FINS JOURNAL

OF DIPLOMACY & STRATEGY

राष्ट्र रक्षा बहुश्रुती

FINS

Initiate Interact Influence

Forum for Integrated National Security

July – Sept. 2026 | Issue No. 03 Vol. 9 | ISSN 2581-6586

Editorial: Empowered Global South – India's Aspirations and Contributions–Adv. S. N. Desai	02
Geo-Economic Cooperation in India–South Korea Relations – Dr. Sutandra Singha	07
BRICS Role in Counter Terrorism and its Impact on Security – Julia Jose	13
Analysing the Iranian Nuclear Programme, the Lacunae in Multilateral Arrangements and the need to Strengthen Disarmament Frameworks – Yash Swar	20
China's Military Purges and its Strategic and Operational Relevance – Balaji Chandramohan	32
Erosion of the Rules- Based International Order: Transition to a Law of Power – Dr. Navashikha Duara	38
Maritime Connectivity and Security in the Indo-Pacific 2.0 – Dr Madhukar Shyam and Manya Singhal	51
Critical Minerals in India - Import Dependency to Strategic Autonomy, National Security and Defence Preparedness – Prof. Pradeep V. Kamat and Dr. Neela Kamat	55
India's Engagement with Taliban 2.O led Afghanistan – Aniruddha Phadke	72

Editorial: Empowered Global South – India's Aspirations and Contributions

Global South refers to countries that are described as "developing", "less developed" or "underdeveloped", many of these are in Southern Hemisphere, largely in Africa, Asia, Latin America and the Caribbean. They are poorer, have higher levels of income inequality and suffer lower life expectancy and harsher living conditions than countries in "Global North" — richer nations located mostly in North America and Europe. The term "Global South" is not geographical. Global South's two largest countries – China and India – lie entirely in Northern Hemisphere. Global South countries share common history of colonialism, economic dependency, and socio-political struggles and face substantial developmental challenges. Global South concept transcends geographical boundaries; it encapsulates critique of global inequalities, power imbalances, highlighting shared experiences of underdevelopment, colonial exploitation, and ongoing struggles for economic and political autonomy. Socially, these countries face substantial disparities in wealth distribution, educational attainment, and access to healthcare. Politically, many Global South nations contend with challenges related to governance, corruption, and internal conflicts, with autocratic regimes complicating their development trajectories. This framework is crucial for understanding contemporary global dynamics, particularly in terms of trade, economic policies, and diplomatic relations.

Global South is now key driver of global economic growth. According to International Monetary Fund (IMF), developing economies accounted for over 60% of global GDP growth in past decade. While, some countries like China and India have undergone remarkable economic transformations, contributing to global economic dynamism and shifting centre of economic gravity toward the South, others remain dependent on agriculture and natural resource exports. World Bank's data shows that East Asia and Pacific region, driven by China's growth, had average annual GDP growth rate of 6.3% from 2010 to 2020. In contrast, Sub-Saharan Africa's growth rate was 3.1% during same period, reflecting disparities within Global South. Global South also plays crucial role in global energy landscape due to its abundant natural resources. Countries like Saudi Arabia, Nigeria, and Venezuela are major oil producers, while Brazil and Indonesia are significant exporters of biofuels and natural gas. Global South is home to majority of world's population, with significant demographic expansion implications for global politics and economics. According to United Nations, Africa's population is projected to double by 2050, reaching 2.5 billion. South Asia, particularly India, is expected to experience substantial population growth, making it world's most populous region. Emerging economies have become major players in global trade networks, contributing to diversification of trade flows. According to World Trade Organization (WTO), developing countries' share of global merchandise exports increased from 28% in 2000 to 43% in 2020.

Future Potential and Risks

The potential for economic development in Global South is significant. With continued investments in infrastructure, technology, and human capital, Global South can achieve sustained economic growth and poverty reduction. Diversifying economies, enhancing trade, and fostering innovation are key strategies for unlocking this potential. Technological innovation is critical driver of development in Global South. Promoting innovation ecosystems, enhancing digital literacy, and addressing digital divides help leverage this technological potential. Political instability remains significant risk for Global South. Governance challenges, corruption, and internal conflicts can undermine development efforts and regional stability. Strengthening democratic institutions, promoting good governance, and addressing root causes of conflict are crucial for mitigating these risks. Climate change poses threat to Global South, exacerbating vulnerabilities and endangering livelihoods. The region is particularly susceptible to climate-related impacts such as extreme weather events, rising sea levels, and resource scarcity. Investing in climate resilience, sustainable development, and international cooperation is vital for addressing this challenge. Inequality and poverty remain challenges in Global South. Addressing inequality through inclusive policies, social protection programs, and equitable access to resources is essential for fostering social cohesion.

Global South's role in international relations is multifaceted and critical to evolving global order. Traditionally viewed through lens of economic underdevelopment and political marginalization, Global South now finds itself at forefront of global economic growth, geopolitical strategies, and redefinition of global governance structures. Economic landscape of Global South is marked by stark disparities both within and between countries. While some nations, such as China and India, have leveraged globalization to achieve rapid economic growth, others remain trapped in cycles of poverty and conflict, exacerbated by poor infrastructure, inadequate healthcare, and limited educational opportunities. Global South faces significant challenges, including governance issues, corruption, and internal conflicts, many of which are legacies of colonial rule. Rise of regional organizations such as BRICS, ASEAN, and African Union reflects collective effort to assert greater autonomy and influence in global affairs. These organizations are instrumental in promoting economic cooperation, conflict resolution, and pursuit of multipolar world order that better reflects interests and aspirations of Global South countries. Economic development and technological innovation offer promising avenues for growth and poverty reduction, but these gains must be carefully managed to ensure they are inclusive and sustainable. Political instability, climate change, and inequality remain major threats that could undermine progress made in recent decades. Addressing these challenges will require concerted efforts at national and regional levels, supported by reformed global governance system that is more equitable and responsive to needs of developing countries. Global South is not merely a passive participant in global order but an active agent with potential to reshape international relations in profound ways. By asserting their collective influence, strengthening regional cooperation, and advocating for more just and inclusive global system, countries of Global South can play pivotal role in shaping future that is more balanced, equitable, and sustainable.

The World Today

Last few years have witnessed devastating impact of major conflicts, volatility in trade and investment flows, extreme climate events, and slowing down of SDG Agenda, having consequences for global order, causing global uncertainty and risk to global economy and particularly for Global South, as seen in geopolitical tensions, conflicts, disruption of supply chains, increasing trade barriers, fragmented investment flows, climate shocks. Global South today may be in front row of global crises, but is in back row of decision-making. For Global South, there has never been a moment as critical as right now for solidarity.

India and Global South

India's relationship with Global South has deep roots in shared histories, common struggles, and mutual aspirations for development and self-reliance. As one of largest countries in Global South, India's role has evolved from being a leader in Non-Aligned Movement (NAM) to becoming a pivotal player in contemporary South-South cooperation. During its G20 presidency, India positioned itself as a bridge between developed and developing worlds. India's partnership with Global South was propelled to whole new level by Prime Minister Narendra Modi when he organized first Voice of Global South Summit (VOGSS) on 12-13th January, 2023 within fortnight of India taking over Presidency of G20, to focus international attention on priorities, perspectives and concerns of developing world, which was attended by 125 countries. Prime Minister Modi presided over Inaugural and Concluding Leaders' sessions. India was able to channelize inputs received in these sessions into deliberations and discourse of G20. VOGSS is India's endeavour to provide a common platform for emerging economies and nations from Global South to deliberate on concerns, interests and priorities of developing countries, exchange ideas and solutions, and unite in voice and purpose in forging development solutions. If the summit demonstrated India's commitment to engage Global South not as a passive recipient of aid or policy prescriptions, but as an active and indispensable partner to reshape global agenda, it also highlighted New Delhi skilfully using its historical legacy for positioning itself as leader in current context. The G20 was also political opportunity to display material developments and social transformation as evidence of what India had internally achieved. India showcased itself as an alternative partner of engagement. India adopted slogan of "Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam" (one earth, one family, one future) for G20 Summit, and carefully constructed image and positioned Brand India against other Asian giant, as an inclusive and non-confrontational leader. Following on success of first VOGSS, India hosted 2nd VOGSS on 17 November 2023, under theme – 'Together, For Everyone's Growth, With Everyone's Trust'. Both editions of VOGSS saw participation of over 100 countries from Global South. 3rd VOGSS in August 2024 with theme of 'An Empowered Global South for a Sustainable Future',

served as platform to expand discussions held in previous Summits on range of complex challenges that continue to affect the world, such as conflicts, food and energy security crises, climate change, debt burdens - all of which disproportionately affect developing countries in severe manner. At VOGSS, countries of Global South deliberated on challenges, priorities, and solutions for Global South, particularly in developmental domain. VOGSS witnessed participation of 173 dignitaries from 123 countries, including 21 Heads of State / Government, 34 Foreign Ministers and 118 Ministers and Vice Ministers. This was testimony to India's sincerity and commitment in advancing collective developmental journey of Global South. The three summits have been strongly projected by New Delhi to showcase its convening power and participation of leaders has been used to strengthen its credentials to lead Global South. India has consciously sought to strengthen ties with Global South countries as strategy to balance and hedge against influence and rise of other emerging powers.

India's vision for leadership of Global South is rooted in a profound understanding of changing geopolitical landscape, shaped by mix of political ideas, economic necessities and strategic considerations. India's aspiration for Global South Leadership emanates from an enduring commitment to self-determination, multilateralism, and quest for more equitable global order. In a rapidly evolving geopolitical contested arena, India has consciously sought to strengthen ties with Global South countries as strategy to balance and hedge against influence and rise of other emerging powers. This quest for leadership has been buoyed with a robust economy that in 2025 is 5th largest in the world, giving it more confidence in projecting its claims. This leadership role offers India a platform to consolidate its strategic autonomy and emerge beyond category of being merely a swing state in growing geopolitical contestation. India's foreign policy has evolved into adopting strategic autonomy and multi-alignment while offering developing nations an alternative from rigidities of great power blocs. By projecting itself as a "Vishwa Bandhu" (friend of the world), India seeks to strengthen the collective voice and ensure equitable representation for developing countries in global arena. Global South constitutes 85 percent of world population and contributes nearly 40 percent of world GDP. Leadership of such a large group would be an asset to any foreign policy, and this was visible during India's G20 presidency in 2023, where it served as crucial platform to operationalise this vision. Due to consistent efforts of New Delhi, G20 was expanded to include African Union as a permanent member and it was evidence of India's strong interest convergence with advocacy.

Revisioning South- South Economic Cooperation

India's economic vision for Global South is underpinned by shared understanding of development challenges and commitment to enhancing South-South Cooperation. The rapid growth of Indian economy in last few decades, racing ahead from 10th largest economy in 2014 to 5th largest in 2025, and technological breakthrough along with enhancement of digital public infrastructure, has brought a new dimension to its foreign policy engagement reflected also in its development and economic activities with countries of Global South. In a major support to Global South countries during the Covid-19 pandemic, India showed leadership in global public health and undertook "Vaccine Maitri" (vaccine friendship) and supplied Indian developed and produced vaccine to countries in Africa at much affordable price, while West displayed vaccine nationalism. Its development cooperation initiatives now encompass areas of infrastructure development and connectivity and also promoting renewable energy solutions through International Solar Alliance. India's remarkable success in using technology in designing digital public infrastructure has contributed to financial inclusion, efficiency in service delivery, innovation and connectivity within the country. Actively promoted by India as a tool for socio-economic upliftment and empowerment, it has been adopted by six African countries (Ethiopia, Morocco, Angola, Sierra Leone, Guinea and Zambia), while Rwanda and Ghana are in discussion to implement similar payment platforms. This cost-effective model of digital connectivity can be viewed as a third way towards creating a digital non-alignment. India has increased investment in building maritime infrastructure, sharing maritime domain knowledge and Africa-India Key Maritime Engagement (AIKEYME) in April this year, a large-scale multilateral maritime exercise having 11 countries co-hosted with Tanzania, signalled intentionality to claim leadership and expand benefits to partner African countries.

India's economic cooperation with Global South is characterized by trade, investment, and development assistance. Trade relations have seen substantial growth, particularly with African and Latin American countries.

For instance, India's trade with Africa surged from $5 billion in 2001 to $90 billion in 2020, making India Africa's third-largest trading partner. Similarly, India's trade with Latin America reached $50 billion in 2020, driven by oil imports, and exports of pharmaceuticals, automobiles, and engineering goods. Investment is another critical aspect of India's economic engagement. Indian companies have made significant investments in sectors such as telecommunications, pharmaceuticals, agriculture, and mining across Global South. In Africa, Indian enterprises have invested over $50 billion, creating jobs and contributing to infrastructure development. In Latin America, Indian investments in IT and renewable energy sectors are on rise, promoting sustainable development. India's development assistance programs underscore its role as a partner in progress. Through Indian Technical and Economic Cooperation (ITEC) program, India has provided training, capacity building, and technical assistance to over 160 countries in wide range of areas, thereby contributing to human resource development in Global South. 600 major Indian development projects in 78 nations, testify to India's commitment, African nations and Small Island Developing States, have been India's preferred partners in this journey. Initiatives like International Solar Alliance, Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure, or Global Biofuels Alliance are all making steady progress. Global South faces a 4F crisis – of security of food, fuel, fertilizer and finance. The combined impact of Super El Nino, compounding fertilizer shortages and now impediments to grain movements, all these are cause for alarm. SDG progress is under increasing pressure. In turbulent times, India has sent medical shipments to conflict zones, epidemic locations, and after natural disasters. As first responder, India was there, be it Nepal flash floods or Venezuela earthquake. India's limb fitment camps, have given new hope to many in Global South as have its capacity-building, experience-sharing programs, made real difference across Global South.

Who leads Global South?

The Global South is not a formal bloc; there is no agreement or an organising secretariat. But some countries are taking more prominent role than others. India is one of leading proponents of Global South. India hosted two Voice of Global South summits in 2023, to "share their perspectives and priorities on a common platform". China has launched "concerted campaign to present itself as natural leader for developing world". South Africa has "sought to position itself as a leading voice of the global south". India has adopted a nuanced approach to countries of Global South that seeks to empower and not dominate, to collaborate and not dictate and to create an inclusive network and not offer competing polarised blocs. In an age of growing geopolitical and geo-economic contestation, with major powers trying to exert influence and act unilaterally, India offers an alternate model based on a historical perspective of collective action. The ability to convert engagement to growing influence and political preference on part of leadership of various south countries has been better played by China. If India seeks to represent collective interest of Global South, it needs to show more evidence of inclusion of the south in its activities by investing more in deliverable results. India's biggest challenge is matching Chinese scale and size of economic investment. There is direct and indirect contestation based on capacity, political engagement and material power between India and China for role of leading Global South. Compared to China, Indian capacity for development support has been limited in both scale and size. China's Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), is global endeavour in terms of number of countries, projects and capital invested by Beijing since 2013 to scale up infrastructure development. BRI has enabled China to project power and wield influence at a level far beyond financial and political reach of India. Designed to deliver large scale infrastructure projects, these are also catalysts for major economic instability. Many African countries including Angola, Congo, Ethiopia, Kenya, Nigeria and Sudan have become overstretched by their economic commitments in BRI. Chinese projects have been characterised by opaque financial terms and immense debt obligations, leading to dire economic crises for participating states, who have been confronted by compromised economic sovereignty and long-term economic instability. In contrast to China, India's success in field of economic diplomacy has been limited. Indian private sector's projects and investments are no match to Chinese economic engagement. India needs to scale up with speed and with technology for enhancing more meaningful economic cooperation at South-South level. Contestations are not only between India and China for leadership, but also in other regions of Global South. As G20 Summit moved from India to Brazil and South Africa, one can observe similar claims to leadership for their respective regions if not for entire Global South. There are many claimants to Global South leadership and there is no clear, defined one leader.

Key Priorities for Joint Consideration by Global South Countries

External Affairs Minister (EAM) Dr. S. Jaishankar while addressing High-level ministerial meeting of Global South Countries on sidelines of 81st UN General Assembly in New York on 22nd September 2026 called for greater cooperation among Global South countries to address rising geopolitical tensions, economic challenges, climate shocks and pressures on multilateral system, listing out key priorities that merit joint consideration:

- Transformation being brought about by Artificial Intelligence must not create new divides.
- Energy security is at heart of development. Availability and prices should not be manipulated for political ends.
- Food security is a common goal and we must swiftly address challenges in that regard, particularly supply of grains and fertilizers.
- Ensuring fair economic and trade practices which enhance our production capabilities and to not reduce us to be mere consumers. Our right to industrialize must not be denied.
- The maritime commons must be secured, international law observed, and safety and security of seafarers and commercial shipping guaranteed.
- Global South needs to be part of decision-making structures that deliberate on issues that directly pertain our future.

EAM also suggested some points for consideration:

- Use India's existing platforms to highlight concerns of Global South, with a view to ensure our concerns do not get deprioritized
- Closer economic cooperation among Global South is necessary to buffer us against the fallout of overlapping global crises
- On Artificial Intelligence, we could share indigenously developed tools and frameworks for benefit of Global South members, and ensure that AI remains human-centric
- Rather than relying solely on Global North, frameworks such as International Solar Alliance (ISA) and Coalition for Disaster Resilient Infrastructure (CDRI) and others could bring about much needed progress on climate action
- Reform of United Nations and multilateralism is essential to address priorities of Global South

India's pursuit of leadership in Global South is anchored in its historical experience of non-alignment and its growing economic weight, using these to strengthen strategic autonomy and advance a multipolar order aligned with its values and interests. Through sustained cooperation, mutual respect, and shared aspirations, India and Global South can collectively navigate challenges and opportunities of 21st century.

Articles in this edition examine various dimensions of Diplomacy and Security related issues. Views of authors will help in instilling the subjects and topics in minds of readers.

Editorial Board

Adv. S. N. Desai – Editor in Chief
Prof. Pradeep Kamat – Executive Editor
Lt. Gen. (Dr.) D. B. Shekatkar
Dr. Seshadri Chari
Prof. Dr. Uttara Sahasrabudhe
Prof. Dr. Shrikant Paranjpe
Lt Gen V. G. Khandare
Shri. V Balachandran
Shri. R. Chandrashekhar
Dr. Samudra Gupta Kashyap

Geo-Economic Cooperation in India–South Korea Relations

Abstract

India and South Korea have become significant stakeholders in the Indo-Pacific's developing geo-economic architecture. Despite two decades of relations, the two countries have advanced beyond classic diplomatic relations and are in closer contact on trade, industrial cooperation, investment, technology exchanges, and new issues like supply chain management. South Korea's advanced technological and industrial base works for India's large domestic economy, yet the potential for partnership remains unfulfilled. This paper probes the structural opportunities, long-standing constraints, and strategic pathways of the two countries' geo-economic cooperation. There is a high strategic convergence, but the profound economic integration requires institutional reforms, regulatory convergence, digital innovation, and financing facilities.

Keywords: India, South Korea, geo-economics, Indo-Pacific, trade, technology, supply chains

1. Introduction

Geo-economics has been recognised as a major tool in world politics, treating the economy to secure strategic goals (Blackwill & Harris, 2016). In contrast to geopolitics, where military power is the chief focus, geo-economics focuses on trade, investment, finance, and technology as instruments of statecraft. This change can also be observed in the Indo-Pacific: while on one side economic bonds are strengthening, on the other side the geopolitical rivalry intensifies (Pant & Rej, 2018).

India and South Korea are important actors in the new regional setting. And the trans-Pacific relationship is orienting their bilateral relationship toward a new landmark after an established special strategic partnership. India's Act East Policy and South Korea's New Southern Policy serve as frameworks supporting each other so as to deepen economic ties, improve connectivity, and strengthen the diversification of strategic partnerships (MEA, 2020; Chung, 2020). Both nations aim to diversify their economic partnership and, at the same time, expand their regional footprint.

However, the economic aspect of the relationship has not yet reached its full potential. The volume of trade between India and South Korea is still modest, and cooperation has been quite successful only in a few sectors, such as the automotive and electronics sectors. The institutional coordination arrangements remain weak, and regulatory impediments still make deep integration difficult. These challenges highlight a persistent gap between strategic plans and economic outcomes.

This study fills the gap by examining how structural, institutional, and economic forces shape India–South Korea's geo-economic ties, particularly when policy alignment fails without real institutional capacity. Deeper integration hinges on more than shared goals, and it requires real regulatory coordination, innovation channels, and competent institutions that operate efficiently.

2. Methodology

This study applies a qualitative analytical perspective on India–South Korea geo-economic cooperation by considering the four dimensions interrelatedly: policy alignment, technological complementarity, institutional coordination, and financial structures. It uses a set of secondary data sources such as official documents, reports from international organisations, policy papers, and other related academic literature in this context. Based on these four indicators, major prospects and challenges at the level of trade investment supply-chain cooperation, technology partnership and institutional engagement between India and South Korea are identified.

3. Conceptual Framework of Geo-Economics

'Geo-economics' refers to the strategic application of economic instruments to shape global politics and enhance national power (Luttwak, 1990). Geo-economics influences how nations build power through markets, not just military strength. It is rooted in trade rules, financial decisions, tech control, and industry plans. Today, its reach is greater than ever due to supply chain stability, data ownership, and economic security (Farrell & Newman, 2019).

India's manufacturing growth comes from innovation and digital networks. The government launched programmes like Make in India and Production Linked Incentive to create supply chains and connect with global markets (NITI Aayog, 2021). With millions of workers joining the workforce, there is a growing demand for goods and services.

Domination of 'chaebols', big business conglomerates, in the fields of semiconductors, electronics, and automobiles (Amsden, 1989), and the continuous high investment of R&D (research and development) allow these companies to keep themselves in the forefront of technology, adapting to global challenges. For now, their focus on high-value outputs maintains their status as global performers. State guidance and individual aspiration work together towards steady progress. Constant pressure to be innovative and adapt keeps South Korea at the forefront of technology.

This study adopts an analytical framework based on four interrelated dimensions: policy alignment, technological complementarity, institutional coordination, and financial structures. Policy alignment refers to the extent to which the two countries' economic and strategic priorities support deeper bilateral cooperation. Technological complementarity considers the scope for combining South Korea's technological and industrial capabilities with India's expanding market, manufacturing base, and human capital. Institutional coordination examines the capacity of bilateral and domestic institutions to translate policy commitments into effective implementation. Financial structures assess the availability and effectiveness of investment, financing, and risk-sharing mechanisms required to support large-scale economic and industrial cooperation. These four dimensions provide the analytical basis for examining the opportunities and constraints discussed in the following sections.

4. Trade and Investment Dynamics

Bilateral trade remains skewed towards South Korea's high-tech outputs. India imports high-tech goods (cars, electronics, and machinery) from South Korea, as India continues to face gaps in selected advanced manufacturing capabilities and supply-chain ecosystems, particularly in technology-intensive sectors (KOTRA, 2023).

South Korean conglomerates, including Samsung and LG, are very influential in India's manufacturing industries. Apart from creating vast employment opportunities, they have also brought in state-of-the-art technologies. Thus, India has become an attractive location for South Korean companies to produce their goods. On the other hand, marketing Indian products to Korean buyers is a significant challenge for Indian enterprises, as they have to follow many regulations and still meet a high level of quality for the product. This is more difficult for small companies, as they do not have enough finance and expertise required to meet the standards of South Korea (WTO, 2022).

The dynamics of global supply chains shape the interaction of India and South Korea. For South Korea, India remains a promising frontier, with high growth potential and an ever-expanding consumer base. The push for greater economic stability has led both countries to evaluate how they depend on foreign markets and look toward partnerships with foreign nations.

India is trying to improve its manufacturing by working with South Korea. However, India still has trade deficits that point to gaps in how trade rules are set up and enforced (Lee & Park, 2019). With stronger backing for export firms and clearer alignment on product standards, trade flows can become smoother and more reliable.

The pattern of cooperation so far must be differentiated from the overall scope for deeper future integration. India and South Korea have already developed complementary capabilities in manufacturing, technology, logistics, and consumer services, but these alone do not ensure integrated supply chains. For these to materialise, issues of investment in infrastructure, regulatory convergence, customs procedures, and institutional coordination must be overcome. For this reason, sectors like electronics, auto components, green energy systems, and pharmaceuticals should be regarded as categories where there is scope for better cooperation rather than as indicators of fully integrated bilateral production networks.

5. Supply Chain Cooperation and Industrial Integration

Supply chains are still weak, despite attempts to improve them (Gereffi, 2020). This is because many countries rely heavily on one place for production. India and South Korea both believe in decentralisation of manufacturing.

In India, large numbers of workers and rising consumer demand offer strong foundations. India's location near important seaway routes undoubtedly facilitates the transportation of certain commodities. Meanwhile, South Korea brings precision engineering skills, shaping assembly methods and providing extensive experience in the international markets. Their collaboration could shape new flows in electronics parts, car components, green energy systems, and medicines (UNCTAD, 2022).

Often, the infrastructure of roads and ports is inadequate for current needs, which stalls operations. In India, transport delays are a problem that increases logistics costs. The regulations vary throughout different regions. Customs delays are unpredictable (World Bank, 2023). The certification procedures are also inconsistent, and this creates trouble for some industries that need to move goods across borders; they must make changes first.

