda of understanding, and coordinated development and aid programmes across the Indo-Pacific. Patterns of aid disbursement often align with heightened diplomatic engagement, suggesting deliberate sequencing between economic outreach and political signalling. These indicators point towards an integrated approach in which diplomacy and economics reinforce each other rather than operate in isolation.

An examination of joint statements, policy documents, and elite discourse further substantiates the coordinated nature of India’s institutional engagement. Official texts emphasise inclusivity, partnership, and shared prosperity, avoiding language associated with bloc formation or confrontation. Elite commentary and regional policy narratives increasingly frame India as a bridge-builder and consensus-oriented actor. Together, these interpretive insights highlight how institutional participation functions as a key pillar of the Samanvaya Doctrine, enabling influence through coordination rather than compulsion.

VI. Soft Power as a Force Multiplier

Soft power occupies a central place within the Samanvaya Doctrine, functioning as a normative force multiplier that enhances the effectiveness of India's material capabilities. India's engagement in the Indo-Pacific consistently emphasises principles such as a rules-based order, freedom of navigation, peaceful dispute resolution, and inclusivity. Rather than seeking to impose norms, India positions itself as a facilitator and participant in collective norm-building processes. This approach resonates with regional states wary of coercive rule-making and reinforces India's image as a status quo-oriented actor committed to stability and openness. Norm entrepreneurship, in this sense, becomes a means of shaping expectations and behaviour without confrontation.

Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR) operations represent one of the most visible manifestations of normative Samanvaya. India's rapid responses to natural disasters in the Indian Ocean and broader Indo-Pacific have generated long-term strategic goodwill that extends beyond immediate relief outcomes. Disaster response functions as legitimacy-building in practice, demonstrating capability, reliability, and benign intent. These operations strengthen trust among recipient states and enhance India's standing as a dependable partner, reinforcing its broader strategic narrative of responsibility and restraint.

India's diaspora, cultural outreach, and educational engagement further embed its influence within regional societies. Cultural diplomacy, academic exchanges, and capacity-building initiatives cultivate familiarity and trust at societal levels, creating durable linkages that complement state-to-state relations. The presence of Indian communities across the Indo-Pacific facilitates informal networks of engagement, enhancing receptivity to India's strategic messaging (Tewari, 2026)^{viii}. Within the Samanvaya framework, such social embeddedness amplifies influence by aligning normative appeal with diplomatic and economic initiatives.

While soft power is inherently difficult to quantify, proxy indicators provide insight into India's normative reach. The frequency of HADR missions, the scale of training and educational programmes offered, and participation in regional norm-setting forums reflect the depth of India's engagement. Taken together, these indicators illustrate how normative instruments are systematically coordinated with military, economic, and diplomatic efforts. Soft power thus operates not as an adjunct but as an integral component of India's coordinated statecraft in the Indo-Pacific.

VII. Regional Reception of India's Coordinated Strategy

Across Southeast Asia, India is largely perceived as a reassuring and non-disruptive actor within an increasingly polarised Indo-Pacific. ASEAN states tend to view India's strategic engagement as complementary rather than competitive, particularly due to its consistent endorsement of ASEAN centrality and its avoidance of coercive posturing. India's emphasis on inclusivity, capacity building, and economic cooperation aligns with ASEAN's preference for autonomy and balance, enhancing its acceptability as a partner. Within this context, Samanvaya-style coordination reinforces India's credibility by coupling security engagement with diplomatic restraint.

Among Indian Ocean small states, India's coordinated strategy is often interpreted through the lens of proximity, historical ties, and developmental assistance. These states exhibit a preference for partnerships that enhance security and economic resilience without undermining sovereignty. India's approach—characterised by infrastructure support, maritime security cooperation, and humanitarian assistance—has generally been received as stabilising rather than intrusive. The absence of overt coercion and the emphasis on responsiveness during crises contribute to a perception of India as a first responder and trusted regional stakeholder.

Middle powers in the Indo-Pacific increasingly engage with India through issue-based alignment rather than comprehensive strategic alignment. This pattern reflects shared concerns over maritime security, supply-chain resilience, and regional stability, while allowing policy flexibility. India's willingness to cooperate across multiple formats and domains without demanding exclusive commitments enhances its appeal among states seeking strategic diversification. Samanvaya thus facilitates convergence without forcing alignment, enabling India to occupy a bridging role among diverse regional actors.

Regional think-tank assessments, media commentary, and elite policy discourse further illuminate the reception of India's strategy. India is frequently portrayed as a balancing presence that contributes to regional stability without exacerbating rivalry. Narratives emphasise reliability, moderation, and partnership rather than dominance. Collectively, these discursive patterns indicate that the Samanvaya Doctrine resonates with regional preferences, reinforcing India's influence through legitimacy and trust rather than compulsion.

VIII. Comparative Evaluation: Samanvaya versus Competing Strategic Models

The strategic approaches of China, the United States, and India in the Indo-Pacific reflect fundamentally different conceptions of power and influence. China's model is characterised by *salami slicing* and coercive integration, relying on incremental actions that cumulatively alter the status quo while remaining below the threshold of open conflict. The United States, by contrast, operates through an alliance-based hub-and-spokes system, anchored in formal security guarantees and forward military presence. India's Samanvaya Doctrine diverges from both models by privileging coordination over control, convergence over coercion, and flexibility over binding commitments. Rather than seeking dominance or deterrence through scale, Samanvaya aims to shape outcomes through the calibrated alignment of instruments.