In order to achieve success, reforms should be carried out simultaneously. Governments need to agree on clearer rules early on. Building better highways and port links will help move goods faster. Digital tools that are interoperable across different travel documents and areas can make the border-checking process more efficient.

Shipping using blockchain records has already been implemented in South Korean ports to show how digital tools can make logistics more efficient. Regional agreements between Asia's leading economies can make way for such cross-border innovations, especially on multi-nation trade routes. Both India and South Korea emphasise a reliable transport system and a stable supply network across the Indo-Pacific.

By harnessing digital tools such as data analytics, companies can detect potential delays even before they occur. Cutting down uncertainty on the ground, and for better or worse, shared systems help align supplier schedules and reduce disputes. This kind of coordination supports longer-term integration into global production cycles (Park, 2022).

6. Technology and Innovation Cooperation

South Korea is already having an impact on trade in the region because of its semiconductor exports. The expertise in the field of high technology, mainly in intelligence and manufacturing, gives a competitive advantage to both South Korea and India. This is particularly true as India endeavours to enhance its infrastructure (Kim, 2021).

Bengaluru and Seoul startups are partnering actively through two-way R&D collaborations. India's massive talent pool makes scale an advantage (Korean innovations are transformed into marketable products). However, data-sharing rules vary widely from country to country. It makes joint efforts difficult, so concerns over IP theft and ever-changing rules and regulations hold companies back (WIPO, 2022).

Joint grants for tech projects can build more trust between institutions. Industry-academia ties would help test new approaches without massive upfront risks. South Korea's track record in turning research into market-ready products gives an edge to innovation pipelines. India's vast base of engineers and IT talent fuels meaningful co-development across borders. Labs and factories offer hands-on learning that shapes global supply chain strategies.

Joint training, shared courses, and links between universities and industries deepen cross-country knowledge exchange. A clear regulatory setup helps startups grow fast, pushing new tech partnerships forward. Stable rules allow ideas to spread quickly (Kim, 2021). Therefore, when students study abroad, they return with innovative ideas to their home countries.

7. Financial and Institutional Constraints

Financial and institutional limitations, in particular, are still major obstacles to boosting India–South Korea cooperation. Large-scale infrastructure and industrial projects usually entail considerable investment and long-term financial support. However, the financial structure is scattered and inefficient (ADB, 2021).

Developing joint investment platforms, sovereign partnerships, and blended finance models can increase resource mobilisation. Besides that, public-private partnerships will be able to support infrastructure development in a major way. Coordination within institutions is just as critical. Despite agreements being in place, their implementation is often inconsistent and ineffective (MEA, 2020). Lack of integrated cooperation among government departments and lack of monitoring mechanisms make policy measures less efficient.

To strengthen frameworks, setting up dedicated coordination bodies can help. Conducting policy dialogues and establishing effective monitoring systems can also improve governance and build investor confidence. Being transparent and accountable are factors for long-term cooperation.

A resilient regulatory system, transparent and consistent procedures, and resolution of disputes are crucial for investors. However, unreliable and uncoordinated policy enforcement will have a negative effect on investors in the long term and further negatively affect the bilateral agreement. Strengthening the governance system and coordination mechanisms of the concerned institutions is also essential in boosting investor confidence. The introduction of infrastructure funds and the issuance of green bonds can help undertake large infrastructure projects, leading to sustained development.

8. Strategic and Regional Implications

India–South Korea geo-economic cooperation has significant implications in the Indo-Pacific region. This collaboration can make the global supply networks more robust and varied. Diversification of the supply chain alongside the reduction of dependence on a few economic hubs could enable both nations to boost their economic security and stability.

The partnership also illustrates the potential for cooperation between an advanced middle power and an emerging economy. The two countries can achieve economic growth and strengthen regional economic integration by using South Korea’s tech innovation and India’s big consumer market.

Collaboration in digital governance, green technology, and advanced manufacturing will make these areas more competitive worldwide. Their engagement will also influence regional economic governance mechanisms and ensure inclusive growth. Furthermore, the India–South Korea relations must be assessed in the context of the changing global economic governance system. As two middle powers, they are in a position to influence the establishment of regional standards as well as contribute to the creation of rule-based economic systems.

Partnership between India and South Korea for the Indo-Pacific would be crucial for fair trade, sustainable development and inclusive growth. Converging on their economic strategies and engaging more vigorously in multilateral forums, India and South Korea can strengthen their position collectively and ensure global economic stability at the same time (Pant, 2019). This wider strategic aspect underlines the importance of strengthening bilateral ties.

9. Policy Recommendations

India and South Korea can take full advantage of geo-economic cooperation only if that cooperation is backed by policy measures. To begin with, regulatory harmonisation should be the main focus in order to minimise trade barriers and enhance the ease of doing business. Infrastructure building and logistics upgrading will be the key factors in the efficient integration of supply chains.

Innovation partnerships can also be deepened through joint research, technology sharing, and organising startup collaborations. However, financial cooperation should also be expanded through aligning investment mechanisms and creating risk-sharing models. Last but not least, the institutional frameworks need to be bolstered so as to pave the way for more effective implementation of the agreements and policy co-ordination on a continuous basis.

10. Conclusion

India–South Korea geo-economic cooperation has significant potential, but strategic convergence alone has not produced deeper economic integration. South Korea's technological and industrial capabilities complement India's large market, expanding the manufacturing base and human resources, creating opportunities in trade, investment, technology, supply chains, and emerging industries.

The study identifies four key conditions shaping this cooperation: policy alignment, technological complementarity, institutional coordination, and financial structures. However, policy divergence, institutional inadequacies, and financing constraints can limit the depth and effectiveness of such cooperation.

Deeper cooperation therefore requires stronger regulatory coordination, institutional mechanisms, technology partnerships, and financial instruments. The extent of future cooperation will depend on translating strategic objectives into effective institutions, technological cooperation, and sustainable financing.

References:

Amsden, A. H. (1989). Asia's next giant: South Korea and late industrialisation. Oxford University Press.

Asian Development Bank (ADB). (2021). Infrastructure financing in Asia: Challenges and opportunities. Asian Development Bank.

Blackwill, R. D., & Harris, J. M. (2016). War by other means: Geoeconomics and statecraft. Harvard University Press.

Chung, C. (2020). South Korea's New Southern Policy and its strategic implications. Asian Survey, 60(3), 413–435.

Farrell, H., & Newman, A. (2019). Weaponised interdependence: How global economic networks shape state coercion. International Security, 44(1), 42–79.

Gereffi, G. (2020). What does the COVID-19 pandemic teach us about global value chains? The case of medical supplies. Journal of International Business Policy, 3(3), 287–301.

Government of India, Ministry of External Affairs. (2020). India–Republic of Korea relations.

Kim, S. Y. (2021). Innovation, industrial policy, and economic development in South Korea. Asian Economic Papers, 20(2), 45–67.

Korea Trade-Investment Promotion Agency (KOTRA). (2023). Trade and investment trends report.

Lee, S., & Park, J. (2019). Economic cooperation between India and South Korea: Trends and prospects. Journal of Asian Economics, 62, 101–115.

Luttwak, E. (1990). From geopolitics to geoeconomics: the logic of conflict, the grammar of commerce. The National Interest, 20, 17–23.

Ministry of Trade, Industry and Energy, Republic of Korea. (2021). Korea's trade policy review.

NITI Aayog. (2021). India's industrial policy and manufacturing strategy. Government of India.

Pant, H. V. (2019). India and the Indo-Pacific: Strategy, policy, and prospects. Routledge.

Pant, H. V., & Rej, A. (2018). The Indo-Pacific strategy: Emerging geopolitics. Observer Research Foundation Report.

Park, H. (2022). Supply chain restructuring and South Korea's economic strategy. Global Economic Review, 51(2), 123–140.

UNCTAD. (2022). World Investment Report 2022: International tax reforms and sustainable investment. United Nations.

World Bank. (2023). Logistics performance index 2023. World Bank.

World Intellectual Property Organization (WIPO). (2022). Global Innovation Index 2022.

World Trade Organization (WTO). (2022). Trade profiles: India and Republic of Korea.

About The Author:

Dr. Sutandra Singha, ICSSR Post-Doctoral Fellow, Centre for Korean Studies, SLL&CS-II, Jawaharlal Nehru University, New Delhi, India. She can be reached at sutandra.singha@gmail.com

BRICS Role in Counter Terrorism and its Impact on Security

Abstract

The meeting of the BRICS counter-terrorism working group took place on June 5 in Brasilia, where they discussed a new mechanism to deal with growing terrorism using new internet technologies. Brazil and Ethiopia are leading when it comes to imparting education related to counter terrorism. Recently, BRICS have condemned the Phalgam terror attack or terrorism in all forms, happened in Jammu and Kashmir, showcasing BRICS active role in keeping up with its goals or objectives. BRICS primarily comprises of eleven member states, including Brazil, Russia, India, China, South Africa, Saudi Arabia , Egypt , the UAE , Ethiopia , Indonesia, and Iran. The BRICS Counter Terrorism Working group is divided into five subgroups, each with its own agenda of activities and thematic areas like de-radicalisation, improper use of the internet for terrorist activities, terrorism financing, and capacity building for the combat of terrorism. BRICS plays a very significant role in the 21st century, fostering cooperation among member nations to combat terrorism and related threats. This paper highlights BRICS' role in counter terrorism, considering the growing menace of terrorism in India and other countries within the BRICS grouping. Considering this, the paper highlights initiatives taken by BRICS as a bloc to keep up with the cause to combat terrorism.

Keywords -BRICS, Terrorism, BRICS counter terrorism working group, UNSC.

Introduction

The 17th BRICS summit in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil, condemned the terrorist attack which happened on April 22, 2025, in the Phalgam region, Jammu and Kashmir, which tells us the prominent role BRICS is playing to address one of the major setbacks for India. Besides, BRICS, with passing time, is coming as a platform to address concerns like terrorism on a global scale. In the commencing days, BRICS was more focused on trade than security dynamics. For instance, BRICS had increased their share of trade between 2001 to 2007 and 2015 to 2017.Other than this, BRICS as a bloc had greater affinity towards the economic and development domain but post the 2008 financial crisis, the grouping, tried to make a common stance towards international security issues. The path to address the issues were filled with challenges like one major roadblock was regarding the structural concern among the member countries of BRICS, as all of them were not having equal representation in the UNSC. The security aspect of the grouping called BRIC was nothing before the coming of South Africa into the Bloc. According to the UN charter, the member countries of the UNSC are responsible to maintain international peace and security. In that case, Russia and China are the only ones with power, even though the other three countries, like India, Brazil, and South Africa, are willing to contribute their part in international security, when it comes to, showcasing concrete commitments, such as placing troops and police contributions to the UN peacekeeping, and by engaging directly in conflict mediation. Additionally, the security aspect of BRIC was nothing before the coming of South Africa into the bloc. When we consider the objectives of BRICS nations one of the goal was to challenge the prominent institutions like the IMF and World bank, which got transformed to addressing concerns like terrorism at later stages. For BRICS, Terrorism in all its forms comes as a serious concern for international peace and security, and it stated that any act of terrorism by whomever, whatever, and wherever is a crime. The BRICS nations are of the opinion that terrorism in all its forms is a major threat to freedom, democracy, human rights, territorial integrity, and the security of states. Being the Chair of the BRICS, India was the country that hosted the very first meeting of the BRICS joint working group on counter terrorism. The concerned meeting was addressed by all the member nations of the BRICS bloc. The meeting discussed various issues pertaining to terrorism, which entailed domestic perspectives and the analysis of the threat scenario and the cooperation among the BRICS nations on information sharing, technology sharing, how to deal with online radicalisation, capacity building, and cooperation in forums like the United Nations and the Financial action task force.

Historical context

The BRICS nations comprise Brazil, Russia, India, China, and South Africa. It comes across as an informal grouping which primarily comprises of emerging economies to increase their stature in the global domain. BRICS was established in the year 2009 to serve the needs of the developing countries, as International Institutions dominated by Western powers could not address the concerns of developing and underdeveloped nations. BRICS also had the objective to reform the existing international institutions like the IMF, and did coordination with the economic and diplomatic policies of its member nations for new financial institutions that can challenge the US dollar. The BRICS bloc comes as an alternative to major grouping like the G7, the World Bank, and the UNSC for the inclusion and addressing the needs of emerging world. Time and again, BRICS countries has showcased its criticism regarding the military intervention carried out by major powers like the US and Europe, as they consider it as a selfish motive for regime change. For instance, in the year 2000, when the concept of responsibility to protect came into force under the UN resolution 1674 to decide regarding the use of force for the UNSC member nations, which comes under Chapter seven of the UN charter, BRICS countries opposed the military intervention (Erthal, 2016). When we look into the Syrian case, there was no opposition to the Assad regime's crackdown on the protestors in Syria. To address these concerns at the global level, 17 summits happened till now, where the member countries discussed different prominent issues of concern, like counter terrorism, influencing the international community regarding the measures to tackle the concerns. The very First BRICS Summit took place in Yakateringburg, Russia, in the year 2009. In terms of the BRICS Summit 2009, it was considered the year of institutional innovation with respect to global governance. The first summit also showcased the onset of western economic crisis. Besides, India's international status benefited from the first BRICS Summit. The third BRICS Summit, the Sanya Summit, was the first one to come up with BRICS after the inclusion of South Africa in the bloc. It was also for the first time that all the BRICS nations were represented in the UNSC. This tells us the emphasis given by declaration to international security. Other than this, more focus was shed on state sovereignty, political independence, and territorial integrity with respect to the Middle East and North African Region. The fourth BRICS summit happened in Delhi in 2012, the summit again stressed issues concerning security through the event 'BRICS partnership for global stability, security, and prosperity. (Fourth BRICS Summit-Delhi Declaration, 2012).

The fifth BRICS Summit happened in Durban. In the BRICS summit in Durban, South Africa, the bloc further discussed the Syrian crisis. During the Arab League summit in Qatar, where the seat for Syria was not represented by the Syrian president, Bashar al-Assad, but Moaz al-Khatib, Syrian membership was suspended. This was the time when Assad requested support from the BRICS bloc to protect Syria's territorial integrity from the extremist group backed by the Western powers (Erthal, 2016). The BRICS bloc, in response, outrightly condemned the violation of human rights and international humanitarian law in Syria. Besides, the BRICS referred this case to the UN, expressing support for the Joint Communique of Geneva action groups to come up with an approach to resolve the Syrian crisis. They also requested to respect Syrian independence, territorial integrity, and soverignity. This was a targeted response to Western nations like the US and NATO, who has a record of carrying out unilateral interventions that can infringe the territorial integrity and sovereignty of countries like Syria. Russia also showed concern for the same, as the substitution of the Assad regime with the opposition would result in the weakening of Russia's foothold in the region. Considering this, the Obama administration also tried to launch air strikes, which further escalated the rivalry between the global powers. The global rivalry was seen at a time when ISIS was expanding its influence in Iraq and Syria (Erthal, 2016).

The 6th BRICS happened in Fortaleza. In this concerned summit, the focus of the BRICS nations was on the spread of terrorism and extremism in Syria. It also encouraged Syrian parties to put an end to terrorist acts facilitated by Al Qaeda and its associated organisations. In this summit, there was talk of humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan. Other than this, there was talk of terrorism in Iran as well. (Sixth BRICS Summit-fortaleza Declaration, 2014). In the summit that took place in Fortaleza, the focus was also on economic cooperation, basically the launch of the BRICS new development bank and the contingent reserve arrangement. Here, BRICS also discussed the political solution to be brought through dialogue and reconciliation. BRICS also tried to delink humanitarian issues from military intervention,

as BRICS nations felt humanitarian issues were used many times by Western powers for regime change. BRICS nations also called for a complete ceasefire and unimpeded access for humanitarian organisations and agencies, which sits well with UN Security Council resolution 2139 (Erthal, 2016). Other than this, BRICS continued its support for other UN efforts in mediating the conflict, including the appointment of Staffan de Mitsura as UN special envoy to Syria to come with dialogue channels for Syrian groups. It was also in this declaration that the BRICS grouping emphasized the concern of terrorism. The focus on terrorism is not a new thing, considering India, Russia, and China list violent extremism as the main threat to their national security concerns. In 2016, India and China, despite their mutual concerns they decided to focus on terrorist issues at the bilateral level. Whereas Brazil and South Africa were aloof from debates surrounding terrorism due to pessimism around labelling terrorist and insurgent groups for political reasons. Some level of agreement among India, China, and Russia may be due to their good ties with the Syrian government and having their respective embassies in Damascus (Erthal, 2016).

The Ufa summit was the one to come up with a sub-ministerial meeting on security-related issues. Other than this, BRICS working groups and consultations was also seen in areas around cyber security, illicit trafficking, countering money laundering, and financing of terrorism. The growing diversification showcases BRICS deepening its security aspect of cooperation. The Goa summit further improved institutionalization of BRICS cooperation in security by coming up with the second meeting of BRICS Heads of Anti-Drug Agencies, the first BRICS working group on counter terrorism. The 2016 declaration tried to strengthen their cooperation to counter global threat at both the bilateral and multilateral level. At the multilateral level, BRICS showed agreement with UNSC resolutions, cooperation with international bodies like the of Financial action task force, and coming up with new conventions like the Comprehensive convention on international Terrorism in the United nation general Assembly. Other than condemnation of terrorism it entailed coming up with a cross-dimensional approach to deal with issues like radicalization, recruitment, and financing and issues around FATF. The declaration also considered Peacekeeping as the main issue concerning security. In the seventh BRICS Summit, the emphasis was given further on terrorism and extremism in the Syrian region. In the concerned summit, the BRICS nations called for strict implementation of all the provisions of United Nations Security Council resolutions 2170,2178, and 2199, specifically dealing with suppression of financing of terrorists (Erthal, 2016). Through the summit that happened in Ufa, the BRICS bloc praised Moscow's initiatives, which came up with two rounds of meeting in March and January 2015. This meeting came at that point of time when the Geneva II conference was not able to solve the crisis. This case also reflected the international community being tired of the UN-brokered process, and with the belief that the US and Russia being the needed partners for establishing peace and security for countries in crisis. Russia’s direct military intervention was seen just after the Ufa declaration. The intervention basically followed the Syrian government's request for assistance from Russia. In the month of February, Russia attacked Aleppo, adding to the outflow of refugees into neighbouring countries and other regions. Moscow’s effort was to combat the menace of terrorism in Syria. Meanwhile, India wanted BRICS to come up with a common stance against terrorism in the region. The BRICS meeting agenda showcases that the Syrian crisis has entered into the BRICS discussion at several points in time, from the head of state to the ministrial level (Erthal, 2016). India and China also backed Russia to combat terrorism, which is also their priority concerning national security.

In the 9th and 10th BRICS summits that happened in China and Johannesburg, we saw issues concerning security being discussed through a diverse lens. Additionally, the meeting of the BRICS MFA happened to further strengthen the engagement in the political and security arena. The meeting of the BRICS special envoy on MENA and the foreign policy dialogue. At the 11th BRICS summit, BRICS condemned terrorism in all its forms. BRICS also recognized the efforts made in the counter terrorism operation and the progress made in the fourth meeting of the BRICS counter terrorism working group, including the establishment of thematic sub working groups. In this summit, BRICS nations stressed addressing illicit financial flows and cooperating with the Financial action task force and Financial Action Task Force-style regional bodies (XI BRICS Summit Brasilia Declaration, 2019). In the 12th BRICS summit, the major focus was to support the Iraqi people in their fight against terrorism and extremism for the further economic recovery of the nation. In the summit, another major area of focus was Afghanistan. In the case of Afghanistan, BRICS nations called for an Afghan-led and Afghan owned peace process (XII BRICS Summit Moscow Declaration, 2020).

If we look into the 13th BRICS summit, the BRICS nations condemned terrorism in all its forms, wherever, whenever, and whomever committed. The BRICS nations vouched that they are committed to combating terrorism in all its forms, including cross-border terrorism, terrorist financing networks, and safe havens. BRICS nations emphasized contributing further in the global efforts to counter the threat of terrorism, keeping in mind international law, specifically the charter of the United Nations (XIII BRICS Summit: New Delhi Declaration, 2021). Additionally, they stressed a comprehensive and balanced approach to dealing with terrorist activities. There was also talk regarding the Comprehensive Convention on international terrorism and multilateral negotiations for an international convention to suppress biological and chemical terrorism. BRICS nations came up with the BRICS counter terrorism action plan, which further introduced the BRICS counter terrorism strategy adopted by national security advisors of the group, which had the objective to implement the BRICS counter terrorism strategy and define its action towards counter terrorism cooperation. In the 14th BRICS Summit, BRICS nations emphasized not using Afghan territory to threaten or attack any country, or for that matter, to shelter or train the terrorists, or finance terrorist acts, and focused on dealing with the concern of terrorism in Afghanistan. BRICS nations also stated to provide humanitarian assistance to the Afghan people and to protect the fundamental rights of the Afghan people. In this summit, they again stated condemnation of terrorist acts in all forms and further looked forward to strengthening counter terrorism cooperation (XIV BRICS Summit Beijing Declaration, 2022).

The BRICS countries affirm that terrorism in all its forms is one of the serious concerns to international peace and security, and that any act of terrorism performed by whoever, wherever, and with whatever purpose comes as a crime with no explanation. Considering this, in the 17th BRICS summit in Rio De Janeiro, Brazil, the leaders condemned the terrorist attack that happened on April 22, 2025, in the Phalgam region, Jammu and Kashmir. The concern of terrorism was raised by Honourable Prime Minister Narendra Modi during the BRICS summit on International peace and security. The Prime Minister also appreciated the concerned BRICS members for their support in condemning the Gruesome Phalgam terrorist attack and for showcasing their solidarity with India. The Prime Minister thought that the concerned attack was a severe blow to the soil, identity, and dignity of the nation (Prime Minister participates in the 17th BRICS Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil, 2025). He also insisted on zero tolerance for any act of terrorism and on imposing severe sanctions on terrorists. Besides, he was of the opinion that India should stay with dialogue and diplomacy to resolve the conflicts and ensure peace. He also stated that we can't take the victims and the supporters on the same scale.

After 30 days of meeting in Brasilia, the BRICS counterterrorism working group concluded that addressing the concerns of education and poverty is significant to deal with terrorism, which often exploits marginalized communities and vulnerable regions to sustain its operations. The working group is currently coordinated with the help of the Brazilian Intelligence agency under the Brazilian presidency of BRICS in the year 2025. The concerned group is also of the opinion that financing of terrorist organizations can come across as a threat to global peace and security, with an impact on social and economic stability. This calls for the need for preventive measures. When the delegations gathered in Brazil's capital, they shared diverse perspectives, experiences, and knowledge on terrorism and violent extremism. The Concerned discussion also explored the use of new technologies for recruitment, financing, and dissemination of information, and the role of such tools in violence and self-radicalisation. At the summit, BRICS members put forward their view on the African conflict. They stated they recognize the role of the African Union when it comes to conflict management, prevention, and resolution, and reiterated the African peace effort on the continent. There was also consideration to support African peace consideration, mediation efforts, peace process and the mediation efforts.

The BRICS countries not only condemned the attack on Iran but also terrorism in Syria as well. Additionally, the group stated that any attempt at a military strike against Iran would be a violation of International law and the UN Charter. The statements given by the group stressed the significance of nuclear safeguards to protect the people and, environment, showcased concern for any attack on civilian infrastructure, and to keep up with peaceful nuclear facilities abiding by the International Atomic Energy Agency. This was regarding the conflict between Israel and Iran that happened on June 13, where Israel launched airstrikes on Iranian military, nuclear, and civilian sites, killing around 935 people.

BRICS was of the opinion that Syria and Iran should move ahead with negotiations to achieve a permanent and unconditional ceasefire. Other than this, the leaders welcomed the activities of the BRICS counter terrorism group, its five-sub group based on the BRICS counter terrorism strategy and BRICS counter terrorism action (Rio de Janeiro Declaration- Strengthening Global South Cooperation for a More Inclusive and Sustainable Governance, 2025). The foreign ministers looked forward to further enhancing the counter terrorism cooperation amongst BRICS nations. They called for the finalization of the Convention on international terrorism in the UN framework. The member states also had talks on renewing the protocol of the convention that bans the use of biological warfare. The protocol should also provide an effective verification mechanism to deal with the same. BRICS nations also welcomes the cease fire agreement between Armenia and Azerbaijan in the Karabakh region and calls for political efforts to establish peace there. The leaders of Brazil, China, Africa, India, and Russia came up with diplomatic and political efforts to further restore peace in the region. The BRICS nations also showcased a strong commitment to unity, independence, sovereignty, and territorial integrity of the Syrian Republic (Rio de Janeiro Declaration- Strengthening Global South Cooperation for a More Inclusive and Sustainable Governance, 2025)

The BRICS also stated that it will continue its work towards strengthening and reforming the international governance to make it more inclusive, representative, democratic, with more participation from the developing countries in the decision-making and better fit to deal with contemprory realities. The ministers recognized the progress towards the BRICS cooperation when it comes to countering terrorism through the BRICS Working Group on terrorism. The ministers supported the international cooperation to deal with illicit financial flows from all types of crimes within the realm of the Financial action task force and world Customs Organization. When we consider BRICS Summits, it has taken into consideration conflicts and hostilities across the world as well as issues like violent extremism, terrorism, and cybercrime. Considering different foreign and security priorities of the BRICS nation states, the group has found overlapping of interests on counterterrorism as terrorism comes as a serious threat to national, regional, and international security. The BRICS summit declaration stated that their notion of terrorism goes beyond the traditional and non-traditional security divide and takes into consideration the military and non-military dimensions of terrorism. The BRICS have showcased support to fight against major terror outfits like the Taliban, Islamic State, Al Qaida, the Haqqani network, Lashkar-e-Taiba, Jaish-e-Mohammad, Tehrik- i-Taliban Pakistan, and Hizb ut-Tahrir which again shows its relevance.

Measures

BRICS is seen supporting the Financial Action task force (FATF) and other similar regional bodies. Besides, it has come up with the Comprehensive Convention on International terrorism at the United Nations. BRICS has also come up with an institutional mechanism to deal with terrorism, for instance, it came up with the BRICS council on Anti-Money Laundering and Countering the Financing of terrorism within the FATF. In the year 2020, it came up with a terrorism strategy that basically aims to foster cooperation between BRICS states. India has made a significant contribution within the framework of terrorism. For India, addressing the concern of terrorism has always been a foreign policy priority. During India's leadership in 2016, the BRICS had expanded its definition of terrorism, now it entails violent extremism, radicalisation, terrorism recruitment, movement of terrorists, terror financing, and associated organised crimes like money laundering, drug trafficking, and the misuse of information and communication technology. Besides, the group adopted a comprehensive approach to counterterrorism post the Goa Declaration in 2016.Other than this, BRICS also came up with a working group on counterterrorism in the same year. BRICS considers that multilateral negotiations are the need of the hour when we consider the strategy to deal with the weapons of mass destruction terrorism nexus. At the 2020 summit, Prime Minister Modi stated that the international community needs to deal with the problem of terrorism in an organized manner.

BRICS as a group stated that combating terrorism and reforming some of the prominent institutions is the need of the hour. Democratic Decision making, representations at financial institutions, and at the global political level are important. Since the first summit, there was a lot of emphasis on how the UN and the UN charter help to deal with the concern of terrorism. In the year 2016, BRICS came up with counter terrorism working group (CTWG), a mechanism to identify regional and global issues and come up with a strategy to deal with the same.

CTWG was further divided into sub-working groups on terrorist financing, use of the internet for terrorist activities, countering radicalisation, use of foreign terrorist fighters, and capacity building. In 2015, the BRICS as a group came up with the BRICS council on Anti-Money Laundering and countering financing of terrorism. Additionally, the BRICS counter terrorism strategy document came up in the year 2020 (The future of BRICS, 2021). It aims to foster international and intra BRICS coordination in the realm of information and intelligence sharing, law enforcement and security, legal assistance, extradition, deradicalisation, and capacity building. BRICS member countries have agreed upon a framework for space technology to prevent an arms race in outer space. In the year 2021, the BRICS nations introduced a BRICS remote sensing satellite constellation for linking the satellites of each member country with a network for data sharing. On several occasion there was interest shown in the field of peacekeeping which was stated in 2018 declaration titled BRICS dialogue on peacekeeping. BRICS follows presidency in rotation in that case different regional issues gets represented according to the summit host country. Considering the progress, BRICS should focus on four key aspects, for instance, coming up with a result-oriented action plan to implement the BRICS counter terrorism strategy, discussing a legal framework for cooperation to combat terrorism and extremism, building consensus on terrorism relevant cybercrimes, and coming up with a global and regional terrorism activity tracker. BRICS should also look forward to build a data or resource pool on regional and global terrorism to collect information on individuals, groups, and organizations identified as terrorist actors.

India's on BRICS Counter terrorism initiatives

- Besides India's agreement with UN security council resolutions on terrorism, India has entered into associations like Joint working group on counter terrorism, Legal assistance treaties and Extradition treaties. India is keeping up with its counter terrorism objective or goal through various bodies like SAARC, BIMSTEC, BRICS, UN (Committee on Extrenal affairs, December 2024). The BRICS as a grouping will also help to address India's core concern of Terrorism. It can also use this as a platform to address other issues of importance. Considering the global terrorist groups India should come up with group of experts to understand how to deal with new and emerging technologies, cyber related matter and financial technology innovation. Through BRICS India can address its concern regarding equal representation in institutions like IMF, World Bank and UN. Indias participation in BRICS also sits well with the idea of anti-colonialism or anti-imperialism or its objective of self-reliance. It can challenge the notion of western hegemony or euro centrism. If we go back to history, Ancient Thinkers like Kautliya stressed the need for a well trained and equipped army to ward off enemy attacks.He highlighted importance of Intelligence gathering and Espionage a key element of warfare.His approach has been effective in many instances like Surgical strike by India against Pakistan.

Criticism

BRICS different approach was seen in case of organisation like that of IBSA. Giving no consideration to IBSA may be due to the initiative being undertaken by a different organisation altogether. In addition to this, IBSA, instead of being part of the BRICS grouping, developed further into a larger bloc with its own objectives and agenda, which is different from that of BRICS. Not taking into consideration IBSA efforts also showcases that established global and regional organisations are more legitimate to deal with a crisis like that of Syria (Erthal, 2016). As the Bloc is represented by four different nations different countries can have different take on few issues like the case of military intervention where China and India were against the military intervention. On the other side Brazil and South Africa supported the military intervention. Other than these differences do exist on bilateral level between countries like India and China which can hamper the objective of the bloc. Tensions with the West can also hamper the relations within the bloc like between India and Russia. Today after Trump's Presidency and his coming of 50% tariffs on Import of Indian goods for purchase of Russian oil can impact its relation with Russia in the long run and further can impact BRICS as a whole. Another criticism is how well the groupings formed by BRICS to address terrorism functioning in the present era with changing geopolitical tensions.

Conclusion

BRICS had its own security related milestones, for instance, regarding United Nations Security council reform, even though there was no universal consensus among BRICS nations still they were able to coordinate in the UNSC.BRICS, as a grouping, stressed counter terrorism in its 17 summits and has come up with body like the Comprehensive convention on international terrorism at the United Nations. Other than this, BRICS has come up with a counter-terrorism working group to deal with the concern of terrorism. With respect to the BRICS bloc, we have seen Russia, India, and China voicing their support in the Syrian case to combat terrorism, as terrorism is also an issue that can impact the national security of India. BRICS can also come up as a platform to address the issues surrounding terrorism, like the recent event of the Phalgam attack in India, where BRICS was used as a platform to bring the issue before the international community. Bringing the issue before the BRICS members can also allow the other BRICS members to give their view regarding the concern and to deal with the issue collectively rather than in individual terms. It can also help to get inputs regarding the kind of measures to be used to tackle the concern in time. BRICS can also be used as a platform to deal with the rise of terrorism in other BRICS nations, like South Africa. It can help to deal with the rise of the Islamic state in African regions. This can subsequently also help to deal with the concern of the rise of the Islamic State in India, as well, for instance, in Kerala, as the number of pro-IS cases reported in India is increasing day by day with passing time. Also a quarterly check on the function of BRICS On counter terrorism aspect can further boost its objective towards national security.

References:

Fourth BRICS Summit-Delhi Declaration. (2012). Ministry of External Affairs.

XI BRICS Summit Brasilia Declaration. (2019). BEICS 2022 China.

XII BRICS Summit Moscow Declaration. (2020). Ministry of External Affairs.

XIII BRICS Summit: New Delhi Declaration. (2021). Ministry of External Affairs.

XIV BRICS Summit Beijing Declaration. (2022). Ministry of Foreign Affairs People's Republic of China.

(December 2024). Committee on Extrenal affairs. Lok Sabha Secretariat,New Delhi.

Erthal, A. (2016). Rising Powers and International Security: the BRICS and the Syrian Conflict. Rising Powers Quarterly.

(2025). Prime Minister participates in the 17th BRICS Summit in Rio de Janeiro, Brazil. Ministry of External Affairs.

(2025). Rio de Janeiro Declaration- Strengthening Global South Cooperation for a More Inclusive and Sustainable Governance. PIB.

Sixth BRICS Summit-fortaleza Declaration. (2014). Ministry of External Affairs.

(2021). The future of BRICS. BRICS India 2021.

About The Author:

Julia Jose, PhD Scholar from the Department of Security Studies, Central University of Gujarat

Analysing the Iranian Nuclear Programme, the Lacunae in Multilateral Arrangements and the need to Strengthen Disarmament Frameworks

Abstract:

Operations Rising Lion and Midnight Hammer, conducted by the Israeli and American armed forces respectively in 2025 and Operation Epic Fury which occurred in 2026 have placed the Iranian nuclear enrichment program at the forefront of security and non-proliferation discourse globally. This endeavour, which finds its origins in the civilian nuclear cooperation extended to Shah ruled Iran, an NPT signatory, was militarised in the aftermath of the Islamic Revolution of 1979. The Iran-Iraq war of the 1980s, as also the Gulf War served as catalysts for the nuclear mythmakers in the Islamic Republic. This coincided with the transnational proliferation network run by Pakistani nuclear scientist AQ Khan, resulting in the transfer of critical technology to the Iranians. The discovery of undeclared enrichment facilities in 2002 was followed by extensive IAEA inspections and UNSC resolutions with the latter resulting in the imposition of a strict sanctions regime and a consequent decline in oil revenues and the freezing of assets. The JCPOA signed in 2015 between Iran and the P5+EU, the subsequent withdrawal of the USA in 2018, reimposition of snapback sanctions, Iranian progress in the enrichment process and the alleged denial of access to IAEA inspectors culminated in the operations conducted in 2025 and 2026. In this light, the research aims to analyze the frailties inherent in multilateral frameworks like the JCPOA and the NPT, focusing on vulnerabilities due to their weak enforcement mechanisms which precipitated this crisis. Examining the relative decline in the relevance of these arrangements, resulting from an erosion of multilateralism in today's era and the necessity to strengthen them is of paramount importance. The paper will be driven through a qualitative, analytical and interpretative method of secondary research relying upon verified sources like reports from international bodies, established think tanks, research papers, etc.

Introduction:

The global nuclear order, which has evolved significantly over the years, has witnessed an intense state of flux over the last couple of decades. With the Democratic People's Republic of Korea's advent as a self-proclaimed 'responsible nuclear weapon state', fears around the proliferation of these weapons have only heightened (Davenport, 2022). This unease has exacerbated with the exposure of the covert Iranian nuclear enrichment programme in the year 2002 by the National Council of Resistance of Iran (NCRI), an overarching organisation of Iranian dissidents (Iran Watch, 2023). The clandestine nature of these dual use facilities, which were not declared to the IAEA, caused concerns surrounding proliferation activities amongst NPT signatories and exposed the vulnerabilities of multilateral frameworks in preventing such developments. As a result, there arose a need to address these issues through multilateral arrangements. The Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action, signed in 2015, was a measure in this direction. That the USA withdrew from it depicts the weaknesses inherent in such agreements in an era of rising unilateralism and geopolitical flux. The military operations targeting these facilities were conducted in a bid to render them dysfunctional and are testimony to the fact that states are now resorting to unilateral kinetic action to respond to the void left by the absence of effective disarmament frameworks. The trust deficit, resulting from this, is most visible in the Iranian government's refusal to permit the IAEA to conduct inspections of their enrichment facilities (Liechtenstein, 2026). Such arbitrary measures have undermined the institutional legitimacy of these bodies. Furthermore, the West is not devoid of blame either. The non-reciprocal withdrawal of the USA from the JCPOA, coupled with the imposition of snapback sanctions, has worked to weaken trust in sanctified agreements. As a result, it's necessary to strengthen these agreements and ensure that enforcement mechanisms remain capable of holding violators accountable. While agreements like the NPT have largely held strong against proliferation risks, entities like the AQ Khan network have succeeded in subverting these structures. The omnipresence of non-state actors in such endeavours exacerbates concerns surrounding the possible spread of nuclear weapons amongst them, thereby increasing the threat of nuclear terrorism. The purpose of this research is not to delve into the nitty-gritties of this programme and engage in prognostications about the intentions of state actors and the possibilities of weaponization.

The objective remains to provide a chronicle of the history of the programme, an account of the extant frameworks and their interactions with it along with an overview of possible measures to be taken to bolster these arrangements.

Research objectives

The primary objective is critically examining the progress of the Iranian nuclear programme through both historic and contemporary lenses. The research also aims at addressing the gap in analysing the frailties in multilateral non-proliferation frameworks and the pitfalls in these arrangements which led to a rise in nuclear proliferation. It also aims to delineate certain measures to ensure the strengthening of these disarmament structures. The aim remains to highlight the interactions between state actors, multilateral non-proliferation and disarmament arrangements and the need to combat an ever-increasing threat of nuclear proliferation.

Literature review: The research delves into credible and verified secondary sources like research papers from established academic journals, government documents and the data derived from them, etc. Since the research problem is complex and polarising, reports compiled by well-established think tanks have been referred to as well. Articles from international media outlets have been examined to analyse contemporary developments from diverse perspectives. Historical records have been taken into account to delineate the evolution of this programme. Since a key area of focus of the paper is the impact of multilateralism in the non-proliferation domain, reports, resolutions and policy statements from extant bodies have been scrutinised. Therefore, the paper attempts to achieve the research objectives through a thorough secondary research leaning on authoritative academic and non-academic literature.

Methodology

The research conducted relies upon scholarly literature including academic journals, government documents, reports by international bodies, etc. The extant scholarship has been subjected to a qualitative analysis based upon secondary data sourced from verifiable outlets. The approach adopted is interpretive, critical and analytical. A thorough historical analysis has been blended with articles depicting contemporary developments. Notwithstanding the preponderance of a chronological arrangement of events, the research also involves an interpretative analysis and measures suggested on the basis of an examination of existing frameworks. While the approach remains primarily qualitative, the quantitative method is deployed sparingly when concerned with statistics from multilateral organisations, governments and reports from established think tanks.

Analysis

This section shall entail a detailed deliberation upon the origins and chronological development of the Iranian nuclear programme.

Historical background of the Iranian nuclear programme

Commentary surrounding the Iranian nuclear programme focuses primarily on the events of the 21st century, examining its historicity is of paramount importance in understanding the gradual evolution and covert weaponisation of the endeavour which began as a peaceful civilian nuclear initiative. While cooperation between the USA and Shah ruled Iran was diverse, spanning economic, military and technological sectors, the first widely cited instance of nuclear cooperation was the Agreement for Cooperation Concerning Civil Uses of Atoms signed between the two nations in 1957, in keeping with the spirit of then President Eisenhower's flagship ‘Atoms for Peace’ initiative (Kibaroglu, 2007). This was closely followed by the establishment of the Nuclear Research Centre at Tehran University in 1959 and began negotiations for acquiring a 5MW thermal research reactor for the Centre (Kibaroglu, 2007). The extension of critical technological aid and the sharing of scientific know-how through educational exchange programs provided Iran with scores of scientists, competent in nuclear technology, and possessing training from western universities. This initial phase culminated in the US supplying Tehran with a 5MW research reactor which came to be known as the Tehran Research Reactor (Davenport, 2023). With the NPT, of which Iran was a signatory, coming into force in 1970, the Shah regime began extensive research and launched numerous ambitious ventures in the field of civilian nuclear technology with the assistance of western trained Iranian technicians.

Dr. Akbar Etemad, who presided over the Atomic Energy Organisation of Iran (AEOI), ensured that these projects, alongside widespread nuclear education schemes, were begun by 1974 (Iran Watch, 2023). This pivotal year also witnessed the Shah delineating his vision for an extensive indigenously developed nuclear programme as he charged the AEOI with the construction of 20 nuclear research reactors, a uranium enrichment facility, a reprocessing plant and a target of producing over 23000 MWe in nuclear power by the end of the century (Malus, 2018). In line with this blueprint, Iran solicited the services of Kraftwerk Union, a West German company to build two 1200 MW reactors at what is now known as the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant (Iran Watch, 2023). These attempts at constructing multifarious facilities, point towards a design to master the entire nuclear fuel cycle, right from ore mining and enrichment to fuel fabrication and finally reprocessing spent fuel. French state-owned nuclear behemoth Framatome was engaged for the construction of 2 additional 900MW nuclear reactors while plans were charted for the possible development of a nuclear facility at Isfahan (Iran Watch, 2023). These endeavours were driven by the Shah regime's assertion that Iran possessed the sovereign right to pursue peaceful nuclear technology under the NPT. While Iran reiterated its commitment to mastering the entire fuel cycle up to and including reprocessing spent fuel, US interlocutors remained apprehensive of the Shah's intentions and continued to press for an agreement which would codify a disavowal of weaponisation of the American nuclear material transferred to Iran and thereby allay the Carter Administration's concerns over the expanding nuclear cooperation (Burr, 2009). American fears were not devoid of reason as the Shah himself equivocated both in public as well as in private when asked about the possibility of Iran developing nuclear weapons in the future (Esfandiari, 2015). The much-coveted US - Iran Nuclear Agreement, finalised in 1977-78 was all set to be approved by Congress, thereby granting Iran ‘Most Favoured Nation’ status in terms of spent fuel reprocessing (Kibaroglu, 2007). The 1979 Islamic Revolution which overthrew the Shah regime, with Pahlavi and his family fleeing, as also the subsequent embassy hostage crisis only served to deteriorate US - Iran ties. Bilateral nuclear cooperation was frozen and a number of ongoing projects were halted. The decline in bilateral relations adversely affected the nascent Iranian nuclear programme.

Post Shah era developments

The Islamic Revolution of 1979 and the Iran- Iraq war which began in 1980 coupled with the inveterate anti-Americanism of the Islamic Republic resulted in the nuclear programme grinding to a halt. The Ayatollah Khomeini led regime was itself skeptical about the Shah's expansive nuclear initiative. However, this policy ambiguity regarding the need for a deterrent was effectively laid to rest by the cataclysmic consequences of the Iran-Iraq war. The lethal use of chemical warfare by the Iraqi Baathist regime exposed the vulnerabilities of the Islamic Republic in the matters of non-conventional warfare and highlighted the necessity for the regime to develop CBRN capabilities for its survival. Furthermore, the US arms embargo and the devastating sanctions regime imposed as an outcome of the classification of the nation as a state sponsor of terrorism in 1984 caused even greater problems for Iranian conventional rearmament (Davenport, 2023). The change in attitude in the aftermath of the war is stark when one compares it to the invidious anti-modernisation streak visible during the early months of clerical rule. Dr. Etemad has recounted the animosity of the Vilayat e Faqih regime towards scientific development and the purges carried out in establishments like the AEOI (Kibaroglu, 2007). Reasons cited for this hostility towards the nuclear sector included the astronomical costs incurred, concerns surrounding dependence on foreign technology and the Ayatollah's theological resistance to the very concept of nuclear power (Azodi, 2021). The gradual amelioration of the regime's sacrosanct opposition to anything remotely modern was hastened by the compulsions of a running a wartime nation.

While the Bushehr project had been all but halted, the urgent need to recommence the nuclear programme was felt for both civilian and military purposes. This change of stance can be credibly established through the statements of the then Iranian leaders themselves. IAEA internal working documents point to the fact that then President and later Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei had, in 1984, announced before a gathering of top regime officials that Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini had revisited the Islamic Republic's policy on the nuclear programme and had permitted its further development in light of security threats (Albright and Stricker, 2010). Akbar Hashemi Rafsanjani, then Speaker of the Iranian Parliament (Majlis) and later President, in an address to the Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps in 1988 tacitly espoused the development of non-conventional warfare capabilities in view of the catastrophic Iran Iraq war (ISIS, n.d.).

This fundamental shift in the policy outlook encouraged Iran to look for partners in its proposed endeavours. China signed two nuclear cooperation protocols in 1985 and 1990 with Iran while the Russians inked a pact for the completion of the construction of the Bushehr Nuclear Power Plant in 1995 (Iran Watch, 2023). Alongside formal agreements with state actors, the regime dabbled in the purchase of enrichment equipment covertly through the means of non-state actors of the infamous AQ Khan nuclear proliferation network. It is reported to have received a starter kit for a gas centrifuge plant, a set of technical drawings used for building P1 centrifuges, samples of the components utilised in them and instructions to enrich weapons grade uranium (Albright and Stricker, 2010). In 1991, Iran also procured nearly a metric ton of uranium hexafluoride (UF6) from China, to master the fuel cycle, which the former was obligated to declare under the NPT but desisted from doing so, committing a violation of the treaty's clauses (ISIS, n.d.). The mid 1990s also witnessed the creation of a team of scientists under the aegis of Dr. Mohsen Fakhrizadeh, which was to spearhead the programme and the negotiations to be held with the Khan network (Piotrowski, 2025).

The sheer extent and depth of the cooperation between the Iranians and the Khan network is evident through the trove of documents highlighting the activities of the network. The much-discussed 1987 deal between Iran and the Khan network, pegged at about 3 million dollars, was the foundation for cooperation between the two entities. The most significant happening in this regard was the alleged transfer of 3 complete P2 centrifuges to Iran, as per the admission of Buhary Syed Tahir, a close confidante of AQ Khan and a key member of his clandestine network (IISS, 2007). Alongside the direct procurement of disassembled centrifuges, components and designs, the Iranians also gained significant insight into the global proliferation ecosystem. Thus, they were able to acquire certain critical materials like maraging steel from Khan's contacts spread across the globe (Abbas, 2018). The assistance extended to Iran by this network proved crucial in the future trajectory of its programme. This is starkly visible through the deployment of P1 and P2 centrifuges in the Natanz Enrichment Facility, the largest in the country (Rowberry, 2013). These inflows of critical technology, components, designs and technical knowhow enabled the Iranians to chart out an ambitious pathway towards the eventual attainment of nuclear weapons. In the last decade of the 20th century, top Iranian officials approved a plan dubbed the ‘Amad Plan’ which would ultimately lead to the development of five nuclear warheads by 2004 under the auspices of a team of scientists headed by Dr. Mohsen Fakhrizadeh (Iran Watch, 2023).

While the Khan network was deeply invested in the Iranian programme, the role of the Pakistani state machinery, specifically its military forces, is scarcely examined in this context. Successive Chiefs of the Pakistani armed forces remained openly supportive of the Iranian program. General Mirza Aslam Beg had espoused the transfer of critical nuclear technology to Tehran, with his successor General Asif Nawaz having reportedly reached a deal that would involve bartering away nuclear technology in return for Iranian oil, to ease the grave forex crisis which had engulfed his nation (IISS, 2007). Although the conduit only consisted of drawings, components, etc., the contacts provided helped Iran develop its indigenous capabilities with support from Khan's suppliers globally. The enrichment capacities demonstrated by Tehran in its facility at Natanz are evidence enough to believe that if it were to withdraw from the NPT and work towards acquiring Highly Enriched Uranium (HEU), it could obtain the requisite amount to manufacture a nuclear warhead (IISS, 2007).

Aftermath of the discovery of facilities

The turn of the century proved pivotal for the fate of the Iranian nuclear programme. A press conference held in the summer of 2002 by the National Council of Resistance of Iran, a coalition of numerous Iranian opposition and dissident groups, unearthed the reality of the clandestine operations run by Tehran. The exposé of two undeclared facilities - a uranium enrichment facility at Natanz and a heavy water production unit at Arak, sent shockwaves across the globe (Iran Watch, 2023). The dual use nature of these installations and their covert utilisation raised concerns over the weaponisation of these complexes for the fabrication of weapons grade uranium and plutonium. The Board of Governors at the IAEA adopted a resolution on the 12th of September, 2003 calling on Iran to suspend any and all enrichment and reprocessing activity, allow inspectors from the body to conduct operations and demanded that the Islamic Republic declare all fissile material in its possession, relevant to the programme (Davenport, 2023). Unfettered access was granted to these inspectors who, while noting the violations which had taken place already, recorded that substantial progress had been made in a bid to palliate them.

With the 31st October deadline for the signing of the Additional Protocol fast approaching, a triumvirate of European foreign ministers arrived in Iran to resolve the deadlock. This visit proved critical in the signing of the accord and created the 'EU-3 and Iran' framework, which served to temper the rising tensions between Tehran and Washington over the further period (ISIS, n.d.). This arrangement also stamped out an understanding between the two sides with Iran agreeing to extend the voluntary suspension of its enrichment and reprocessing activities. However, the election of hardliner Mahmoud Ahmadinejad to the presidency in 2005, Iran-US ties were strained even further. The Americans were apoplectic and demanded that the Iranian dossier, submitted to the IAEA, be transferred to the UNSC for the pursuit of punitive measures as retribution for what they considered as violations of Article 2 of the NPT (Kibaroglu, 2007). Iran refuted these allegations and repeated its claims of this incident being a result of bureaucratic oversight in reporting to the IAEA than the outcome of any regime machinations to acquire nuclear weapons. It further stated that owing to the Treaty allowing signatories the sovereign and inalienable right to pursue enrichment for peaceful purposes, Tehran could claim protection under Article 4 of the same (Kibaroglu, 2007). Notwithstanding Iranian protests to the contrary, the IAEA passed a resolution on 4 February 2006 referring the Islamic Republic to the UNSC prompting it to suspend its voluntary implementation of the Additional Protocol (Davenport, 2023).