A quantitative comparison highlights these differences in strategic orientation. China and the United States exhibit high ratios of military presence relative to economic dependence, reflecting strategies that prioritise deterrence and enforcement. India, by contrast, displays a lower military footprint relative to its economic exposure in the Indo-Pacific, indicating a reliance on stability and reassurance rather than force projection. Patterns of defence deployment, trade concentration, and institutional engagement suggest that India compensates for limited military presence by embedding security efforts within broader economic and diplomatic activity. This balance underscores the logic of Samanvaya as a resource-efficient strategy suited to conditions of constraint.

Qualitatively, crisis behaviour and escalation patterns further differentiate the three models. China's approach often involves calculated ambiguity and incremental pressure, increasing escalation risks and generating regional anxiety. The United States tends towards overt signalling and deterrence, backed by alliance commitments that can heighten crisis stakes. India's responses, by contrast, are typically characterised by strategic patience, calibrated assertiveness, and de-escalatory signalling. Risk tolerance remains comparatively low, with emphasis placed on legitimacy and regional reassurance. Through naval diplomacy, institutional engagement, and normative messaging, India signals resolve without provoking confrontation. This qualitative contrast reinforces the analytical claim that Samanvaya represents a distinct and viable strategic model, particularly for middle powers seeking influence without escalation in a contested regional order.

IX. Effectiveness and Limitations of the Samanvaya Doctrine

The effectiveness of the Samanvaya Doctrine depends on a set of enabling conditions that allow coordination to translate into influence. First, issue alignment between India and its partners is essential; convergence is most effective when interests overlap without requiring formal alignment. Second, trust—built through consistency, transparency, and delivery—forms the foundation of coordinated statecraft. Finally, institutional support, both domestic and international, provides the mechanisms through which coordination can be sustained over time. Where these conditions are present, Samanvaya allows India to generate strategic effects disproportionate to its material capabilities.

Despite its advantages, the Samanvaya approach is not immune to breakdown. Coordination failures can emerge from inter-agency fragmentation, where misalignment between diplomatic, military, and economic institutions weakens coherence. External shocks—such as sudden crises, great-power escalation, or economic disruptions—may also overwhelm the incremental and consensus-based logic of coordination. In such contexts, the absence of binding commitments or rapid decision-making structures can limit responsiveness and reduce strategic effectiveness.

A further limitation lies in the risk of under-commitment. Excessive caution or ambiguity, while preserving flexibility, may dilute signalling and reduce deterrent credibility. Partners may interpret restrained engagement as hesitancy, particularly in high-risk scenarios requiring visible commitment. Strategic ambiguity, if not carefully calibrated, can therefore undermine confidence and invite misperception. The challenge for Samanvaya lies in balancing restraint with clarity, ensuring that coordination does not slip into indecision.

X. Policy Implications: Scaling the Indian Platter

For Samanvaya to function as a scalable strategic doctrine, India must first consolidate coordination at home. Effective external coordination is contingent upon internal coherence among the Ministry of External Affairs, the Ministry of Defence, economic ministries, and implementing agencies. Institutionalised mechanisms for joint planning, shared threat assessment, and synchronised execution are essential. Moving from personality-driven coordination to process-driven integration would enhance continuity and reduce fragmentation, particularly during crises or leadership transitions.

India's strategic toolkit is broad but unevenly leveraged. Policy emphasis should therefore shift toward prioritizing instruments that generate the highest multiplier effects when deployed together. Diplomatic signalling, development assistance, capacity-building, and selective security cooperation should be sequenced rather than pursued in isolation. Such calibrated bundling enables India to project influence without overextension, reinforcing its image as a reliable yet non-coercive partner. Strategic synergy, rather than sheer resource expansion, remains the central logic of the Samanvaya approach.

The logic of Samanvaya is not geographically confined to the Indo-Pacific. In regions such as Africa, West Asia, and the broader Global South, where states often resist binary alignments, coordinated and issue-based engagement holds particular appeal. Applying the model in these contexts would involve adapting to local political economies, prioritising development and capacity-building, and leveraging historical goodwill and diaspora linkages. If carefully localised, Samanvaya could evolve into a distinctive Indian contribution to global statecraft—one that offers coordination without coercion and partnership without dominance.

XI. Conclusion

This study reassesses conventional understandings of power by situating Indian strategy within an international environment marked by constrained capabilities and heightened systemic uncertainty. Rather than interpreting material limitations as a strategic weakness, the paper demonstrates how constraint can operate as a structuring condition that shapes more coordinated, selective, and sustainable forms of influence.

The Samanvaya doctrine emerges as India's distinct contribution to strategic theory, offering an alternative to dominance-based and alliance-centric models. By integrating military restraint, economic engagement, diplomatic flexibility, and normative signalling, Samanvaya reframes power as the capacity to align instruments and partners without provoking escalation or dependency. It underscores coordination, not coercion, as the central mechanism of effective strategy under conditions of asymmetry.

Beyond the Indian case, the findings carry broader implications for middle powers navigating a multipolar order. Samanvaya illustrates how states with limited resources can remain strategically consequential by privileging adaptability, legitimacy, and institutional embeddedness. In doing so, it provides a conceptual framework for understanding how influence can be accumulated through alignment and trust rather than through scale alone.

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