A major reason cited by Iran in a bid to render the accusations of pursuing nuclear weapons null and void is the 'fatwa' issued against nuclear arms by the late Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, then Supreme Leader of the Islamic Republic. The characterisation of these weapons of mass destruction as 'haram' (forbidden) was quoted by former President Hassan Rouhani during his talks with the interlocutors from Europe in 2004 (Isfahani, 2024). While skeptics have voiced disagreement with the notion of accepting this assertion as gospel, Iran continues to argue that the Ayatollah's fatwa was binding on the nation. This is contradicted by critics who cite later statements by the late Khamenei as proof of him vacillating on this front. Many have also raised concerns about the possibility of the fatwa being disregarded in the interests of 'regime expediency' (Eisenstadt and Khalaji, 2021). Other voices, more sympathetic to the regime, have differing opinions on this matter. The fatwa, in such cases, is stated to be binding and obligatory, signifying a 'unilateral' and 'unconditional' renunciation of all forms of weapons of mass destruction (Sirjani, 2013). These views of the fatwa seem to characterise it as reinforcing existing non-proliferation commitments, strengthening them through what is understood as a law superseding any legislation passed by the Majlis, and tacitly espousing the peaceful use of nuclear technology as permitted under the NPT.

In spite of these assurances, the IAEA was committed to investigating alleged violations of the safeguards agreements and has since filed status reports on a regular basis to inform the international community about Iranian progress in upholding them (IAEA, n.d.). The role played by the IAEA, a leading multilateral institution which investigates violations of the NPT and non-compliance with safeguards protocols, needs to be examined. As depicted, the inspections began only after the exposé by the NCRI. Even in these cases, the IAEA required voluntary cooperation from the host country and permission to access facilities. This was denied on multiple occasions as will be seen ahead. This requirement for unilateral compliance, in the absence of concrete coercive measures, leads to the emergence of significant issues in inspections. While the UNSC did put in place a strict sanctions regime, it was in the aftermath of the revelations and served as a further reminder of the inability of the IAEA to enforce its jurisdiction. The abject lack of a unifying definition of 'safeguard violation' results in greater conjecture (Gerami & Goldschmidt, 2012). The want of independent enforcement mechanisms is evident through this instance.

It is incumbent upon one to analyse the measures undertaken by the UNSC to enforce compliance with IAEA standards. The first major step was the passing of the UNSC Resolution 1737 on the 23rd of December 2006 which established a Security Council Sanctions Committee (1737 Committee), tasked with the imposition of sanctions on the Islamic Republic for failing to halt enrichment activities as demanded by UNSC Resolution 1696, banned the supply nuclear technology and sensitive material and initiated a freeze of assets of the individuals closely involved in the programme (United Nations Security Council, n.d.). Four rounds of UNSC sanctions were imposed between 2006 and 2010 with UNSC Resolution 1747 introducing a two-way arms embargo and UNSC Resolution 1803 requiring a blanket abdication of enrichment activities alongside desisting from research and development pertaining to centrifuges and uranium enrichment (Albright & Stricker, 2010)

United Nations Security Council, n.d.). These proceedings proved cataclysmic for the Iranian economy. The sixth round of sanctions, covered under Security Council Resolution 1929, was particularly debilitating for the Iranian government as it prohibited the state from undertaking any activities related to ballistic missiles, tightened the arms embargo, worked against alleged Iranian smuggling and formed a Panel of Experts which would make recommendations to strengthen extant measures (Davenport, 2026).

The EU too, while endorsing UNSC sanctions, imposed its own on the 31st of December 2012 through a EU Council Resolution, which were later rescinded on the 20th of January 2014 in light of the Iran nuclear deal (European Council, 2026). The extension of the US secondary sanctions regime to the banks, financial and energy sectors reflect a move grounded in a response to alleged repeated violations of international law by the Iranian programme. The abandonment of Iranian projects, the exit of multinational banks and the damage to the state's oil revenues adversely affected the Iranian economy. The alienation of Iranian banks from the SWIFT and its economic isolation, coupled with measures designed to coerce entities into deserting Iran linked initiatives relegated the Iranian economy to the doldrums. Iranian oil exports nearly halved from 2.5 million barrels a day in 2011 to just about 1.3 million barrels a day in 2013 and this drove down the nearly 100 billion dollars in oil revenues in 2011 to a meagre 35 billion dollars in 2013 (Gheibi, 2022). The economic turmoil, exacerbated by the nearly 50 billion dollars' worth of lost investments in the oil sector, resulted in a precipitous decline in the Rial's value as it plummeted to 37000 against the dollar by 2013, a steep rise in inflation, a decline in living standards and a meteoric escalation in prices of essential commodities (Gheibi, 2022). Thus, one witnesses the catastrophic impacts that secondary sanctions have had on the Iranian state and how they might have influenced decision making at a policy level.

The JCPOA saga:

The cumulative pressure created by the UNSC Resolution 1929, Congressional action on secondary sanctions and the EU Council sanctions, succeeded in coercing Iran to arrive at the negotiating table. Immediately after a meeting in December 2010, the P5+1 met again with Iranian officials in early January 2011 though this did not yield any results owing to the maximalist positions of both sides (Davenport, 2023). Further rounds of talks continued in Istanbul, Baghdad, Moscow and Kazakhstan over the following couple of years with both sides bringing forth their own proposals (Davenport, 2023). The election of Hassan Rouhani to the Presidency hastened the process of negotiations with a historic call taking place between him and then President Obama and the P5+1 and Iran reaching an initial understanding in late 2013 delineating a break on the programme in return for sanctions relief (Ballotpedia, n.d.). A nuclear agreement was finally reached on the 14th of July, 2015 with it being adopted on the 18th of October (Ballotpedia, n.d.).

The UNSC Resolution 2231, passed on July 20, 2015 endorsed the deal and lifted all sanctions with the rider that they would be re-imposed through the snapback mechanism which would remain in place for a decade after the deal was signed (Williams, 2015). The deal operated through a number of sunset provisions which aimed to delay the programme, pushing it back by several years. The accord placed restrictions on centrifuges for a decade and on acquiring high amounts of LEU for a decade and a half apart from the commitments extracted from Iran to abjure HEU possession and pursue only peaceful research at Natanz, Fordow and Arak (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023). A clause of paramount importance was the one dictating that enrichment levels must remain below 3.67 percent for 15 years after the commencement of the treaty and that any uranium hexafluoride even at this level, in excess of 300 kgs must be down blended (Williams, 2015). Blanket restrictions were put in to prevent the installation of any new centrifuges for a decade and limits were imposed on building new enrichment facilities for a period of 15 years (Kerr and Katzman, 2018). Measures were also undertaken to ensure compliance through verification mechanisms and permissions granted to the IAEA to pursue inspections even at sites not declared to it by the Islamic Republic (Kerr and Katzman, 2018). In line with initial Iranian compliance, sanctions were eased and assets unfrozen. Sanctions relief was also provided by the EU with respect to its unilateral actions. The agreement also ensured the temporary suspension of UNSC sanctions brought about under Security Council Resolutions 1696, 1737, 1747, 1803, 1835, 1929, 2224 and 2231 in a phased manner, linked to the implementation of the JCPOA and satisfactory Iranian compliance (Williams, 2015).

The staggered retraction of sanctions was set to be incumbent upon the JCPOA joint commission and the IAEA being satisfied with the phased compliance of the deal by Iran. The 10-year mark was coined 'Termination Day' to commemorate the removal of all UNSC and EU sanctions with the upper limit on the uranium enrichment percentage (3.67%) expiring at the end of 15 years (Williams, 2015).

However, President Trump unilaterally withdrew from the deal in 2018, claiming that it emboldened the regime to pursue proxy warfare, develop ballistic missile capabilities and eventually develop nuclear weapons after the timelines placed by the JCPOA elapsed. Sanctions on oil, finance, banking and other critical sectors were imposed once again by the United States. The Trump administration stated that the sunset clauses gave Iran leeway to enrich itself for a decade or so, embolden it as it gave an impetus to its proxy warfare and eventually produce nuclear weapons upon the lapse of the deal. The withdrawal, long demanded by Iran hawks in the US and Israel, was announced and carried out by the Trump administration which brought about a policy of 'maximum pressure' through sanctions and other coercive measures. The objective was to force Iran into giving up its nuclear programme by inflicting unprecedented economic pain onto the state. This was carried out in view of the concerns expressed by US allies in the Gulf and Israel. Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed Bin Salman, for instance, declared that if Iran were to attain nuclear weapons, the Kingdom would follow suit (BBC News, 2018). The Crown Prince's statement ignited worries about the possibility of a nuclear arms race in an already fractious West Asia. Israel also remained uncompromising in its opposition to the accord. Then Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu characterised the signing of the JCPOA as a 'stunning historic mistake' owing to apprehensions regarding the sunset clauses and a dearth of concrete measures to tackle Iranian ballistic missile capabilities and support to regional proxies (CBS News, 2015). The reasons cited by Israel were the same as those propounded by states like the UAE, Saudi Arabia and Bahrain while voicing support for the Trump administration's withdrawal from the JCPOA (Kalin & Dadouch, 2018). While these sanctions imposed in 2018 have certainly caused predicaments for the Islamic Republic, they have not been enough to intimidate the state into abdicating its nuclear activities. Many would argue also that these actions have proven counterproductive with the state further consolidating its grip on the populace. The JCPOA falling apart has had undeniable and irrevocable ramifications for global politics. The US has, through its actions, made no qualms about its perception of the threat posed by potential Iranian nuclear weaponisation. Meanwhile, Iran has, in the face of crippling sanctions, doubled down on its nuclear programme. The consequences of these actions have been detrimental for all sides involved. Some developments which followed the withdrawal have been highlighted further. They will throw light upon the impact of the US withdrawal, actions taken by the Islamic Republic in its aftermath, the repercussions faced by countries in the region, the crisis of credibility engulfing the E3 and the need for the strengthening of multilateralism in dealing with such crises. The lack of receptiveness to forge a political solution to this conundrum and the predilection to resorting to military means is depicted through this series of events as well.

Recent developments

As a consequence of the 2018 American withdrawal, Iran restarted its enrichment activities in full steam in 2019 with the Majlis revoking Iranian assent to the IAEA's Additional Protocol (Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation, 2025). In light of these developments, the Americans attempted to resurrect UNSC sanctions via the snapback mechanism. These efforts failed but the snapback measure was ultimately triggered by the E3 in 2025 (Kerr, 2026). Iran retaliated to the collapse of the JCPOA by declaring that it had begun work on the production of uranium hexafluoride at its uranium conversion facility and would also attempt to start production of centrifuge motors and construct an advanced centrifuge assembly plant at Natanz (Kerr and Katzman, 2018). The assassination of former Quds Force Commander Qasem Soleimani further strengthened the Iranian resolve to enhance nuclear enrichment, develop new centrifuges and resume heavy water production (Council on Foreign Relations, 2023). The Islamic Republic has also reduced the extent, scale and intrusiveness of the IAEA inspections (Tirone, 2023). The IAEA Director General Rafael Grossi stated that the agency had reason to believe that Iran had increased its stockpile of 60% enriched Uranium 235 to 275 kg, becoming the only country to enrich it to such a high degree while disavowing the attainment of nuclear weapons (IAEA, 2025).

The agency had also found traces of Highly Enriched Uranium at undeclared sites and lamented the loss of complementary access after the failure of the JCPOA (IAEA, 2025). The Islamic Republic has provided access only as per the government's own safeguards agreement but does not seem open to continuing the Additional Protocol signed by it earlier (Kerr, 2026). The heightened enrichment levels coupled with the rejection of access to the IAEA to both previously declared and undeclared sites resulted in greater global concerns about the Iranian nuclear programme. While the Biden administration attempted to ease sanctions by amending the American position on snapback sanctions, the return of President Trump has ensured the continuance of the maximum pressure policy alongside military strikes targeting facilities at Isfahan, Fordow and Natanz. Operations Rising Lion and Midnight Hammer in 2025 and Operation Epic Fury in 2026 aimed to dislodge the regime and give a setback to the nuclear programme. These attacks have deepened the schism between the two sides and despite ongoing negotiations, there has been very little progress on the signing of a nuclear deal of any consequence. The trust deficit is palpable and therefore the possibility of a revival of the JCPOA or the creation of any similar agreement is bleak. Nuclear negotiations undertaken by the Trump administration have gone nowhere with Iran currently possessing over 400 kgs of 60% enriched Uranium as per IAEA reports (Ghobadi, 2025). The military operations conducted in consecutive years have only worked to undermine trust in multilateral frameworks and have given an impetus to arguments which espoused the flouting of international law in favour of unilateral punitive actions.

Result and discussion:

Crisis of Multilateralism

This chronicling of the trajectory of the Iranian nuclear programme through the lens of its interaction with multilateral arrangements yields invaluable insights into the lacunae immanent in them. One pitfall which is starkly visible is the IAEA's abject lack of enforcement mechanisms. While it has rights to extensive and often intrusive inspections, it remains dependent upon the benevolence of the host nation. That nation retains the option of revoking access granted previously, denying access to newer sites and prohibiting visits to suspected undeclared sites. This has been the primary pitfall even in the implementation of the NPT which relies largely on the signatories' voluntary cooperation. There remains a necessity for a fortification of the NPT with stricter controls, more oversight, greater prerogatives to the IAEA including systematised and regular inspections at dual use sites in nations utilising such facilities, etc. Apart from these measures, fostering trust in the agency's non partisanship is of paramount importance. States adversarial to the West must also be persuaded of the agency's lack of bias. Unhindered access, timely checks and bolstered enforcement mechanisms remain key to the survival of the non proliferation order. Although it is clear and logical for the IAEA to not possess any mandate to implement coercive measures to ensure compliance, it is vital that it coordinates its actions with bodies like the UNSC that do. The dysfunctionality that has gripped the UNSC also remains a cause for concern. With the chasm between global powers widening, multilateralism faces an existential crisis. Where once the UNSC spoke with one voice, it is now fragmented, and weak, riven with internecine conflicts. This is evident in the inability of the UNSC to effect measures to tackle the growing rifts between the USA and Iran. While its sanctions were far from ineffectual, the dearth of a common roadmap and vision to address the fallout of the American withdrawal from the JCPOA only worsened the situation. The infighting in the western camp between the USA and Europe proved insurmountable during President Trump's first term in office especially in relation to the Iran nuclear deal.

America's unilateral and hasty withdrawal, without any contingency plan to resort to, exposed the crisis engulfing multilateralism today. The JCPOA too has unfortunately been a victim of this phenomenon. Though the agreement itself was contentious, it was a functional structure which is yet to be replaced. The major issue, apart from misgivings over the sunset clauses and their ramifications for future weaponisation, was the vulnerability of the JCPOA being reduced to a domestic political hot potato and a fulcrum for polarisation. That the agreement could be rescinded and was not sacrosanct proved to be its undoing. The US withdrawal was closely followed by the Iranians defenestrating any pretence of holding up their end of the accord. Subsequently, the entire agreement collapsed. The alternative of opting out, being presented to the signatories, was a structural frailty which led to the 2018 crisis. Any further agreement must mandatorily address concerns of all parties involved, specifically the Iranian assertions of sovereignty over nuclear enrichment and Israeli and American fears over the former's possible weaponisation of its nuclear capabilities.

It is also clear that while ‘maximum pressure’ sanctions have certainly dented the Iranian state's coffers, they are not enough to effect a change in its security posture. A comparison of UNSC sanctions and those placed unilaterally by the western powers would reveal that the latter's secondary sanctions and asset freezes have proven far more paramount in containing Iran and influencing the regime's decision making. It would, therefore, be useful to ponder upon the effectiveness of multilateral sanctions regimes and disarmament frameworks, both of which have proven to be ineffectual.

Strengthening multilateral non-proliferation and disarmament treaties in the multipolar era

Now that the shortcomings in these frameworks have been noted, it would be useful to establish certain ameliorating measures to resolve them. It is arguably more instructive to first look into the nitty-gritties which need fixing in terms of hammering out another nuclear accord with Iran. In this regard, the USA would be well served by delineating a clear list of priorities and discriminating between the nuclear issue and other outstanding sticking points with Iran. Therefore, the support extended by the Islamic Republic to proxies across the region as well as the development of ballistic missiles and a need to bring about a change in the character of the regime, ensuring that it remains sensitive to human rights concerns are vexed matters which ought to be dealt with separately. Attaching the resolution of the nuclear issue to these extraneous matters risks jeopardising the solution of the crux of the nuclear programme. Rolling back the nuclear programme is a pipe dream and focus must be placed upon halting it in its tracks and putting in safeguards to prevent the weaponisation of the nuclear programme, militarisation of its enrichment capabilities and developing nuclear warheads as well as weapons delivery systems (Levite, 2025). Any new accord must prioritise IAEA access to declared and undeclared sites, neutralise the Iranian veto over inspection rights, reinforce compliance with the Additional Protocol and Safeguards Agreement and ensure that Iran refrains from imposing unilateral restrictions upon IAEA operations. Advanced verification mechanisms must be put in place to reduce persistent concerns over the ‘breakout time’ (Hinderstein, 2025). That the technical knowledge regarding the nuclear programme would survive any nuclear deal is an undeniable fact. Extensive reportage of actions undertaken by State parties, creation of a Non-Proliferation Treaty Bureau and formalising the NPT’s infrastructure through the creation of an Office of Disarmament Affairs under the United Nations’ aegis are certain steps suggested by the United States through the means of a working paper (US Department of the State, 2024).

The NPT has proven largely effective when it comes to preventing nuclear proliferation. However, apprehensions that Iran might go the DPRK’s way, exit and then weaponise remain ever present. For this purpose, it remains essential that existing frameworks are strengthened, verification and authorisation mechanisms are reinforced, coercive measures are explicitly stated and multilateralism bolstered to tackle the threat of nuclear proliferation and weaponisation. Ensuring the continuance of safeguards agreements and adherence to the Additional Protocol by the Islamic Republic is crucial. Eventually, the solution which shall emerge must necessarily be multilateral to ensure its survival and acceptance. Unilateral coercive measures are perceived as illegitimate and hence they must instead be replaced by stricter measures through bodies like the UNSC which possess widespread acceptance. Avoiding past mistakes like sunset clauses for certain activities and provisions for unilateral exits is crucial. Bridging the gaping trust deficit between the US and Iran will be key as well. The crisis in multilateralism caused by geopolitical flux shall only worsen with time. In such a case, any new nuclear deal would be fraught with challenges, not only in its negotiations but also in its implementation. It is essential for nuclear policymakers in each of these countries to delineate priorities and negotiate accordingly. Whether the P5+1 will be able to hammer out another nuclear agreement remains to be seen.

Conclusion

Thus, the Iranian nuclear programme remains a matter of grave concern globally. This paper has made a foray into understanding it from the point of view of multilateral frameworks and their interactions with the said programme. Apart from delineating the historical trajectory of the issue, this article delves into the impacts of organisations like the IAEA and agreements like the NPT and JCPOA. While highlighting the possible lacunae, measures to strengthen them and resolve these shortcomings have been suggested. The role of nuclear proliferation networks has also been analysed. The failures in these arrangements point to the need to reinvent the approach towards disarmament and non-proliferation. How the world approaches these issues of paramount significance will decide the future of the global nuclear security architecture.

References:

Abbas, H. (2018). Pakistan's Nuclear Bomb: A Story of Defiance, Deterrence and Deviance: Penguin India.

BBC News. (2018, March 15). Saudi Arabia pledges to create a nuclear bomb if Iran does. https://www.bbc.com/news/world-middle-east-43419673

Davenport, K. (2023, January). Timeline of nuclear diplomacy with Iran, 1967–2023. Arms Control Association.
https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/timeline-nuclear-diplomacy-iran-1967-2023

Davenport, K. (2026, May). UN Security Council resolutions on Iran. Arms Control Association.
https://www.armscontrol.org/factsheets/un-security-council-resolutions-iran

Davenport, K. (2022, October). North Korea passes nuclear law. Arms Control Association. https://www.armscontrol.org/act/2022-10/news/north-korea-passes-nuclear-law

Liechtenstein, S. (2026, February 28). UN nuclear watchdog says it's unable to verify whether Iran has suspended all uranium enrichment. Associated Press. https://apnews.com/article/iran-nuclear-iaea-uranium-enrichment-suspend-ccf574a324504b985f4b158f9d3d6941

Isfahani, K.S. (2024, May 9). Iran nuclear weapons fatwa by Khamenei. Atlantic Council. https://www.atlanticcouncil.org/blogs/iransource/iran-nuclear-weapons-fatwa-khamenei/

Azodi, S. (2021, February 16). What does the history tell us about Iran's nuclear intentions? Nuclear Network, Center for Strategic and International Studies. https://nuclearnetwork.csis.org/what-does-the-history-tell-us-about-irans-nuclear-intentions/

Ballotpedia. (n.d.). Iran nuclear agreement: Timeline. https://ballotpedia.org/Iran_nuclear_agreement:_Timeline#2013

Ghobadi, P. (2025, May 31). Iran nuclear developments. BBC News. https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c1mg7kx2d45o

Tirone, J. (2023, May 12). Iran nuclear monitors express concern after inspections plunge. Bloomberg. https://www.bloomberg.com/news/articles/2023-05-12/iran-nuclear-monitors-express-concern-after-inspections-plunge

Williams, J.R. (2015, July 21). A comprehensive timeline of the Iran nuclear deal. Brookings Institution. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/a-comprehensive-timeline-of-the-iran-nuclear-deal/

Rowberry, A. (2013, December 18). Sixty years of “Atoms for Peace” and Iran’s nuclear program. Brookings Institution. https://www.brookings.edu/articles/sixty-years-of-atoms-for-peace-and-irans-nuclear-program/

Gerami, N. & Goldschmidt, P. (2012, December 6). The International Atomic Energy Agency’s decision to find Iran in non-compliance, 2002–2006. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2012/12/the-international-atomic-energy-agencys-decision-to-find-iran-in-non-compliance-2002-2006

Levite, A. (2025, February 18). Prioritizing nuclear negotiations with Iran. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. https://carnegieendowment.org/posts/2025/02/iran-trump-nuclear-deal

Hinderstein, C. (2025, April 18). Five lessons for the current Iran nuclear talks. Carnegie Endowment for International Peace. https://carnegieendowment.org/emissary/2025/04/iran-nuclear-talks-five-lessons-jcpoa-negotiations

Center for Arms Control and Non-Proliferation. (2021, March 10). The Iran deal, then and now (Updated June 2025). https://armscontrolcenter.org/the-iran-deal-then-and-now/

Sirjani, F.S. (2013). Iran’s nuclear fatwa. Iranian Review of Foreign Affairs, Vol. 4, No. 2, Summer 2013, pp. 57-80 https://ciaotest.cc.columbia.edu/journals/irfa/v4i2/f_0029607_23960.pdf

Malus, K. (2018, September 9). From “Atoms for Peace” to “JCPOA”: History of Iranian nuclear development. Centre for nuclear studies, Columbia University. https://k1project.columbia.edu/content/atoms-peace-jcpoa-history-iranian-nuclear-development

Kerr, P.K. (2026, April 6). Iran’s Nuclear Program and UN Sanctions Reimposition. Congressional Research Service. https://www.congress.gov/crs-product/IF11583

Council on Foreign Relations. (2023, October 27). What is the Iran nuclear deal? https://www.cfr.org/backgrounders/what-iran-nuclear-deal

CBS News. (2015, July 14). Netanyahu slams Iran deal as a "historic" mistake. https://www.cbsnews.com/news/israel-prime-minister-benjamin-netanyahu-iran-nuclear-deal-bad-mistake/

European Council. (2026, March 30). Sanctions against Iran. https://www.consilium.europa.eu/en/policies/sanctions-against-iran/

Kalin, S. and Dadouch, S. (2018, May 10). Gulf Arab allies hail triumph after U.S. quits Iran deal. Reuters. https://www.reuters.com/article/world/gulf-arab-allies-hail-triumph-after-us-quits-iran-deal-idUSKBN1I93CW/

Kerr, P. K. & Katzman, K. (2018, July 20). Iran Nuclear Agreement and U.S. Exit. Congressional Research Service. https://sgp.fas.org/crs/nuke/R43333.pdf

Burr, W. (2009, January 13). U.S.-Iran Nuclear Negotiations in 1970s Featured Shah's Nationalism and U.S. Weapons Worries. George Washington University, National Security Archive. https://nsarchive2.gwu.edu/nukevault/ebb268/

Gheibi, P. (2022). The rise and fall of U.S. secondary sanctions: The Iran outcasting and re-outcasting regime. Georgia Journal of International and Comparative Law, 50 (2), 389–440. https://digitalcommons.law.uga.edu/cgi/viewcontent.cgi?article=2540&context=gjicl

Institute for Science and International Security. (n.d.). Iran country page. https://isis-online.org/country-pages/iran

International Atomic Energy Agency. (n.d.). IAEA and Iran: Board reports. http://www.iaea.org/newscenter/focus/iran/iaea-and-iran-iaea-board-reports

International Atomic Energy Agency. (2025, March 3). IAEA Director General's introductory statement to the Board of Governors. https://www.iaea.org/newscenter/statements/iaea-director-generals-introductory-statement-to-the-board-of-governors-3-march-2025

International Institute for Strategic Studies. (2007). Nuclear Black Markets: Pakistan, A.Q. Khan and the rise of proliferation networks https://bpb-us-e2.wpmucdn.com/sites.middlebury.edu/dist/9/5764/files/2009/02/IISS-from-web.pdf

Albright, D. & Stricker, A. (2010, October 6). Iran's nuclear program. United States Institute of Peace. https://iranprimer.usip.org/resource/irans-nuclear-program

Iran Watch. (2023, December 19). A history of Iran's nuclear program. Wisconsin Project on Nuclear Arms Control. https://www.iranwatch.org/our-publications/weapon-program-background-report/history-irans-nuclear-program

Kibaroglu, M. (2007). Iran's Nuclear Ambitions from a Historical Perspective and the Attitude of the West. Middle Eastern Studies, Vol. 43, No. 2, 223–245. http://mustafakibaroglu.com/sitebuildercontent/sitebuilderfiles/Kibaroglu-MES-March2007-IranNuclear.pdf

Piotrowski, M.A. (2025, January). Military nuclear programme of Iran: Its history, suspension and prospects for the future. Polish Institute of International Affairs. https://www.pism.pl/webroot/upload/files/Raport/Report_Military%20Nuclear%20Programme%20of%20Iran.pdf

Esfandiari, G. (2015, July 3). The Father of Iran's nuclear program recalls how it all began. Radio Free Europe/Radio Liberty. https://www.rferl.org/a/father-of-iran-nuclear-program-recalls-how-it-began/27108228.html

US Department of the State. (2024, May 22). Strengthening the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons review process: practical steps to improve the process and reinforce best practices. Working paper submitted by the United States of America. https://2021-2025.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2024/07/n2414299.pdf

United Nations Security Council. (n.d.). Resolutions. https://main.un.org/securitycouncil/en/sanctions/1737/resolutions

Eisenstadt, M. and Khalaji, M. (2021, February 4). Iran's flexible fatwa: How "expediency" shapes nuclear decisionmaking. The Washington Institute for Near East Policy. https://www.washingtoninstitute.org/policy-analysis/irans-flexible-fatwa-how-expediency-shapes-nuclear-decisionmaking

About The Author:

Yash Swar is a student of FYBA Political Science at St. Xavier's College, Mumbai

China's Military Purges and its Strategic and Operational Relevance

Abstract:

As China PLA is scheduled to observe its centenary next year, it will be important to note the recent purges in the PLA hierarchy raising question over its combat efficiency. It's important to note the existing status quo of the Civil military relations and the impact on the operational and strategic impact that PLA will have. The recent purges of senior PLA officers by Xi Jinping are unprecedented in the history of the PLA. The Chinese Communist Party's Central Military Commission (CMC), which oversees China's armed forces, has been organizationally decapitated. Of the six generals named to the CMC in 2022, only one remains. This will be a precursor for the existing strategic dilemma that China's Western Theatre Command will face in view of a renewed clash with India or if it has faced the dilemma of invading Taiwan in the years to come. From the perspective of operational effectiveness, the purges in the PLA will hinder the newly created Theatre Commands and as an extension will have great significance to the development of joint operations capability.

Key words: PLA, Centenary, Theatre Command, Chinese President, Western Theatre Command

As China is preparing itself ahead of the centenary of the People Liberation Army next year, it's important to note the existing status quo of the Civil military relations and the impact on the operational and strategic impact that PLA will have[1].

To start with, the PLA is legally and functionally subordinate to the Chinese Communist Party (CCP), not the state. The Central Military Commission (CMC), chaired by Xi Jinping, ensures that the party controls the gun. The military serves as the guardian of the CCP's survival, while also expanding its role to defend increasing territorial claims in the South China Sea and near Taiwan.

The recent purges of senior PLA officers by Xi Jinping are unprecedented in the history of the PLA. The Chinese Communist Party's Central Military Commission (CMC), which oversees China's armed forces, has been organizationally decapitated. Of the six generals named to the CMC in 2022, only one remains.

On the other hand, as the new data gathered by the CSIS China Power team shows, the significance of this round of purges extends far beyond the CMC to impact the entire PLA leadership which may impact in their operational capability[2].

It's noted that the CMC, the highest grade an officer can hold is theater command leader, which includes the commanders and political commissars of the four services and five regional theater commands, as well as the directors of key departments within the CMC.

Further as per the available data, the focus on grades indicates that the PLA leadership comprises roughly 176 billets or positions. In addition to the six CMC positions (two vice chairs and four members), these include 25 theater command leader positions and another 145theater command deputy leader positions, according to Text Ore's Directory of PLA Military Leadership 2025.

Further as noted by CSIS Database on Chinese Military Purges shows that 101 senior officers who served in CMC, theater command, or theater deputy command grade positions have been dismissed or gone missing as a part of the purges.

After accounting for positions in which more than one purge has occurred, such as the commander of the PLA Rocket Force, approximately 52 percent of positions in the PLA leadership have been impacted.

This figure is striking and extraordinary, demonstrating the depth of Xi's campaign and the unprecedented churn in the PLA leadership. It has affected the commanders and political commissars of each service (Army, Navy, Air Force, and Rocket Force) and each theater command, as well as the directors of six CMC departments, among many other senior leadership positions and deputy leadership positions.

It's noted that purges have occurred in approximately 38 percent of all theater command deputy leader positions.

First, the depth of the purge suggests that dissatisfaction with the PLA leadership's performance especially in the operations in Galwan Doklam against India is a major factor in Xi's calculus (in addition to concerns about corruption, political loyalty, military autonomy, military obedience, or policy differences).

The above will have connotation on rebuilding the PLA leadership will take time which may lead them to lag behind the ambitions of the PLA ahead of the centenary next year or even beyond. A large gap exists at the theatre command leader grade, with 38 officers in such positions having been dismissed or disappeared.

They can only be replaced by officers serving in theatre deputy leader command positions, yet with 56 officers in this grade having been dismissed, the pool of potential officers who can be promoted to theatre command level positions has been cut by more than one-third. Moreover, to be promoted to a higher grade, an officer typically must serve three to five years in their current grade, further complicating efforts to replenish the leadership positions[3(a)].

On the other hand, the purge underscores the challenges that PLA leadership would face, either with empty billets or newly promoted officers inexperienced in their new roles, in undertaking large-scale military operations such as a blockade or amphibious assault of Taiwan. Although roughly half (53 percent) of theatre command–level officers who were purged came from the command track, this proportion grows to around two-thirds (68 percent) at the deputy theatre command level, highlighting the difficulty that the PLA will face to meet its ambitious modernization goals.

In addition, the purge is being led by the CCP office, which accuses high ranking Chinese General Zhang of trampling on the 'Chairman Responsibility System'. This is code for Zhang challenging Xi's supreme authority, and the episode therefore has tell-tale signs of a political power struggle. Moreover, the PLA is a secretive organisation and has historically often been at the forefront of resisting Party initiatives, even during Mao Zedong's era.

Therefore, even individuality and independent expression of thought can be interpreted as defiance, especially by Xi, who has become extremely apprehensive in the run-up to next year's leadership renewal. The purge is being led by the CCP office, which accuses Zhang of trampling on the 'Chairman Responsibility System'.

This is code for Zhang challenging Xi's supreme authority, and the episode therefore has tell-tale signs of a political power struggle

Another noticeable feature of this investigation is the media drip-feeding of multiple allegations, including the leak of nuclear secrets, corruption in promotions, and other reasons cited for the case. However, this also reflects Beijing's concealed anxiety and a weak justification for this round of top-level removals. Predictably, Zhang and Liu are being accused of exceptionally grave, unpatriotic conduct, intended to discipline elite dissent, the rank and file, and the wider military community[3(b)].

China's approach to Civil Military relationship and its relevance today

The fissures between CCP and PLA are evident from the days of Mao itself when he developed PLA as a praetorian revolutionary group Mao suggested three methods: permanent revolution, ideological rectification, and self-transformation through struggle. This effectively introduced a siege mentality in the CCP, which has endured through generational changes in its leadership.

Coming to the present days of Xi Jenping response to this fundamental question has been encapsulated in his concept of 'self-revolution': treating corruption and disloyalty not as governance failures but as existential political threats thereby creating a new layer in Civil Military relations[4].

Xi, therefore, drives a vertical self-revolution through surveillance, discipline, fear, and bureaucratic penetration, keeping technological control over economic and administrative domains while enhancing ideological purity in political and military realms.

This also underpins his continuous search for adversaries, real or imagined, reining in corporate czars such as Jack Ma, pursuing dissidents abroad, and side-lining elder politicians such as former President Hu Jintao.

Xi, therefore, drives a vertical self-revolution through surveillance, discipline, fear, and bureaucratic penetration, keeping technological control over economic and administrative domains while enhancing ideological purity in political and military realms.

This also underpins his continuous search for adversaries, real or imagined, reining in corporate czars such as Jack Ma, pursuing dissidents abroad, and sidelining elder politicians such as former President Hu Jintao.

Xi, therefore, drives a vertical self-revolution through surveillance, discipline, fear, and bureaucratic penetration, keeping technological control over economic and administrative domains while enhancing ideological purity in political and military realms. This also underpins his continuous search for adversaries, real or imagined.

His anti-corruption campaigns are a crucial part of the permanent struggle, ensnaring thousands of "tigers and flies," especially in the PLA. Gradually, Xi has dismantled the entire CMC, barring Zhang Shengmin, his anti-corruption enforcer. If Zhang and Liu were not spared, there is no guarantee that Zhang Shengmin himself will not eventually fall. Chinese history is replete with examples of emperors purging their top aides and lieutenants, along with their family and patronage networks, once doubts arose over their loyalty or continued utility.

Earlier, the CMC exercised command and control over the seven Military Regions (MR) of the PLA, the PLA Navy, the PLA Air Force and the Second Artillery Corps through the four general headquarters, namely, the General Staff Department (GSD), General Political Department (GPD), General Armament Department (GAD) and General Logistic Department (GLD).

In order to integrate and strengthen the joint structure in line with its military doctrine 'integrated joint operations under conditions of informationisation,' the seven Military Regions headquartered in Shenyang, Beijing, Jinan, Nanjing, Guangzhou, Chengdu and Lanzhou were reorganised in 2016 into five new 'Joint Battle Zone Commands' (Joint Commands) working directly under the CMC. As it reorganized its Command Matrix, China started to have five Theater Commands, namely the Eastern Theater Command, the Southern Theater Command, the Western Theater Command, the Northern Theater Command and the Central Theater Command of the PLA.

Further, in order to attain a leaner structure without compromising on its efficiency, China started to cut down the strength of military by 3,00,000 personnel from late 2015 onwards. The process eventually ended in 2018 and it was the 11th time that the military's size has been reduced since the founding of New China in 1949.

China's Civil Military relations and it's context within institutions

Coming back to the recent purges, the recent purge is bound to create anxiety in the PLA, eroding trust in promotions, command structures, and institutions. The worst sufferer is the CMC. Xi will eventually strive to populate the CMC with a younger generation of military officers untainted by the politics of the old guard — a much more difficult vetting exercise. Even the more enterprising recruits in the future are likely to be cautious after observing the predicament of their predecessors.

However, it's noted that coup fears or an immediate leadership threat to Xi from the military remain low, as the PLA is institutionally fragmented into theatre commands and party-controlled organs and remains answerable to Xi through parallel command structures.

However, the elite fragmentation will occur, as officers allied to or promoted by purged generals may feel insecure or sidelined, thereby creating space for factionalism. This could lead to micro-level disobedience, leaks, sluggish implementation of directives, and a loss of cohesion, accompanied by copious mistrust in the PLA.

As the PLA appears to be entering a phase where institutional cohesion, professionalism, and higher command effectiveness may become brittle. The pre-eminent emphasis on political work and ideological purity risks political commissars dominating the PLA rather than commanders. This renewed emphasis on the 'Red Over Experts' dynamic will be net negative in the long run.

Earlier, the fissures between PLA and CCP were evident during the the fourth plenary session of the 20th Central Committee of the Communist Party of China (CPC). It's noted that the bridge between the closing phase of the 14th Five-Year Plan and the preparation of the 15th Five-Year Plan (2026-2030) — a stage that will lay the groundwork for China's basic modernisation by 2035.

Externally, sluggish global growth, rising protectionism and fragmentation of supply chains threaten export stability. Domestically, the economy continues to grapple with weak consumption, debt overhangs and a need for deeper supply-side reforms. Against this backdrop, the Fourth Plenary re-anchors the 15th Five-Year Plan around a few central propositions[5].

Recent developments within the People's Liberation Army (PLA) leadership, including the high-profile purge of Central Military Commission Vice Chairman Zhang Youxia. Exposing the internal tensions for civil-military relations in China, including how Xi's consolidating authority over the PLA affects military modernisation, strategic decision-making, and China's regional posture.

The theoretical models of Chinese civil-military relations that exist within the literature during the period divide into three distinctive categories.

"Traditional models" including the Factional, Symbiosis, Professionalism, and Party Control models, dominate the literature from 1989 to 1995. Scholars worked to integrate information becoming available as the PRC opened to the world into these already existing models of Chinese civil-military relations.

However, evolving political dynamics within the PRC following Tiananmen marginalized the utility of the models. From 1995 to 1997 many scholars argued that these traditional models should not be considered mutually exclusive but complementary.

This concept of a "combination model" was short lived as it became increasingly apparent that even a combination of traditional models had little predictive or even explanatory power in light of rapidly changing political dynamics. Two new models, the Conditional Compliance and State Control models, emerged in the period of 1997–2003. Both incorporated elements of the traditional models while attempting to address the implications of new political and military dynamics in the PRC.

Examining the predictions of these models against four case studies involving major developments in civil-military relations, we found that although each model had some descriptive and explanatory power, none possessed strong predictive ability.

The traditional models help explain the PLA's reaction to intensified Party control following Tiananmen, but none was able to predict how Chinese civil-military relations evolved subsequently.

Civil-military models offered their most specific (and ultimately least accurate) predictions regarding the leadership succession from Deng Xiaoping to Jiang Zemin. Most models predicted a strong role for the PLA in the succession that did not materialize. This was the period when traditional civil-military models began to run up against the reality of changing political dynamics within the PRC.

When the PLA was forced to withdraw from most commercial activities in the mid-1990s, the models predicted a far slower, more contentious, and less complete divestiture than ultimately occurred. Most analysts correctly predicted that the PLA would have only limited involvement in the leadership transition from Jiang Zemin to Hu Jintao following the 16th Party Congress in 2002, but subsequent explanations for why the transition went smoothly emphasize different factors.

The models did agree in their emphasis on the importance of greater political institutionalization in reducing PLA influence and highlighted the implicit role and future potential importance of the PLA in elite politics, especially if divisions among the civilian leadership produce a political crisis in the future.

Since 2023, at least 15 full generals and admirals19 have been removed due to charges or even suspicions of corruption, disciplinary violations, bribery, economic graft and political disloyalty (Kumar 2024).20 Most of these terminations have taken place in the PLA Rocket Force (PLARF), which is responsible for the vast majority of the PLA's conventional and nuclear missile arsenals, as well as in the Equipment Development Department (EDD), which is in charge of military procurement as one of the CMC's functional departments.

The extensive nature of this prosecution calls into question (for some) Xi's strongman persona. Despite more than a decade of effort, Xi has not been able to successfully eradicate corruption

In August 2023, the entire PLARF leadership was removed, including its Commander General Li Yuchao and Political Commissar General Xu Zhongbo, due to suspicions and subsequent investigations. Of note, the PLARF had been acquiring large tracts of land in Western China to build silos for their growing arsenal of fixed, nuclear and land-based intercontinental ballistic missiles. These land purchases may have produced many opportunities for fraud by senior officers, including (for example) the reselling some of these lands at far higher prices than the original purchase price, as well as other procurement irregularities 19 In the PLA, full general/admiral rank is three stars.

The numbers cited of removed officers may vary given differences among researchers in their understanding of the current state of ongoing prosecutions and convictions versus also counting those officers who have disappeared from public view but have not been formally dismissed or charged.

Since assuming power, Xi has removed at least 78 PLA officers at the rank of two stars or above. The number of those targeted is currently changing on an almost weekly basis. 21 In 2016, Xi made the PLARF into a full service of the PLA, putting it on equal organizational footing with the PLA Air Force (PLAAF), the PLA Ground Forces (PLAGF) and the PLA Navy (PLAN).

Furthermore, there may also have been concerns about these activities degrading the operational state of China's quickly expanding land-based nuclear forces or the tactical level or the operational level of warfare. Credible media reports, for example, describe missiles filled with water rather than fuel, and silos in Western China with retractable openings that did not function correctly, preventing effective launch capabilities.

The appointment of officers from other services to take command of the PLA Rocket Force also indicated that President Xi had lost all confidence in this service to manage its own affairs, in particular, to maintain discipline and root out corruption

In July 2023, the PLA announced that all procurement programs dating back to 2017 would be investigated. Furthermore, then-Vice Chairman General He Weidong, a loyalist of Xi, stated that the CMC would crack down on "fake combat capabilities" at a speech in March 2024.

In conclusion

The recent purges within the PLA and the existing fissures in the PLA and the Chinese Presidency is supposed to widen the civil military intension in China[6]. This will be a precursor for the existing strategic dilemma that China's Western Theatre Command will face in view of a renewed clash with India or if it has faced the dilemma of invading Taiwan in the years to come. From the perspective of operational effectiveness, the purges in the PLA will hinder the newly created Theatre Commands and as an extension will have great significance to the development of joint operations capability.

End Notes:

1) The Purges Within China's Military Are Even Deeper Than You Think (China Power, February 24, 2026) https://chinapower.csis.org/china-pla-military-purges/

2) Assessing Xi's Unprecedented Purges of China's Military (CSIS, February 2026) https://csis-website-prod.s3.amazonaws.com/s3fs-public/2026-02/260224_Lin_Xi_Purges.pdf?VersionId=JwvU3rl5SpP74Ly.LrjCZps.Hn_CByZq

3) a) Bill Gertz -More than 100 senior PLA officers purged for corruption, says Air Force think tank report Washington Times - Monday, July 20, 2026 https://www.washingtontimes.com/news/2026/jul/20/100-senior-pla-officers-purged-corruption-think-tank-

b) Zi Yang Elite Fragmentation and Anxiety in the PLA (Jamestown Foundation, February 11, 2026) https://jamestown.org/elite-fragmentation-and-anxiety-in-the-pla/

4) Lim, J. (2022). Explaining military reforms under Xi Jinping: military effectiveness, power consolidation, and party-military relations in China. Journal of Contemporary East Asia Studies, 11(2), 264–281

5) Balaji Chandramohan Strategic impact of the Fourth Plenum and its impact on Beijing's polity (Centre for China Studies, November 11, 2025) https://www.c3sindia.org/post/strategic-impact-of-the-fourth-plenum-and-its-impact-on-beijing-s-polity-by-mr-balaji-chandramohan

6) Atul Kumar Xi Jinping's Rectification Campaign and Power Consolidation in China (Obsevervor Research Foundation, March 13, 2026) https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/xi-jinping-s-rectification-campaign-and-power-consolidation-in-china

About The Author:

Balaji Chandramohan is a research scholar with University of Madras and he was previously a visiting fellow with future directions international, Perth Australia.'

Erosion of the Rules- Based International Order: Transition to a Law of Power

Abstract

Although the term "Rules-Based International Order " (RBIO) has gained prominence in the post-Cold War era, its foundation was laid in the 1945 UN Charter. The RBIO was intended to function within a rule-of-law framework, but the system has eroded under the structural realities of the Westphalian nation-state system. In the absence of a common “Leviathan”, equal sovereigns began to prioritise national interest over international law and morality, leading to intensified great-power rivalry.

This paper is divided into different parts, beginning with an analysis of the context and the controversy surrounding the RBIO, and how the unilateral and selective enforcement of rules by major powers, in contrast to the idea of multilateralism and global governance of the RBIO, has resulted in a transition from multilateral consensus to power-based competition. The Paper discusses how the Global South’s perception of the RBIO as a "law of power” has made them engage in the formation of mini-lateral blocks, small-scale collaboration on the basis of shared interests instead of shared values as a tool for strategic autonomy, moving to India’s diplomatic manoeuvring to navigate the geopolitical reality of power domination to safeguard national interest. The paper deals with the effect of the growing popularity of minilateralism on the RBIO, as the Global North also uses these “small club groupings,” suggesting that RBIO should be reformed to reflect the neutrality of the system, in which rules are applied to the weak and strong alike to deal with common and complex transnational threats like cybercrime, Climate Change, health Emergencies, and AI governance.

Keywords: Rules-Based International Order (RBIO), Multilateralism, Global Governance, International Law, UN Charter, Global South, Minilateralism, Bilateral Treaty,

The paper examines the context and the controversy of the Rule-Based International Order (RBIO) at a time when relations between states are marked by intense great-power rivalry, creating geopolitical uncertainty. The RBIO in the contemporary era faces unprecedented strain, undermining the pillars of the order. The paper proposes examining the context and controversy surrounding the legitimacy, fairness, and survival of the RBIO amid US Unilateralism, Russian Expansionism, and US-PRC strategic competition, which have dismantled its pillars. The paper addresses the challenges to the RBIO, a gap between its promise and the current reality. What is the future of the formal treaty regime, which enforces the rule-based International system through formal dispute mechanisms? How is India navigating contested geopolitical shifts to maintain and secure its national interest? What changes are to be expected in global power dynamics in an environment of self–seeing, egoist states, more concerned with their strategic autonomy? Has the time come for recognising that the principles of the Rules-Based Order are more context-dependent rather than universal? Is there a shift from multilateral consensus to power-based competition and regional mini-orders? Is the system of Multilateralism equipped to address global existential threats and challenges such as cybercrime, climate change, pandemics, and AI governance?

Beginning of the Rules –Based International Order

The massive and unprecedented devastation caused by the Second World War created a sentiment and willingness that the mayhem caused by great power politics, shifting of alliances, and imperial conquest must be replaced with a system, a global framework governed by shared norms. The vision was ambitious and universal, and fuelled by the idea of replacing the chaos of shifting alliances with a predictable world governed by shared rules and norms. The UN Charter, with its founding principles / Purposes, laid the general foundation for an international order based on rules. Thus, a collective effort by the international community to address common challenges through international cooperation and diplomacy, emphasising mutual adherence to universally agreed principles of international law and promoting multilateralism, began. That was the sentiment of the world and the leading powers at that time, a realistic assessment of the post-World War scenario, that an alternative platform to war is to be provided, to minimise differences/conflicts, if not to totally eliminate the differences between nation-states, which are sovereign equals.

The UN-centred international system provided a collective security framework and a structured mechanism for the peaceful settlement of Disputes under the UN framework. The primary purpose of the UN was described in the UN Charter as maintaining peace and security in the world[1]. At the same time, the catastrophic collapse of the world trade in the 1930s, fueled by the Great Depression and the resulting surge in economic nationalism, compelled the leaders to accept that unregulated economic nationalism, retaliatory tariffs, in an interconnected global economy, can never ensure economic prosperity for any nation. Most importantly, the prevailing belief was that if nations are bound together by economic dependency within a framework of international institutions designed to manage the global economy collaboratively, lasting peace may be achieved.

During and immediately after the Second World War, the victorious powers, the United States, the United Kingdom, and other allied nations, engaged in a series of negotiations to establish a framework for the post-war global economy. The result was the creation of the International Monetary Fund and the World Bank at the July 1944 Bretton Woods Conference and the signing of the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade, the precursor to the World Trade Organisation (WTO) at an international conference in Geneva in October 1947. Thus, a new framework of global governance, based on shared /agreed norms, primarily having these three dimensions- promoting multilateralism to maintain international peace and security, open global trade, free markets, liberal diplomacy, & treaty-based solution to conflict came into existence.

Change from LIO TO RIO – Liberal International Order to Rules-based International Order

For decades, this international order, so created, was not called "rules-based international order." The term "rules-based international order" began to feature in foreign policy discourse in the 2000s, initially in the Anglosphere. Former US Secretary of State Anthony Blinken described the RIO as an "international order" based on "rules.

'The system of laws, agreements, principles, and institutions that the world came together to build after two world wars to manage relations between states, to prevent conflict, to uphold the rights of all people[2].

The logic behind the change of term appears to be a tactical move. Many commentators have agreed that the promotion of the new term RIO in place of LIO was designed to secure the support of the non-Western world against Chinese and Russian expansionist and other policies. There is no denying the fact that the non-Western world, especially the Arab world, viewed Western liberal democratic values and the way they were promoted, especially during the Cold War period, with reservation.

The term RBIO was frequently used during the administration of former US President Joe Biden, whose officials often used it to warn against what they held to be threats to the international system posed by Russian and Chinese geopolitical revisionism.

A system built on great power equations

From the very beginning, the order was primarily led by the USA and the 5 veto-wielding permanent members of the UNSC. Over time, this Western-led approach became a concern, particularly for the Global South. In fact, the selective application of agreed norms relating to sovereignty, Human Rights, Trade, climate change, etc., created a kind of credibility crisis for the system.

The system indeed had its own contradictions and appeared to be based on great-power equations built by the victors of the Second World War. The UN charter promoted the principle of Sovereign Equality, the P-5 veto, five permanent member states veto in the UNSC, making them more equal than the other UN members, allowing them to veto decisions in the UNSC. Similarly, the Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) rules also invited criticism, as they allow nukes only to those who already have them. Ironically, the 'haves' are the great P-5 members of the UNSC.

The NPT, which entered into force in 1970 and was extended indefinitely in 1995, seeks to

1. Prevent the spread of nuclear weapons. Non-nuclear states agree not to acquire or develop nuclear weapons.

2. Promote the right to peaceful uses of nuclear energy and

3. Move towards nuclear disarmament. The P5 member states, the nuclear-weapon states, commit in good faith to eventually eliminate their nuclear arsenals. These goals are often described as the NPT's 'three pillars'- non-proliferation, peaceful uses of nuclear energy and disarmament.

The NPT has, however, been undermined, especially by the failure to implement its disarmament pillar. In fact, the grand bargain at the heart of the NPT – those non-nuclear states forgo nuclear weapons in exchange for progress on disarmament by the P5 – is under severe strain. Under the NPT regime the State Parties are given the right to use nuclear technology for peaceful, civilian purposes, overseen by international inspections by International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA), but they are not given the right to acquire or develop nuclear weapons. Whereas no meaningful efforts are made by the nuclear weapon states to do away with their nuclear arsenals.

Further, the NPT's indefinite extension in 1995 created unrealistic expectations for progress towards nuclear disarmament. The reality started appearing to be in sharp contrast to the nuclear disarmament pillar of NPT. China's nuclear build-up is accelerating, with the Chinese arsenal estimated to have doubled between 2020 and 2025[3]. Another UNSC member, France, has announced an expansion of its nuclear programme.

The New START, the US–Russia nuclear arms control agreement also expired in February 2026, with nothing to replace it. This is a formal end to the last remaining legally binding nuclear arms control agreement between the United States and the Russian Federation. The reality is that for the first time since 1972, there are no legal limits on the strategic nuclear weapons stockpiles of the world's two largest nuclear powers. The two states with huge nuclear arsenals are left without a binding, verification-backed ceiling on their deployed forces.

The Crack within the nuclear-armed states was evident in the recently concluded 11th Review Conference of the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (NPT), which was held in New York in April/May. The review conference failed to arrive at a final document and ended without a consensus amidst high nuclear tension. The sentiment expressed by the conference president aptly summarises the hopeless future of nuclear disarmament in the context of heightened geopolitical security concerns.

Vietnam's U.N. Ambassador Do Hung Viet, who chaired the conference, announced that there was no consensus among the 191 parties to the Nuclear Non-proliferation Treaty on even a watered-down final document.

He told the press

"No one blocked consensus." But he said "a very important reason" for the failure to reach an outcome was a provision in the final draft that said Iran "can never seek, develop or acquire any nuclear weapons[4].

Breakdown of Multilateralism within the World Trade Organisation (WTO)

Dispute settlement under the WTO is the central pillar of the multilateral trading system. The Uruguay Round and the creation of the WTO, as a member-driven organisation, were aimed at establishing and enforcing global rules of trade, so that trade flows smoothly, predictably and freely as possible[5].

The Dispute Settlement Mechanism (DSM) under the WTO was, to a great extent, successful in transforming the global trading system into a more rule-based, inclusive, and capable of enforcing trade obligations. Unfortunately, the Dispute settlement of the multilateral trading system has been functionally paralysed since 2020, because of the blockage of appointment or reappointment of Appellate Body members by the USA[6].

In the absence of a functional Appellate Body (AB) any state losing a WTO panel case has no option to appeal, no final ruling. As of 2026, more than 30 panel rulings have been appealed "into the void," meaning that a resolution of these dispute proceedings is not possible until new Appellate Body members are appointed. US steel tariffs, China IP, EU Palm Oil cases are some of the panel rulings that have been appealed 'into the void[7].

All future panel rulings also face the risk of being appealed "into the void" unless a solution is found to the impasse. Without a binding dispute settlement mechanism, the global trading system is fast reverting to a power-based" trading model rather than a "rules-based" model. The smaller economies are unable to defend their trade rights on an equal footing. " Unilateral /Punitive tariffs. Imposed by great powers are instances of economic bullying by major developed nations. Disputes are increasingly settled through bilateral negotiations, making the one-on-one trade negotiations between smaller economies and major economic powers more of a zero-sum game. Smaller economies are forced to accept unfavourable, asymmetric terms or face unilateral sanctions and market exclusion.

Selective Application of Norms of RBIO – Fairness and Credibility at stake

The selective application of mutually agreed norms as enshrined in the UN Charter by Super Powers was more than evident. During the Cold War period, the ideological conflict and the power confrontation between the two blocs resulted in legitimising unlawful actions by both the superpowers by advancing doctrines like the Brezhnev Doctrine (USSR) and the Truman Doctrine (USA). To fulfil ideological interests and expand their influence, both superpowers engaged in a selective application of the UN Charter and in Proxy wars. Very often, both powers resorted to the 'veto' power to prevent/block resolutions condemning their own actions. As a result, the UNSC, designed as a tool for the collective Security system under the UN charter, failed to deliver the expected result. In other words, Power politics -selective adherence and application of universal norms by the superpowers became the reality of the RBIO during the Cold War period.

The acceptance of ICJ jurisdiction and judgements by the major powers also appeared to be mixed. The U.S.A filed a case before the Court following the occupation of its Embassy in Tehran by Iranian militants on 4 November 1979, and the capture and holding as hostages of its diplomatic and consular staff. Whereas the USA contested and refused to abide by the ICJ decision in the Nicaragua case concerning a dispute relating to responsibility for military and paramilitary activities in and against Nicaragua, filed by Nicaragua on 9th April, 1984[8].

The technique employed by the USA in the name of the Vandenberg Reservation—part of the 1946 U.S. Declaration accepting ICJ compulsory jurisdiction — also raised concern about the limitation of the ICJ as a judicial organ to effectively address interstate disputes in contentious cases involving the USA and arising from multilateral treaties[9]. The Vandenberg Reservation was cleverly used by the USA in the Nicaragua case.

During the Cold War, the other superpower, the former USSR, never accepted the ICJ's compulsory jurisdiction. The Soviets, instead, favoured negotiations as the most "flexible and efficient" means of international conflict resolution. Fedor Kozhevnikov, who was himself a Soviet judge on the ICJ from 1953 to 1961, wrote that, as a rule, the ICJ could only deal with legal disputes and not with disputes of "political character." For disputes of "political character," negotiations were the suitable means of dispute resolution[10].

Toward the end of the Cold War, the Soviet Union's approach towards the global court softened slightly. In 1989, under Mikhail Gorbachev's policy of perestroika, the USSR withdrew its reservations regarding compulsory jurisdiction for six major human rights conventions (including the Genocide Convention) [11].

To date, Russia's acceptance of ICJ jurisdiction is consent and treaty-based. Cases against Russia before the court can be brought only if the issue in dispute arises from specific treaties to which Russia is a party. For example, in recent proceedings brought by Ukraine against Russia for its war of aggression, the ICJ's jurisdiction was established because both nations are parties to the 1948 Genocide Convention and other specific international conventions. Russia's 2014 annexation of Crimea also constituted a crucial violation of core UN charter provisions.

This refusal to accept the court's jurisdiction occurred in several other cases involving other permanent members. For instance, for years, the UK refused to comply with the landmark ICJ advisory opinion (2019) and subsequent UN General Assembly Resolutions that the UK's 1965 detachment of the Chagos Archipelago from Mauritius (prior to Mauritius's 1968 independence) and the United Kingdom's continued administration of the Chagos Archipelago is unlawful

Another major UNSC power, the PRC, has worked through both legal, quasi-legal, and blatantly illegal means to claim sovereignty in violation of the Convention on the Law of the Sea in the South China Sea. China has refused to accept the authority of the Permanent Court of Arbitration, located at the Hague, in a claim brought by the Philippines under UNCLOS, including the court's ruling in favour of the Philippines.

End of the Cold War – A trajectory shift

The end of the Cold War, with the collapse of the former USSR in December, 26th, 1991 created a high optimism among the Western liberal elites about a liberal world order based on democracy, the rule of law, and a liberal market economy in place of the ideological rivalry that marked the Cold War era. A historic shift in trajectory was evident with the introduction of concepts like R2P (2005) and the globalisation of the world, with priority given to trade over ideologically driven military conflict. The establishment of the World Trade Organisation in 1995 to promote and institutionalise Free Trade was one such momentous achievement.

Unfortunately, the 9/11 (2001) deadly terror attack on the USA, followed by rhetoric like "Axis of Evil "," War on Terror (WOT) "Weapons of Mass Destruction "(WMD), resulted in more harm to the Rules-Based Order than delivering compliance to international law.

Following the 9/11 terrorist attacks, the WOT, a military campaign against Afghanistan, which, at the time, was under the government of the Taliban, who were accused of harbouring Al-Qaeda leaders, was launched. Controversy and intense debate surrounded the treatment of prisoners of WOT at the US military detention centre at Guantanamo Bay, the U.S. naval base in Cuba. Serious questions were raised about national security, human rights, and justice. Many detainees were alleged to have been subject to physical torture and psychological abuse.

The Bush administration held that the enemies in the conflict, the terror suspects, were neither combatants nor civilians but unlawful combatants, rather than prisoners of war (POWs), who could be attacked at any time and detained indefinitely without trial. By declaring and classifying the terror suspects as unlawful combatants, the Bush administration managed to escape the scrutiny under the Third Geneva Convention, which has been ratified by the USA and which provide a minimum standard of care for the PoW, among other facilities and rights[12]. Another controversy surrounded the 2003 invasion of Iraq, which was justified under "Axis of Evil" WMD and terrorism narratives. However, the operation lacked UN Security Council authorization[13]. All these highly debated issues/ decisions undermined America's moral authority to be the leader in promoting and protecting a rules-based order. To make matters worse, the selective approach to legal norms by the USA created a kind of apprehension if the USA is promoting the rules-based order, based on an interpretation of rules favourable to U.S. national interests.

As the years passed by with Vladimir Putin's rise to power in 2000, Russia transformed into an aggressive revisionist power aiming to reversing its losses of the 1990s through territorial conquest and annexation. In violation of Article 2 of the UN Charter and the Budapest Memorandum of 1994. annexation of Crimea (2014) was executed, and the territorial conquest escalated into the sweeping invasion of Ukraine in 2022. Contrary to the expectation that China's 2001 accession to the World Trade Organisation would lead to political liberalisation, China became more authoritarian internally and more assertive externally through its Belt and Road Initiative and pursued an aggressive policy in the South China Sea, in line with its defined national interests.

Joe Biden's Presidency and Rules-Based Order

Following President Trump's defeat in the 2020 presidential election, a general sense of euphoria and hope emerged with Joe Biden, a liberal politician, assuming the office of the President of the USA.

During the presidency of Donald Trump, whose all-encompassing policy doctrine was to Make America Great Again (MAGA), the rules-based order appeared rarely. Trump's "America First" doctrine, in fact, systematically disrupted the main pillars of the post-1945 rules-based international order. Decisions like shifting from multilateralism and global consensus toward transactional bilateralism, unilateral protectionism and trade barriers, coupled with protecting America's national interest at all costs, badly affected the long-standing norms of free trade under WTO. His decision to withdraw from key multilateral institutions and agreements created a power vacuum and uncertainty. Joe Biden's presidency was marked by issuing dozens of executive orders in his first month to reverse steps President Trump had taken in his first presidential term that diminished the United States' commitment to international human rights. For example, the USA re-joined the UN Human Rights Council under his presidency. An executive order was signed to bring back the USA to the Paris climate accord, reiterating the significant role played by the USA in framing the accord. USA re-joining the global climate accord was promoted as momentous as our joining the Agreement was in 2016 — and as momentous as our re-joining is today — what we do in the coming weeks, months, and years is even more important[14].

President Biden has famously claimed that upholding human rights is a main priority of his foreign policy. However, a selective approach to human rights by the Biden administration raised questions about the real intention. Controversy surrounded the Biden administration's policy to ignore or to defend excessive /alleged disproportionate military actions by its allies, Israel, in Gaza, that followed in the aftermath of the Hamas attack on Israel in Oct, 2023. While engaging in aggressively condemning similar tactics used by Russia in Ukraine, which is a primary strategic adversary of the USA. This asymmetrical application of International Humanitarian Law resulted in sharp criticism, and the administration was criticised for hypocrisy and double standards, raising concerns about the legitimacy of the order, which, ironically, the Biden administration sought to protect. It is worth recalling his speech to the 76th Session of the General Assembly of the United Nations, held in New York, 21-27 September 2021

"We will defend the rules-based international order that has been the bedrock of global security for decades, and we will work with our partners to ensure that the rules of the road are applied equally to all nations, large and small." [15].

In contrast to this promise for equal application of rules, the inconsistent enforcement of rules, whether in the case of Israel, Saudi Arabia, or Egypt, ultimately eroded U.S. credibility as a reliable and responsible power to uphold the global order. President Joe Biden, for instance, has called the charges of war crimes and crimes against humanity in Gaza against the Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu "outrageous" At the same time, after Russia launched a full-scale invasion of Ukraine in 2022, President Biden accused his Russian counterpart, Vladimir Putin, of genocide and denounced him for undermining "the rules-based international order". The US government later applauded the ICC for its decision in 2023 to prosecute the Russian leader for war crimes while vehemently criticising the arrest warrant issued by the ICC against the Israeli Prime Minister.

The Biden era ended with a highly fractured global system, and selective enforcement and adherence to international legal norms by the USA and other major powers increasingly weakened the system's credibility. The Biden administration's foreign policy achievements were labelled a "Strategy of Renewal," a new age in international affairs. In reality, however, the rules-based international order was in a state of advanced decomposition by the end of the Biden era[16].

Challenges to Multilateral Global Norms- Donald Trump's Second Term

The second term of Trump's presidency appears to have given a deadly blow to the Westphalian model of the nation-state. The Foreign policy goals adopted in the first year of the second Trump administration have challenged the key principles of the established post 1945 global order-, primarily, I) a global trade system based on reciprocity and negotiated rules, ii) mutual respect of the sovereign equality and the territorial integrity principle and iii) the non-use of force to acquire territory. To begin with, the multilateral global trade regime was replaced with sweeping, indiscriminate tariffs that affected allies and rivals alike. Most notoriously, President Trump used the International Emergency Economic Powers Act (IEEPA) of 1977. Two foreign threats: the influx of illegal drugs from Canada, Mexico, and China and "large and persistent" trade deficits were cited. A national emergency was so declared, deeming both threats as "unusual and extraordinary," and presidential authority under IEEPA.

To deal with the trade deficit threat, the President imposed a duty "on all imports from all trading partners" of at least 10%. These baseline tariffs were used as a geopolitical lever, establishing a framework to lower tariffs only if individual nations negotiated customized trade or security deals that directly reduced the U.S. trade deficit. An uncertainty in global trade, total disregard to multilateral global norms was so created. After the US Supreme court struck down the IEEPA-based tariffs ruling, president Trump immediately invoked Section 122 of the Trade Act of 1974—a provision allowing a temporary 150-day tariff during "serious international payments problems"—to implement a fresh, global 10% import duty[17].

In May, this year, the Trump administration launched a massive Section 301 investigation under the US Trade Act of 1974, creating a new, framework for imposing additional tariffs of 10% to 12%on imports of goods linked to forced labour economy. 60 trading partners including India are under the banner of combating forced labour in global supply chains[18]. This move appears more to be a strategic pressure technique and less as an anti-slavery initiative. Has the forced labour probe provided a pretext for Trump to create a new legal and moral vehicle for broad blanket trade restrictions?

President Trump's unilateral protectionism and economic nationalism soon resulted in an inevitable intensified shift from a U.S.-centred, WTO-centric order to strategic regionalism and decentralised globalisation, with the emergence of a regionalised global economy with the proliferation of regional trade agreements[19].

Trump's reliance on the brute force of the US military power, sanctioning U.S. military operations and authorising the abduction of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro in Jan, 2026, represented a severe blow to the rules-based international order. The global order as based on principles of the UN Charter uphold the principle of sovereignty and territorial integrity. A sovereign state is unimaginable without a permanent territory, over which the sovereign state exercises undisputed and exclusive jurisdiction, free from interference from others.

This is recognised in Article 2 (4) of the UN Charter

All Members shall refrain in their international relations from the threat or use of force against the territorial integrity or political independence of any state, or in any other manner inconsistent with the Purposes of the United Nations.

The abduction of Venezuelan President Nicolás Maduro and his wife, Cilia Flores, without a UNSC mandate, is widely seen as a clear violation of the principles of international law of non-interference and sovereign immunity given to the Head of State. The US offering a legal justification to this unlawful abduction appears to be not new; it is the same rationale that was used earlier for invading Iraq. Similarly, the explanation given by Marco Rubio, the US Secretary of State, regarding Washington's surprise entry into the Iran – Israel conflict, the joint US-Israel attacks that killed its supreme leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and military strikes against Iran are widely classified as an Act of Aggression[20]. For Iran was neither attacking the United States nor Israel, nor was it about to attack these states. Iran, in fact, was actively engaged in a negotiation with the parameters of its nuclear program hours before the attacks began." Though Iran's argument that the right of self-defence permits a State to target any of an aggressor's military units, even those uninvolved in unlawful attacks, did not go well with many, including the African Union and the Arab League[21].

Present Crisis -A Structural Breakdown and the Advent of Strategic Autonomy

The most pertinent challenges to the so-called post-1945, Rules based Order is aptly summarised by the Canadian Prime Minister, Mark Carney at the annual World Economic Forum meeting at Davos on January 20, 2026

'… We knew the story of the international rules-based order was partially false. That the strongest would exempt themselves when convenient. That trade rules were enforced asymmetrically. And we knew that international law applied with varying rigour depending on the identity of the accused or the victim. --- great powers have begun using economic integration as weapons, tariffs as leverage, financial infrastructure as coercion, and supply chains as vulnerabilities to be exploited…"

He ended the speech with a word of caution

'…If great powers abandon even the presence of rules and values for the unhindered pursuit of their power and interests, the gains from transnationalism will become harder to replicate. Hegemons cannot continually monetise their relationships…'[22]

The undeniable and harsh reality of today's International Relations is that the postwar international order is crumbling- a 'New Global Disorder 'is forcing a change in policy for the Middle powers. Multilateral dispute settlement mechanisms such as the WTO and the UN are under threat or near collapse. These are the institutions on which the Middle Powers have traditionally relied. The near-collapse of these relief mechanisms has compelled the Middle powers like Canada and India to develop greater strategic autonomy in energy, food, critical minerals, finance, and supply chains to ensure that they remain truly sovereign.

Strategic Autonomy provides a nation-state with the much-needed flexibility, independence, and capacity to engage with multiple powers on its own terms, serving as a protective shield for national sovereignty. Strategic autonomy, thus, has become an absolute structural necessity, empowering the nation-states with the geopolitical resilience required to prevent external powers from dictating their economic or defence policies in a fractured world. As the US moved from rule – maker to rule – violator, nation-states moved to Strategic Autonomy, preferring to build their own power equations to check great power domination, to counter the saying strong do what they can[23].

The countries in between decided to combine economic, demographic, and defence capabilities to resist or restrain naked, brutal unilateralism, with total disregard for once-mutually accepted rules that built the edifice of the Rules-based order. Though the tendency to throw global norms to the dust is not uniquely American, this is the first American President to come to office on the explicit premise that the existing international order is flawed and disadvantageous to American interests. For the first time, an American president discredited the UN and other world bodies like the WTO and refused to share any global burden sharing, pausing America's significant financial contribution to world bodies[24]. This "Trumpian Ruptures "has reinforced both American Allies and Adversaries, Middle and Small powers to discard the rigid, Cold War-style alliance systems in favour of strategic autonomy and alliances[25].

Minilateralism, as a concept in International Relations, has been around for some time; its prominence has increased in recent years amid renewed US Unilateralism, Russia's emergence as a revisionist power, and China's growing power. Ironically, both the USA and the PRC are also entering into often exclusionary Minilateral partnerships to safeguard national interests. The USA has moved towards minilateralism to decouple critical supply chains from China by entering into a partnership with Japan, South Korea and Taiwan (Indo-Pacific Framework for Economic Prosperity) and by becoming part of Quad (with India, Australia) or AUKS (with Australia, UK) to integrate economic pressure with regional security architecture. PRC counters this strategy by expanding the Quad or the SCO.

India Narrative

India is navigating this fractured international landscape through multi-alignment and diversification. The choice of Strategic Autonomy gives India, a major democratic power, a unique advantage to partner with Western alliances while simultaneously engaging with rising revisionist powers like China and Russia. India is no longer non-aligned as in the past, but it is multi-aligned, built on issue-based collaborations, no longer staying away from power centers, engaging them simultaneously.

India, for example participated in the Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad), a Quadrilateral cooperation among the four robust democracies, - India, Japan, USA and Australia in a region redefined to include the Indian Ocean and the Pacific, mainly to ensure Maritime Security, Indo-Pacific maritime routes, access to advanced defence and critical technology, supply chain resilience and to counter China's "String of Pearls" encirclement in the Indian Ocean. Western analysts regard the Quad alliance as a mechanism to counter China's rising military and economic hegemony in the Indo-Pacific, promoting the PRC to term the Quad as "Asian NATO[26].

Whereas India intentionally avoids turning this alliance into an outright anti-China military bloc. To maintain "strategic autonomy", New Delhi continues to" balance its Western/Quad ties with involvement in groups like the BRICS and the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation. India's membership of the SCO (Shanghai Cooperation Organisation), which started as a minilateral grouping of six founding member states in 2001 and later expanded to a grouping of more than 10 member states and 17 SCO partner states, is better viewed through the prism of India's perception of Chinese and Russian influence and Chinese-Russian "no limits' friendship[27].

Membership in diverse groups has given India the distinction of being one of the few global powers to hold active membership in deeply contrasting groups. The objective is to navigate and balance relationships with all major powers, such as the USA, the EU, the PRC, and Russia. India now engages with the "superpowers" in overlapping patterns, expressed through diversified and functional engagement in the areas of defence, technology, trade, energy, etc. Selective coupling and decoupling are enabling India to enter into partnerships with specific defence, technological, trade, and energy needs. India has adopted a strategy of decoupling its military from complete foreign dependence to build true technological sovereignty, and of economic decoupling to reduce over-reliance on China (the "China Plus One" strategy). India's Atmanirbhar Bharat (Self-Reliant India) initiative is introduced as a framework to reduce dependence on Chinese goods.

But this stand of India seems not to go down well with the American administration. The USA. Deputy Secretary of State Christopher Landau at the Raisina Dialogue, 2026, India's premier geopolitical forum, so commented

"We're not going to make the mistakes we made with China 20 years ago, in terms of saying 'Oh, we're going to let you develop all these markets' and then, next thing we know, you're beating us in a lot of commercial things. We're going to make sure that what we do is fair to our people...."[28]

Conclusion

The 1945 ideal vision of an RBIO that rules, not power, will govern all States, the equal sovereigns, appears to be compromised today. The erosion of the RBIO thus shifts toward a law of power. Universal norms and Universal institutions are giving way to power-based coalitions, where geopolitical strength, not legal equality, determines outcomes. Egoist state behaviour under the anarchic structure, with steps such as blocking judicial appointments, missing deadlines, UNSC gridlock through excessive abuse of the veto privilege to block resolutions, and failing to honour commitments and judicial awards, has made collective action nearly impossible. Consensus for global collective action is now becoming rare, resulting in a transition of the universal-rule-based global order to a power-based grouping, where the few write the rules for many and make exceptions for themselves.

In theory, the RBIO multilateral framework and global governance still provide a platform for all states to come together, negotiate rules, build institutions, and coordinate to devise solutions to address issues of common concern and threat. In practice, however, arriving at a common consensus for global cooperation and governance is increasingly difficult due to the lack of such consensus. This lack of global consensus is unfortunately becoming the general norm, not an exception. In response, states from both the Global North and the Global South have initiated smaller issue-specific minilateral, flexible groups capable of offering quick solutions /responses to maintain Strategic Autonomy to offset the unilateral and punitive trade sanctions, supply chain vulnerabilities, and financial exclusions that the RBIO universal institutions are no longer able to provide. In fact, with the weaponisation of interdependence transforming supply chains, trade routes, and semiconductors into a new geopolitical battleground, this new small security and economic alignment is taking place, replacing the multialignment of the RBIO.

While introducing the concept of minilateralism, Moises Naim has famously stated the reality and the difficulty of getting a global consensus for an international action as a well-intended but futile endeavour[29].

Since the rationale behind the formation of Minilateral cooperation is unlikely to disappear soon, this concept of minilateralism is likely to remain in International Relations, making the future of the formal treaty regime context-dependent.

WTO, WHO, NPT and UNCLOS regimes will continue to exist with major powers conforming to rules only when the same favours them and bypassing them where they see their interests being constrained. India's pursuit of strategic autonomy by balancing in the Quad while leading in the BRICS illustrates that Middle Powers like India choose to navigate the geopolitical battle by collaborating on specific issues without being forced to choose a definite side in this new style of cold-war binary.

Minilateralism, in short, provides all states, middle and super powers alike, to identify and collaborate, to create mutually beneficial cooperation. Some minlateral efforts, for instance, like the Minilateral Climate effort -Just Energy Transition Partnerships (JETPs), formed in the year 2021 is contributing significantly to deal with common concerns like carbon emissions, helping emerging economies like South Africa, Indonesia, Vietnam and Senegal to expedite coal phase out to achieve the emission-reduction goals established by the Paris Agreement (2015).

Instead of using multilateral bodies like UNFCC or the World Bank, the JETPs, which is a tailor-made country-specific minilateral financing arrangement, brings together a highly specific core group of donors - the international Partners Group(IPG) of G7 countries to negotiate directly with one targeted emerging economy partner country at a time, to mobilise public and private financing to support a just and equitable energy transition, linking emissions mitigation with social equity in fossil -fuel dependent economies[30].

Despite the success story, it has to be noted that the foundation of minilateralism is fragile as the concept is based on shared interest not on shared values or ideological alignment. This may lead to nations entering into conflicting agreements and forming alliances based on narrow interests rather than shared values, which may, in the long run, make it more difficult for a universal organisation to achieve global peace and security. The challenges before the RBIO are - RBIO as an idea and the reality of international order - lack of effective adherence to multilateralism, and the lack of full respect for international norms as underpinned by the UN Charter. While supporters of the Rules-Based international Order argue that this order still remains vital for addressing global challenges, ambiguity still surrounds what these “rules” actually entail, who and how to enforce them. This lack of clarity, coupled with shifting global power dynamics, complicates efforts to sustain the system, making survival the major engagement. National leaders today are less focused on building a cohesive global system, defining what is “good" only to serve their national interest, and more focused on securing their own survival, supply chains security and economic prosperity. As argued by the famous German philosopher Nietzsche, in the absence of a universal truth, reality becomes a raw struggle for dominance. Whether the system will evolve further, fragment, or endure will depend on how well fairness, inclusivity and stability is balanced in an increasingly volatile world.

We need to remember that a G7 AI resolution /code cannot have binding effect in states excluded from its drafting. A vaccine initiative by any of these minilateral groupings cannot replace the WHO vaccine acceptance rate and legitimacy. Only a Universal Rules-based trading system will support both economic growth and sustainable development, helping balance measures like the EU’s Carbon Border Adjustment Mechanism (CBAM). Restoring a fully operational dispute settlement system, strengthening predictable market access and preserving core principles such as non-discrimination are essential steps to prevent the trust deficit in the RBIO. Perhaps the time has come for all countries to work together again to cultivate a new type of International Relations, resisting unilateralism and bullying, fostering mutual respect, equity, and justice, and restoring win-win cooperation, rejecting the zero-sum game of the Cold War mentality. The recently announced U.S.–Iran Peace Deal is a positive sign for the future of the RBIO as it prioritises diplomacy, de-escalation, and freedom of navigation.

End Notes:

1. Article 1 of the UN Charter has emphasized the primary objective of the UN as To maintain international peace and security,… adjustment or settlement of international disputes or situations which might lead to a breach of the peace. https://www.un.org/en/about-us/un-charter/chapter-1

2. https://2021-2025.state.gov/the-administrations-approach-to-the-peoples-republic-of-china/ Speech Anthony Blinken, The George Washington University, Washington DC ,May, 26 2022

3. https://www.chathamhouse.org/2026/05/avoiding-new-nuclear-arms-race

4. NPT Review Conference fails to reach Agreement for Third Consecutive Time -press conference https://www.un.org/en/conferences/treaty-on-the-non-proliferation-of-nuclear-weapons-npt-2026

5. About the WTO , available on www.wto.org

6. The Appellate Body is composed of seven members and is appointed by the DSB of the WTO. USA, a member, has systematically blocked the appointment of new judges since late 2017. As a result, today, the Appellate Body is facing an existential crisis . The term of the last sitting member expires on 30 th November, 2020. This has made the Appellate Body a court without a judge.

7. https://www.wto.org/english/thewto_e/minist_e/mc12_e/briefing_notes_e/bfwtoreform_e.htm

8. https://www.icj-cij.org/case/64 United States Diplomatic and Consular Staff in Tehran (United States of America v. Iran) https://www.icj-cij.org/case/70 Military and Paramilitary Activities in and against Nicaragua (Nicaragua v. United States of America)

9. The Vandenberg reservation effectively neutralizes the ICJ's compulsory jurisdiction in disputes arising from multilateral treaties, like the UN Charter, to which the USA is a party. The Reservation, in effect, created a procedural impossibility. For it requires the applicant state, intending to file a case against the USA in the ICJ in the case of a dispute arising out of a multilateral treaty, to bring every other state party to the treaty—that might be "affected by the decision"—into the lawsuit. Considering that a multilateral treaty may have more than 100 state parties, it is often procedurally impossible to make all states agree to file a suit against the USA.

10. https://www.cambridge.org/core/journals/american-journal-of-international-law/article/application-of-the-international-convention-for-the-suppression-of-the-financing-of-terrorism-and-of-international-convention-on-the-elimination-of-all-forms-of-racial-discrimination-ukraine-v-russian-federation-judgment/1C4B2C51220C6332B91392FAC2204267 (P 524) Application of the International Convention for the Suppression of the Financing of Terrorism and of International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination. Published online by Cambridge University Press: 17 October 2024

11. https://www.ejil.org/pdfs/2/1/2028.pdf The Acceptance by the Soviet Union of the Compulsory Jurisdiction of the ICJ for Six Human Rights Conventions , Schweisfurth, Theodor, European Journal of International Law

12. ISIS forced hostages and victims to wear the bright orange uniform synonymous with the U.S. military prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. This use of orange jumpsuits in ISIS execution videos was a deliberate, propagandized attempt to draw a visual parallel to the detainees held at the U.S. military prison in Guantanamo Bay, Cuba. At the Guantanamo Bay detention centre, orange jumpsuits were given to the Non-Compliant detainees who are hostile, refusing to accept their confinement, or attacking guards.

13. It has been alleged that US and UK governments overstated the evidence available for them to justify military action in Iraq. The central claim to invading Iraq was that Iraq continued its illicit nuclear weapons programme and had retained illegal stockpiles of biological and chemical weapons. However, no hidden caches of WMD was found by the US Iraq Survey Group after the invasion.

14. The United States Officially Rejoins the Paris Accord- Press Statement Anthony .j.Bilken, Februaray19, 2021, Secretary of State https://2021-2025.state.gov/the-united-states-officially-rejoins-the-paris-agreement/

15. https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=VpYf7wpY_64

16. https://www.stimson.org/2024/bidens-foreign-policy-legacy-a-troubled-interregnum/ Biden's Foreign Policy Legacy: A Troubled Interregnum By Robert A. Manning and Mathew Burrows November 19, 2024

17. In February 2026, the U.S. Supreme Court in Learning Resources, Inc. v. Trump struck down the IEEPA-based tariffs, to set broad tariffs or import duties as an unconstitutional overreach of executive power , forcing the government to refund billions to affected businesses. The use of IEEPA is currently constrained to financial sanctions, asset blocking, and trade embargoes, https://www.supremecourt.gov/opinions/25pdf/24-1287_4gcj.pdf

18. How Trump is relaunching a tariff war citing 'forced labour' concerns https://www.aljazeera.com/news/2026/6/15/how-trump-is-relaunching-a-tariff-war-citing-forced-labour-concerns

19. https://link.springer.com/article/10.1007/s40647-026-00463-w Trumps Trade Offensive and the Rise of Strategic Regionalism : Toward Decentralised Globalisation, 14 th March, 2026

20. https://legal.un.org/avl/ha/da/da.html Definition of Aggression General Assembly resolution 3314 (XXIX) 14 December 1974 https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2026/03/secretary-of-state-marco-rubio-remarks-to-press-7 March3, 2026

21. Letter dated 16 June 2025 from the Permanent Representative of the Islamic Republic of Iran to the United Nations addressed to the Secretary-General and the President of the Security Council In a letter to the UN Security Council, Iran announced that "all bases, facilities, and assets of the hostile forces in the region shall be regarded as legitimate military objectives within the framework of Iran's lawful exercise of self-defence. https://digitallibrary.un.org/record/4084026?v=pdf

22. https://www.pm.gc.ca/en/news/speeches/2026/01/20/principled-and-pragmatic-canadas-path-prime-minister-carney-addresses

23. "The strong do what they can, and the weak suffer what they must" is from Thucydides' Melian Dialogue. In 416 111BC Melos was a free state, an island in the Cyclades, that had remained neutral in the war between the Athenian empire and Sparta. Thucydides, who wrote the history of the Peloponnesian wars, creating a version of the dialogue between the Athenians and the Melians, imagining what must have happened when justice met brute force.

24. In January this year, the US officially withdrew from the World Health Organisation (WHO), leaving the UN agency without one of its biggest donors. The USA has not paid its fees for 2024 and 2025, although WHO lawyers suggest the US is obliged to pay the arrears - estimated at $260m (£193m) - Washington said it saw no reason to do so.

25. The "Trumpian rupture" refers to the decisive break from established multilateral institutions, global security alliances (like NATO), and trade agreements

26. Is Quad A NATO in the Making https://www.crfindia.org//media/Project/ChintanResearchFoundation/Publications%20PDF/New/16th%20may/Is%20Quad%20an%20Asian%20NATO%20in%20Making.pdf

27. China's Xi affirms 'no limits' partnership with Putin in call on Ukraine war anniversary Antoni Slodkowski and Laurie Chen February 24, 20256:19 PM GMT+5:30Updated February 24, 2025 https://www.reuters.com/world/xi-putin-hold-phone-call-ukraine-war-anniversary-state-media-says-2025-02-24/

28. https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/india-us-trade-deal-trade-with-india-yes-but-will-learn-from-china-mistake-us-deputy-secretary-of-state-christopher-landau-raisina-dialogue-11176704 Trade With India, Yes. But Will Learn From China Mistake": US Official

29. Let's forget about trying to get the planet's nearly 200 countries to agree. We need to abandon that fool's errand in favor of a new idea: minilateralism. By minilateralism I mean a smarter, more targeted approach: We should bring to the table the smallest possible number of countries needed to have the largest possible impact on solving a particular problem. Think of this as minilateralism's magic number. https://www.moisesnaim.com/my-columns/2020/6/10/minilateralism Minilateralism ,june21,2009 by Moises Naim

30. https://www.ceew.in/gfc/quick-reads/explains/just-energy-transition-partnerships CEEW, Green Finance Centre, Just Energy Partnerships (JETPs).

About The Author:

Dr. Navashikha Duara - Associate Professor, Incharge Principal of SVKM'S Pravin Gandhi College of Law, Mumbai.

Maritime Connectivity and Security in the Indo-Pacific 2.0

Abstract

Maritime connectivity is the lifeline of the world economy. The region accounts for over 60% of global GDP. The Indo-Pacific contains the Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) and maritime choke points that are extremely crucial to the world, such as the Strait of Malacca. Over 80% of the world's trade takes place via international transport of goods and services via shipping routes (UNCTAD, 2025)[i]. In this background, let us study how China's assertive actions in the South China Sea (SCS) have further compounded challenges to maritime connectivity and security, making the evolution toward an Indo-Pacific framework, which is now known as 'Indo-Pacific 2.0'. What is Indo-Pacific 2.0? How China's assertive behaviour was viewed by other actors, like QUAD, and South Korea.

Keywords: Maritime Connectivity, Maritime Security, QUAD, Indo-Pacific, FOIP

Indo-Pacific 2.0: Concept and Evolution

The Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) was reintroduced in 2016 by Japanese Prime Minister Shinzo Abe, who called for a "free and open maritime order" based on the rule of law, freedom of navigation and resistance to coercion. However, FOIP 1.0 was limited to fundamental values and "value-oriented diplomacy" to enforce the rule of law and freedom of navigation (2006-07) (Yoshimatsu, 2025)[ii], but it could not succeed in bringing all the members under one umbrella as member countries faced internal political challenges. Moreover, Japan moved towards a more inclusive approach in FOIP 2.0. Therefore, Tokyo, under successive administrations, has expanded the scope of maritime security beyond traditional naval concerns. This development arises from the evolving strategic environment characterised by increasing geopolitical rivalry, technological change, and the growing clout of the Global South. Even though the novel idea of Japan is to bring all QUAD members along with ASEAN centrality, the concept of QUAD 2.0 is also facing some challenges. As the world has noticed, President Donald Trump refused to join the QUAD (2025). What message did the USA give to FOIP? What are the other major challenges the notion of FOIP countries facing? How do middle powers like South Korea view FOIP 2.0?

Despite these challenges, the Indo-Pacific strategy of the USA (2022) stated that it was about deepening their relationship with alliances like 'Australia, Japan, the ROK, the Philippines, and Thailand' - and strengthening relationships with leading regional partners, including 'India, Indonesia, Malaysia, Mongolia, New Zealand, Singapore, Taiwan, Vietnam, and the Pacific Islands.' The USA also wants the 'allies and partners' to strengthen their ties with one another, particularly Japan and the ROK.

However, this is also one of the major challenges: the middle powers like South Korea differ from the Japanese perspective of FOIP for two major reasons: a) For South Korea, maritime security and freedom of SLOCs are crucial for its survival as a trade-based middle power; about 90% of the nation's economy depends on maritime transportation. South Korea strives to position itself as a" global pivotal state" by enhancing its maritime cooperation with the US and Japan, mainly via joint drills and coast guard collaboration, as well as establishing maritime situational awareness (MSA) systems. South Korea's "pragmatic diplomacy" under President Lee Jae-Myung is committed to strong alliances that ensure deterrence, but it refrains from officially participating in questioning China in FOIP as it still engages economically with China as well as extends to European allies regarding issues of marine governance and resilience of supply chains (Peron-Doise, 2025; KEI, 2026; MOFA ROK, 2025)[iii]. South Korea's equilibrium approach balances strategic autonomy with alliance obligations. "The future of the world community depends on an Indo-Pacific that is free, peaceful, and prosperous". Yoon Suk-yeol (2022–2025): Strongly supported it. He released South Korea's first official Indo-Pacific Strategy ("Strategy for a Free, Peaceful, and Prosperous Indo-Pacific Region") in December 2022, aligning closely with the US-led Free and Open Indo-Pacific (FOIP) framework (MOFA ROK, 2025)[iv]. b) Secondly, South Korea is dependent on China for resources like rare earth materials (REM); around 90 per cent of the REM it imports are from China, which is the backbone of Industry 4.0. In addition to the other raw materials, intermediate goods, and components (Jones, 2026)[v].

Moon Jae-in (2017–2022) did not fully support the Indo-Pacific vision. He avoided using the term "Indo-Pacific" to prevent upsetting China. Instead, he advocated for the New Southern Policy (NSP), emphasizing economic and "people- to - people" relations with ASEAN and India while preserving strategic ambiguity and not completely agreeing with America's security-focused stance (Birrer, 2025)[vi]. Lee Jae-Myung (2025 – present): He has drifted away from Yoon's Indo-Pacific Strategy. His administration is returning to a more pragmatic approach similar to Moon's New Southern Policy, de-emphasising the "Indo-Pacific" framing and focusing on economic pragmatism and balanced ties with China (Lee, 2025)[vii] .

Other Challenges in Maritime Connectivity and Security in the Indo-Pacific:

Indo-Pacific 2.0 has broadened its concept, which may be viewed as digressing from its core objective. How far was Indo-Pacific 2.0 able to challenge China's illegal claim in the East China Sea and SCS? As we have numerous examples where China has been able to threaten their neighbours, like the Philippines, by ignoring the Permanent Court of Arbitration (PCA) judgement, it continued to put its own dictates in the SCS. Similarly, during the COVID pandemic (2020) a Chinese Coast Guard vessel rammed and sank a Vietnamese fishing boat near the Paracel Islands in the South China Sea. Vietnam strongly protested the incident, the United States condemning China's actions and the Philippines expressing support for Vietnam. (Nguyen, 2020)[viii]. Some examples include the use of intimidation tactics for offshore oil exploration efforts, restricting the freedom of navigation and overflight, employing military, coast guard, and maritime militia ships (water cannons, flares, ramming, and blocking), and militarising disputed areas (U.S. Department of State, 2026)[ix]. At the Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting (2026) held in New Delhi, all four countries expressed deep concerns about the East and South China Seas and strongly condemned any act of destabilisation which might threaten the security of the region. In addition, there were some internal issues among QUAD members that were also reflected in the Quad Leaders' Summit in 2025, when the US president refused to attend the QUAD Summit. The main reasons were serious trade disputes, especially high US tariffs on Indian goods, and differences between Trump and Prime Minister Modi. As a result, the planned 2025 Quad Leaders' Summit in India was cancelled (Mashal et al., 2025)[x].

However, in the recent QUAD summit (2026) there was some silver lining that strengthened the vision of QUAD. Let us understand how QUAD would function in the future; firstly, the member countries launched the Indo-Pacific Energy Security initiative to ensure open and stable energy markets along with resilient supply chains, with special focus on protecting the uninterrupted flow of commerce through critical routes like the Strait of Malacca, Hormuz. Secondly, the member countries also announced the Quad Critical Minerals Framework to create diversified and reliable supply chains for critical minerals, reducing dependence on any single country while strengthening mining, processing, and recycling capabilities. It may give more space to countries like South Korea to integrate with the QUAD members. Thirdly, the Quad agreed to advance port infrastructure development in Fiji and support trusted undersea cable connectivity for Pacific Island nations to enhance regional resilience and connectivity, and finally, it strengthened maritime domain awareness through IPMDA (Indo-Pacific Partnership for Maritime Domain Awareness) and IPMSC (Indo-Pacific Maritime Surveillance Collaboration); firmly reaffirmed freedom of navigation and overflight consistent with UNCLOS; and opposed destabilising actions in the South China Sea (MEA, 2026)[xi]. These aspects are now changing the perspective of China towards QUAD. Earlier, China's foreign minister replied to the QUAD question that these types of minilateralism come and go and compared it with the wave of the ocean. However, now China's foreign ministry spokesperson, Mao Ning, made a comment on the development of QUAD that "China does not support the formation of exclusive cliques or bloc confrontation. No cooperation should undermine mutual trust and cooperation among regional countries" (Reuters, 2026)[xii].

Conclusion

To sum up, the notion of FOIP could be strengthened by avoiding their bilateral disputes at the QUAD summit. South Korea needs to reduce its trade dependence on China and work more closely with like-minded countries. This united approach may help in building a more successful and stable Indo-Pacific region, and the success of FOIP could be seen from how member countries are implementing the commitment made in the QUAD summit (2026), like building ports in the Indo-Pacific countries.

Endnotes:

1. United Nations Conference on Trade and Development. (2025, September 24). Maritime trade under pressure – growth set to stall in 2025. UNCTAD.https://unctad.org/news/maritime-trade-under-pressure-growth-set-stall-2025

2. Yoshimatsu, H. (2025). The development of Japan's Indo-Pacific strategy: Security concerns and instrumental principles. Global Policy, 16(4), 579–588. https://onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/full/10.1111/1758-5899.70006

3. Peron-Doise, M. (2025, July 17). South Korea, a new key power for maritime security within the Indo-Pacific. Fondation pour la Recherche Stratégique. https://www.frstrategie.org/en/programs/korea-security-and-diplomacy-program/south-korea-new-key-power-maritime-security-within-indo-pacific-2025

Korea Economic Institute of America (KEI). (2026, February 2). U.S.-South Korea relations in 2026: Key issues to watch. https://keia.org/analysis/u-s-south-korea-relations-in-2026-key-issues-to-watch/

Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea. (2025.). Introducing the Indo-Pacific strategy. https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/wpge/m_26382/contents.do

4. Ministry of Foreign Affairs, Republic of Korea. (2025.). Introducing the Indo-Pacific strategy. https://www.mofa.go.kr/eng/wpge/m_26382/contents.do

5. Jones, R. S. (2026, May 5). South Korea's strategies to cope with a changing global trading system. Korea Economic Institute of America.https://keia.org/analysis/south-koreas-strategies-to-cope-with-a-changing-global-trading-system/

6. Birrer, A. A. (2025). South Korea navigating the Indo-Pacific: Explaining the strategy shift from Moon Jae-in's New Southern Policy to Yoon Suk-yeol's strategy for a free, peaceful, and prosperous Indo-Pacific region [Essay]. Sciences Po. https://www.sciencespo.fr/observatory-indo-pacific/files/essays/essay-c-birrer.pdf

7. Lee, D. (2025, July 21). South Korea moves away from former Indo-Pacific strategy. East Asia Forum. https://eastasiaforum.org/2025/07/21/south-korea-moves-away-from-former-indo-pacific-strategy/

8. Nguyen, T. T. (2020, April 20). The cauldron boils over: Vietnam vs. China. Asia Maritime Transparency Initiative, Center for Strategic and International Studies.https://amti.csis.org/the-cauldron-boils-over-vietnam-vs-china/

9. U.S. Department of State. (2026, May 26). Joint statement from the Quad Foreign Ministers' meeting in New Delhi https://www.state.gov/releases/office-of-the-spokesperson/2026/05/joint-statement-from-the-quad-foreign-ministers-meeting-in-new-delhi/

10. Mashal, M., Pager, T., & Das, A. (2025, August 30). The Nobel Prize and a testy phone call: How the Trump-Modi relationship unravelled. The New York Times.https://www.nytimes.com/2025/08/30/us/politics/trump-modi-india.html

11. Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India. (2026, May 26). Quad Foreign Ministers' Meeting Joint Statement. https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/41233/Quad+Foreign+Ministers+Meeting+Joint+Statement+May+26+2026

12. Reuters. (2026, May 26). China says QUAD cooperation should not target third party. Reuters. https://www.reuters.com/world/china/china-says-quad-cooperation-should-not-target-third-party-2026-05-26/

About the Authors:

Dr Madhukar Shyam is an assistant professor at the Department of International Studies, Political Science, School of Social Science and a member and Fellow at the Centre for Social and Policy Research at Christ University's NCR Campus.

Manya Singhal is an independent researcher with interests in Maritime Security, the Indo-Pacific, and Information Warfare. Her work focuses on contemporary geopolitical developments, strategic affairs, and emerging security challenges in the Indo-Pacific region.

Critical Minerals in India - Import Dependency to Strategic Autonomy, National Security and Defence Preparedness

Abstract

Achieving goals of Viksit Bharat will require secure and resilient access to critical minerals as they form backbone of sectors such as renewable energy, electric mobility, digital infrastructure and defence manufacturing. India's critical minerals landscape is shaped by its heavy reliance on imports, targeted international partnerships and emerging export ambitions, especially in context of green energy transition, advanced manufacturing and national security. India is dependent on other countries for critical minerals. Critical minerals represent both the strategic vulnerability and a significant opportunity for India. A comprehensive critical mineral strategy, encompassing building strong institutions, incentivisation innovation and forging global partnerships, can turn India's vulnerabilities into strengths, diversify its resource base, and lead the global minerals economy. The coming decade must be India's exploration and innovation revolution, a decisive leap from dependency to leadership.

Keywords: Critical Minerals, Strategic Autonomy, Import dependence, Supply-Chain Resilience

Overview of Critical Minerals

India today stands at a defining moment in its journey towards Viksit Bharat 2047. As the world undergoes profound geopolitical, technological and economic transitions, access to critical mineral resources has emerged as a key determinant of national strength. Among these, critical minerals, strategic minerals and rare earth elements occupy a unique strategic position, quietly powering technologies that define modern life, while simultaneously shaping future of national security and global competitiveness (Kalantri, 2026). In 21st century, a new trinity — rare earths, strategic minerals and critical minerals — has emerged as backbone of defence preparedness, energy security, aerospace and modern high-tech industrial manufacturing. The geopolitical role of oil-rich nations in last century will be replaced by global power hierarchies gaining mastery and control over these advanced materials (Bhaskar, 2025). Rare earths and critical minerals are no longer just industrial inputs; they are strategic assets. They are essential to defence systems, advanced electronics, renewable energy technologies, space applications, electric mobility, telecommunication and digital infrastructure. In increasingly uncertain global environment, where supply-chains are vulnerable and resource dependencies are being reassessed, India's ability to secure its critical mineral and rare earth ecosystem has become more critical than ever (Kalantri, 2026). As an emerging global economic powerhouse, it is essential to understand and harness potential of critical minerals to fuel India's growth, competitiveness and sustainable development. As we navigate complexities and opportunities in domain of critical minerals, it is imperative that we embrace a holistic approach that encompasses economic, social and environmental dimensions where India's critical minerals needs are met in a sustainable, responsible and equitable manner (Joshi, 2023)

Rare Earth Elements (RREs)

Rare Earth Elements (REEs) are key to production of high-power permanent magnets, which are critical to manufacture of wind turbines, jet engines, drones, precision-guided weapons, satellites, semiconductor devices, lasers and medical imaging (Bhaskar, 2025). In era of clean energy, digital connectivity and advanced weaponry, REEs, a group of 17 metals, including 15 lanthanides, as well as scandium and yttrium, form invisible backbone of modern technology (World Trade Center, 2026). Their unique magnetic, catalytic and luminescent properties make them indispensable in defence and high-tech economies for wide range of applications, from wind turbines and electric vehicles to smartphones and guided missiles (Bhaskar, 2025; World Trade Center, 2026). REEs are widely distributed in nature but at low concentrations. The difficulty in mining, separation and refining renders them scarce (Bhaskar, 2025). Their complex extraction and processing make them strategically valuable. But what makes them truly powerful is who controls them (World Trade Center, 2026). China today accounts for roughly 70% of global raw material production, 83% of processing capacity and 92% of all advanced rare-earth products, demonstrating its dominance (Bhaskar, 2025). Over last two decades, China has consolidated near-monopoly over global supply of REEs, controlling lion's share of mining, refining and manufacturing capacities. This dominance has transformed what should be a straight forward mineral resource issue into a potent lever of geopolitical influence (World Trade Center, 2026).

Strategic And Critical Minerals

While protracted US-China dispute over rare earth elements exposed fragility of global supply chains, an even more pressing crisis looms for strategic and critical minerals — one that India can ill afford to ignore. Strategic minerals are vital for defence, space, nuclear and high-security applications, often complementing rare earth elements in permanent magnets and advanced alloys. Critical minerals are economically indispensable and technologically irreplaceable resources that power clean energy, electric mobility, semiconductors and manufacturing — typically combined with REEs and strategic minerals to drive innovations such as batteries, wind turbines and electronics. Together, they form an interdependent ecosystem essential for national security and sustainable growth (Bhaskar, 2025). In July 2023, Ministry of Mines notified 30 critical minerals vital for economic growth, national security and clean energy transition. Among them, lithium, cobalt, nickel, gallium, tungsten and molybdenum are indispensable for batteries, semiconductors, defence systems, renewable energy systems and high-temperature alloys. Yet India remains dependent, importing 85-95% of its requirements by value. China, which processes over two-thirds of world's supply for many of these minerals, holds disproportionate leverage. India has negligible domestic production of lithium, cobalt, nickel or tantalum. For nearly dozen minerals, import dependence is 100%, undermining India's ambitions for 500 GW of non-fossil capacity and Electric Vehicle (EV) program. Even for mineral groups for which India has known reserves — such as REEs or graphite — limited exploration, lack of processing technology and insufficient refining capacity keep India dependent on external suppliers. For example, India's battery demand across stationery and mobility segments is expected to exceed 100 GWh by 2030, necessitating large-scale imports of cells and components. Likewise, despite abundant availability of quartz and bauxite, India imports 95% of high-purity quartz, 90% of ingots, 70% of wafers, and half of all solar cells (Bhaskar, 2025). The consequent import costs of $ 5-6 billion in 2024-25 are expected to reach $ 15-20 billion by 2030, driven by rapid expansion of demand for these materials. With world racing to decarbonise and bolster technological sovereignty, critical minerals have emerged as new front in global power struggles. The ongoing tensions surrounding supply-chains, export restrictions and strategic stockpiling reveal that critical minerals are no longer just commodities; they are vital instruments of economic strength and national security in an increasingly competitive international arena. As global demand for high-technology products and sustainable energy solutions continue to rise, critical and strategic minerals as well as rare earth elements have moved from being niche industrial materials to strategic resources of global importance. Their supply-chains are now closely linked with geopolitics, trade policy, environmental regulation and industrial competitiveness. While all critical minerals play important roles, a small number of critical minerals have emerged as strategically critical due to their outsized influence on clean energy systems, digital technologies, advanced manufacturing, healthcare, and if their industrial demand is currently concentrated in subset of components used in energy, electronics, defence and refining. Their importance is amplified by fact that supply-chains are complex, geographically concentrated and technologically intensive posing challenges for countries like India that are major consumers but limited producers of processed critical minerals, creating strategic risks for defence preparedness.

India's Response: The National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM)

The Government of India's National Critical Mineral Mission (NCMM), launched in January 2025 with an outlay of ₹34,300 crore over seven years, is a significant step in building resilience. The mission aims to reduce import dependence to 50% by 2035 through accelerated exploration, overseas acquisitions, and large-scale recycling.

Hon'ble Union Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman announced setting up of 'Critical Mineral Mission' in Union Budget speech 2024-25 on 23.07.2024. The relevant text of the speech is reproduced as follows - "We will set up a Critical Mineral Mission for domestic production, recycling of critical minerals, and overseas acquisition of critical mineral assets. Its mandate will include technology development, skilled workforce, extended producer responsibility framework, and a suitable financing mechanism." Accordingly, NCMM will be set up for seven years from 2024- 25 to 2030-31 with following vision - "As India embarks on journey of Viksit Bharat 2047, minerals will continue to play an important role for nation's progress.

The NCMM envisions securing a long-term sustainable supply of critical minerals and strengthen India's critical mineral value chains encompassing all stages from mineral exploration and mining to beneficiation, processing, and recovery from end-of-life products. The NCMM seeks to develop a holistic action plan through strategic interventions in form of policy reforms, financial support, infrastructure facilities, human resource development, technological advancements and international collaboration. The Government's aim is to build a globally competitive and resilient critical mineral ecosystem for India."

Objectives of NCMM

1. To secure India's critical mineral supply chain by ensuring availability from domestic and foreign sources.

2. Strengthening value chains by enhancing technological, regulatory and financial ecosystems to foster innovation, skill development, and global competitiveness in mineral exploration, mining, beneficiation, processing and recycling.

Mission Components of NCMM

A. Increasing Domestic Critical Mineral Production

1. Expanding exploration and mining activities

- Undertake 1200 exploration projects
- More than 100 blocks of critical mineral resources to be auctioned

2. Mining in offshore areas

- Polymetallic modules contain minerals like Cobalt, REE, Nickel, Manganese etc.
- Enhanced efforts to explore more Critical Minerals bearing blocks in offshore areas and start mineral production.

3. Critical Minerals Regulatory Support Programme

- Create fast track regulatory approval process for domestic critical minerals exploration and mining projects

4. Concession for Private Exploration

- New Concessions viz. Exploration Licences (EL) for encouraging private participation in exploration activities.

5. Recovery of Critical Minerals from Overburden / Tailings / Fly Ash / Red Mud

- Regulatory regime to be relaxed to encourage optimum recovery of critical minerals from various sources such as overburden, tailings, fly ash, red mud existing mines
- A lower revenue share for critical minerals associated with major minerals.

6. Assessment of Trace Elements / Critical Minerals during Exploration

- Enable collaboration across ministries to integrate data for optimum assessment of trace elements / critical minerals.

7. Formation of Mineral Processing Parks

- Allocate funds to support Critical Mineral Processing Parks.

8. Role of State Governments

- To promote exploration, mining, processing and R & D in Critical Mineral Value Chain and infrastructure support.
- State PSUs to actively participate in acquiring mineral assets abroad.

B. Acquisition of Critical Mineral Assets Abroad

1. Mapping and Acquisition of Significant Critical Mineral Assets

- NCMM will extend support for mapping and detailed exploration of Critical Mineral Assets in resource-rich countries.
- Government will earmark funds to support Critical Minerals Exploration Activities outside India.

2. **PSUs and private companies in Overseas Critical Mineral Assets Acquisition**

- Motivate Central PSUs and encourage private sector companies to allocate funds for acquisition of critical mineral assets overseas.
- Empowered Committee will give broad directions and inter-ministerial support to PSUs and stakeholders to acquire critical minerals abroad.
- Empower Central PSUs and their JVs, subsidiaries to invest in mineral assets abroad by issuing necessary guidelines.

3. **Facilitation of PSU-led Asset Acquisition with Private Sector Collaboration**

- Government of India will facilitate central PSUs in leading asset acquisitions in association with private companies contributing capital and sharing revenue

4. **Encouraging Private Sector Companies**

- To encourage participation of Indian public and private sector companies in acquisition of assets abroad, Government will provide targeted subsidies for mining and for setting up evacuation infrastructure with appropriate finances.

5. **Infrastructure Support**

- Ministry of Mines will work very closely with Ministry of External Affairs (MEA) to engage with regulators from resource country to support development of mineral evacuation infrastructure.

C. Recycling of Critical Minerals

1. **Guidelines / SOPs for Recycling of Critical Minerals**

- Formulation of separate guidelines / SOPs for recycling of critical minerals to streamline informal mineral recycling sector in India.

2. **Incentive scheme for Recycling**

- Incentive scheme for setting up minerals recycling shall be introduced by Government.

3. **Formation of Recycling Advisory Group on Critical Minerals**

- Formation of Recycling Advisory Group to assess presence of different critical minerals in domestic and imported products and suggest necessary measures for optimum recovery of critical minerals from these products.

D. Trade and Markets

1. **Enhance Trade with Resource-Endowed Countries**

- To enter into Critical Minerals Partnership Agreements with resource-rich countries.
- To work to include Critical Minerals chapters in existing bilateral / Free Trade agreements with countries of interest.

2. **Harmonise Tariffs through Bilateral FTAs**

- To actively engage with stakeholders concerning revising Critical Mineral sector relevant Harmonised System (HS) codes.

3. **Eliminate Import Duties on Critical Minerals**

- Government has eliminated import duty on critical minerals based on strategic requirements to facilitate easier flow of these essential resources into India.
- Periodic review also be done.

4. **Removal of Import Duty and other Barriers on Recyclable Minerals**

- Import duties and other barriers on recyclable materials such as scrap, black mass and e-waste shall be reviewed / eliminated.

5. **Develop National Critical Mineral Stockpile / Reserves**

- A joint initiative between central PSUs shall be institutionalised to develop National Critical Mineral Stockpile / Reserves Programme, to guard against supply disruptions and aid mineral supply for domestic utilisation.

E. Scientific Research and Technological Advancement for Critical Minerals

1. Promoting Research and Innovation in Critical Minerals

- To support patent filing procedures for innovators, start-ups, and enablers through improving coordination among institutions / organisations.

2. Establishing a Centre of Excellence (CoE) on Critical Minerals

- Constitution of Centre of Excellence (CoE) on critical minerals, working on Hub and Spoke Model with other institutions and research labs.

3. Supportive Mechanisms and Regulatory Simplification

- To simplify regulations and enhance collaboration with technology labs and academia to bolster local capabilities.

4. Global Collaboration on R & D

- Government will earmark funds specifically to focus on global R & D collaboration across critical minerals value chain.

E. Human Resource Development

1. Promoting Expertise and Skilled Workforce in Critical Minerals

- Establish Skill Development Centres and provide funding.

2. Develop Targeted Degree Programmes, Scholarships and Internships

- To develop and introduce specialised modules on critical minerals in existing mining, metallurgy and recycling technologies degree programmes by 2026.

3. Capacity Building Programmes for Resource-Endowed Countries

- Government will offer Capacity Building Programmes to resource-rich countries through GSI, MECL, IBM, Indian Institutes and universities

F. Developing Effective Funding, Financing and Fiscal Incentives

1. Developing appropriate Fiscal Measures

- Mission will make efforts to develop and implement a range of fiscal measures designed to incentivise junior exploration and mining companies.

2. Leveraging Funding from National / International Institutions

- Government will enable participation in international development programmes of institutions such as World Bank, Asian Development Bank and International Monetary Fund.

3. Dovetailing with Existing Schemes

- While formulating specific schemes and guidelines for financing Government activities, it will be ensured that any existing scheme similar to activities proposed is dovetailed into Mission activities.

National Strategy for Critical Minerals for India

A comprehensive national strategy must rest on three pillars: domestic capability building, diversified international partnerships and circular-economy systems that enhance resilience.

Strengthen Domestic Exploration and Value-Chain Integration

India has mapped and explored barely 20% of its vast geological potential, leaving immense untapped reserves of critical minerals locked beneath the surface. The Geological Survey of India (GSI) has set ambitious target of over 1,200 exploration projects by 2030, focusing on promising deposits of lithium in Jammu & Kashmir, cobalt in Odisha, and copper in Rajasthan. Yet these efforts risk falling short without fundamental reforms. Current exploration standards fall below global benchmarks such as Australia's JORC Code and North America's NI 43-101, eroding investor confidence and deterring substantial institutional capital. In absence of credible, transparent resource reporting, the sector remains dominated by smaller, mediocre players, while high-quality private investment stays shy. To unlock India's mineral wealth, mining reforms must be bold and swift: introduce internationally aligned exploration and reporting standards, establish single-window clearances, digitise approvals and offer incentives for private and institutional participation.

India must urgently simplify import procedures for critical mineral concentrates, especially those involving trace radioactivity (Bhaskar, 2025).

Build Processing and Refining Capacity

India's major weakness lies in mediocre process know-how and technology. India is dependent on foreign players for separation of REEs, production of battery materials and advanced refining. Closing these gaps requires investments in cutting-edge R&D, AI-driven remote-sensing, advanced geophysical modelling and deep-seated extraction technologies. While NCMM has designated nine Centres of Excellence to drive innovation, their impact will remain limited unless mineral-specific mandates are assigned in mission mode (Bhaskar, 2025).

Diversify Supply Through Strategic International Partnerships

As global competition for critical minerals sharpens, India must prioritise securing long-term overseas assets through diplomacy and investment. Khanij Bidesh India Ltd. (KABIL), government's dedicated overseas mining arm, needs urgent restructuring: rather than directly engaging in mining operations, which demand specialised expertise and high risks, KABIL should evolve into a strategic facilitator — coordinating and leading Indian industry in global collaborations, joint ventures, offtake agreements and equity partnerships to ensure reliable, diversified supply-chain. Equally vital is India's deeper engagement with Minerals Security Partnership (MSP), US-EU-led alliance dedicated to forging secure, sustainable critical mineral supply-chains as counterweight to China's dominance. MSP offers India access to high-grade ores, cutting-edge technologies and diversified sources — opportunities that must be seized to bolster strategic autonomy (Bhaskar, 2025).

Build Resilience Through Stockpiles, Recycling and Circular Economy

To insulate against future supply shocks, India must forge a resilient supply-chain for REEs and critical minerals. The proposed ₹500-crore National Critical Mineral Stockpile is vital first step, ensuring 60-100 days' inventory of five priority minerals - lithium, cobalt, nickel, REEs and graphite - to cushion the economy from export restrictions, geopolitical flare-ups or market volatility. ₹1,500-crore national recycling initiative must be fast-tracked (Bhaskar, 2025).

Need for Critical Minerals, Strategic Minerals, Rare Earth Elements (REEs)

The 21st century is witnessing a new global scramble over critical minerals – REEs earths and batter metals that are indispensable for green energy, electronics and defence, making mineral security core component of national power. Energy, communications, space and nuclear sectors are dependent on various critical minerals and REEs. These minerals are predominantly used in products ranging from mobile phones, computers, batteries, electric vehicles to green technologies like solar panels and wind turbines (Satija, 2023). International Energy Agency notes that materials like lithium, nickel, cobalt, manganese, and rare earths are "crucial to battery performance" and power technologies from solar panels to EVs. Ensuring reliable supplies of these minerals has thus become "major priority" and key part of energy security worldwide. Disruptions – from pandemic-induced logistics breakdowns to China's surprise export curbs on rare-earth magnets – have highlighted fragility of global supply-chains. For India, heavily dependent on imports, this is a wake-up call. Critical minerals are essential for country's economic development and national security, and their concentration in few locales can create dangerous bottlenecks. Securing these materials is imperative for India's strategic autonomy and security. India's strategic and defence sector also needs critical minerals for manufacturing of defence equipment. Domestic production and sourcing of these minerals for nuclear and defence applications is also paramount. The applicability of critical minerals in energy, food, telecommunication, electronics, defence sectors makes development of domestic industry and resilience of global supply-chains is urgent policy necessity. By 2030, India aims to have at least 50% of its cumulative installed power capacity sourced from non-fossil fuels, while simultaneously reducing CO2 emissions by 1 billion tonnes and lowering carbon intensity to below 45%. The transition towards decarbonisation, is expected to drive significant demand for critical minerals to support manufacturing of electric vehicles, wind and solar energy projects and battery storage systems (Critical Mineral Mission, 2025).

India's defence modernisation and industrial expansion is inextricably tied to a reliable supply of critical minerals. Advanced military platforms, from fighter aircrafts and precision-guided munitions to radars, satellites and electronic warfare systems, all depend on a range of strategic minerals that are sourced through highly concentrated global supply-chains. China's dominance across the processing and refining of several of these gives it significant leverage over global production networks in response, countries are moving to secure domestic resources, fueling a broader wave of resource nationalism. The tech war between US and China has demonstrated how major powers are increasingly willing to use export controls, sanctions, and regulatory tools as instruments of economic coercion. For India, this raises concerns about the cascading effects on the defence manufacturing timelines, maintenance cycles and broader industrial capacity (Observer Research Foundation, 2026).

Lists of Critical Minerals

Based on their individual needs and strategic considerations, different countries create their own lists of critical minerals. US has list of 50 minerals, EU has 34, UK has 18, Japan has 31 and Australia has 26 minerals. In June 2023, India came out with its first comprehensive report on critical minerals, where it identified list of 30 minerals vital for economic growth, national security and clean energy transition, in focussed strategy to push India towards "self-reliance" and create an 'Atmanirbhar Bharat.' These minerals include Antimony, Beryllium, Bismuth, Cobalt, Copper, Gallium, Germanium, Graphite, Hafnium, Indium, Lithium, Molybdenum, Niobium, Nickel, PGE, Phosphorous, Potash, REE, Rhenium, Silicon, Strontium, Tantalum, Tellurium, Tin, Titanium, Tungsten, Vanadium, Zirconium, Selenium and Cadmium (Satija, 2023). Among them, lithium, cobalt, nickel, gallium, tungsten, and molybdenum are indispensable for batteries, semiconductors, defence systems, renewable energy systems and high-temperature alloys. India remains dependent, importing 85-95% of its requirements by value. China, which processes over two-thirds of world's supply for many of these minerals, holds disproportionate leverage. India has negligible domestic production of lithium, cobalt, nickel, or tantalum. For nearly dozen minerals, import dependence is 100%, undermining India's ambitions for 500 GW of non-fossil capacity and EV program (Bhaskar, 2025).

Geographically Concentrated Critical Minerals

Critical mineral resources across the world are geographically concentrated with at least 55% of each of identified critical minerals found in only 15 countries. Significant amount of lithium reserves is found in Latin American countries. Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) has almost 50% of world's cobalt reserves. Indonesia and the Philippines have abundant nickel and cobalt reserves, with Indonesia standing out as a global leader in nickel reserves. Moreover, China produces about 60% of REEs and molybdenum, while covering for almost 85% processing of much of overall global rare earth supply. According to IEA, although mining operations for critical minerals have become more geographically diverse, little has changed for refining facilities. China controls 50% of planned lithium chemical plants, while Indonesia dominates with 90% of planned nickel refining facilities. India is a major producer of minerals like graphite and silicon, with reserves of select critical minerals with potential for further development. India needs to develop an indigenous critical minerals value chain along with addressing sourcing (Critical Mineral Mission, 2025). Energy, communications, space and nuclear sectors are dependent on various critical minerals and rare earth elements. These minerals are used in products ranging from mobile phones, computers, batteries, electric vehicles to green technologies like solar panels and wind turbines. Indian Economic Survey 2022-23 termed availability of REEs and critical minerals as next possible "geopolitical battleground" just as crude oil has been over last 50 years (Satija, 2023).

Clean Energy and Critical Minerals

Rapid deployment of clean energy technologies as part of energy transitions implies significant increase in demand for critical minerals. An electric car requires six times mineral inputs of traditional car and onshore wind plant requires nine times more mineral resources than gas-fired plant. Shift to clean energy system is set to drive huge increase in requirement for these minerals (Satija, 2023). As energy transitions accelerate, clean energy technologies are becoming fastest growing demand segment. Domestic electric vehicle (EV) market is expected to grow at CAGR of 49% between 2022 and 2030.

Global Scenario for Sourcing Critical Minerals

While critical minerals are found in large extents across the globe, extracting and refining them is costly, technically difficult and energy intensive. China dominates entire value chain accounting for more than half of world's production of battery metals including lithium, cobalt, and manganese and as much as 100% of REEs. China controls 72 % of world's solar modules, 69% of lithium-ion batteries and 45% of wind turbines and produces 63% of world's rare earth elements, including 45% of molybdenum. China has taken majority stake in cobalt mines of Democratic Republic of Congo, which in turn produces 70% of world's output. Australia is world's largest producer of lithium. However, more than 99% of value in lithium battery production is added during chemical processing, cell manufacturing and assembly, which is currently dominated by China. There are genuine security concerns related to criticality in building more diverse and dependable value-chains for critical minerals, about their environmental and social sustainability and technological challenges. The complexity of value-chains, high investment overheads for processing and small markets imply that only handful of businesses or countries participate in critical minerals market (Satija, 2023).

The Strategic Imperative

India's vulnerability in realm of critical minerals is stark. India remains 100 percent import-dependent for lithium, cobalt, and nickel— minerals indispensable for manufacturing EV batteries and energy storage systems. For REEs, India imports significant volumes from China, which controls 70% of global mining and 85-90% of processing capacity. This dependence creates economic and strategic risks. REEs are integral to precision-guided munitions, radar systems, fighter aircraft and naval vessels. India's defence modernisation programs and its semiconductor manufacturing ambitions cannot progress without secure access to these materials. The convergence of energy transition goals – 50% non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030 and defence requirements makes critical mineral security a cornerstone of national sovereignty.

India's Drive for Sourcing Critical Minerals

India has committed to five broad climate change mitigation strategies in UNFCCC Conference of Parties COP26 in Glasgow, including growing its non-fossil fuel energy capacity to 500 GW by 2030, reducing carbon intensity of economy by 45% by 2030, and achieving target of Net Zero emissions by 2070. Decarbonisation will require critical minerals for India's transition towards renewable power generation and electric vehicles. India started its journey for sourcing critical minerals many years back, when an early initiative in this direction came from Planning Commission of India in 2011 which highlighted need for strategic mineral resources for our industrial growth. It analysed 11 groups of minerals under metallic, non-metallic, precious stones and metals and strategic minerals. In 2016, Department of Science and Technology (DST), in collaboration with Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW), came out with Critical Minerals Strategy for India in 2016, which identified 13 minerals that would become most critical by 2030. In 2019, India set up an expert committee on exploration and sourcing of critical minerals for tie-ups with other countries, specifically for cobalt and lithium sourcing from Australia, Argentina and Bolivia. India created KABIL (Khanij Bidesh India Limited), a joint venture of three public sector companies, to ensure sourcing of critical and strategic minerals for supply to the domestic market. In June 2023, India released comprehensive list of 30 critical minerals. The Geological Survey (GSI) of India has shifted its focus to finding out new resources of critical and deep-seated minerals through advanced exploration techniques. Amendment in MMDR Act in 2021 allowed accreditation of private exploration agencies and using National Mineral Exploration Trust (NMET) funds for exploration of new deposits through these agencies. India's first and only lithium deposit with 5.9 million tonnes of reserve has been discovered in Jammu & Kashmir by GSI. MMDR Amendment Act, 2023 came out in August with focus on critical minerals, where it emphasised on exploration of critical minerals where a private exploration agency can explore block for grant of mining lease through auction. It is expected to attract mining companies having expertise in exploration of specific deep-seated and critical minerals such as REE, gold, lithium, platinum etc. The Amendment Act also removed six critical minerals from list of atomic minerals (lithium, beryllium, titanium, niobium, tantalum and zirconium) and placed them with other minerals which shall be auctioned by Central Government. It has allowed private sector participation in such critical minerals, which would bring advanced technology, finance and expertise, thereby accelerating exploration and production of critical minerals in India (Satija, 2023).

Dependence on imports from China poses a security challenge for India

Critical minerals play a vital role in national security, economic development and energy independence. These minerals include lithium, cobalt, graphite and REEs, which are crucial for producing several commodities, including solar panels and electric batteries. These minerals are also necessary for various military applications, defence equipment, and cutting-edge technologies. India has identified 30 such minerals that are important for its technological advancement and national security. This includes lithium a vital component of lithium-ion batteries essential for drones. Likewise, space programme depends on critical minerals and rare earth elements to create optical systems, specialised alloys, heat shields, and electronic systems for equipment like satellites, rovers and spacecraft. Critical minerals are also integral to semiconductors. However, China's near monopoly in this sector poses a major challenge. In 2022, it produced 68% of REEs, 70% of graphite, and processed 90% of REEs and 74% of Cobalt. This near monopoly translates into India's heavy dependence on India's lithium imports come from China. This dependence poses significant national security risks. Despite massive commercial benefits of exporting critical minerals to the world, China has had history of weaponizing these supplies for coercion. In 2010, China banned exports of REEs to Japan for two months following latter's capture of a Chinese captain who had rammed his vessel into a Japanese Coast Guard boat in East China Sea. This ban compelled Japan to re-examine its dependence on Chinese mineral supply chains. In 2023, China restricted gallium, germanium and graphite exports in response to United States' attempts to curtail China's access to American semiconductors. India's reliance on Chinese supplies, therefore, poses a significant challenge. This dependency makes a country vulnerable to supply chain disruptions, embargoes and geopolitical uncertainties. This can render weapons inventory ineffective. Similarly, India may be denied supply of these critical minerals when it needs them most, adversely impacting its defence preparedness. India has taken steps to mitigate this dependency in last few years. Domestically, government has launched Critical Minerals Mission, reduced import duties on various critical minerals, implemented measures to step up exploration campaigns by auctioning off mining blocks. These efforts are being complemented by diplomatic initiatives, where India aimed to secure mineral supply chains by strengthening relations with countries like Argentina, Australia and Chile. Critical Minerals Investment Partnership is one such example of creating robust supply chains. In addition, New Delhi is seeking to obtain mining assets in Latin America (Argentina and Chile) and Africa (Zambia and Congo), which have significant reserves of cobalt and lithium. It has also signed up for US-led Minerals Security Partnership, which strives to make global supply chains resilient to any disruption and promote investment in mining and processing of critical minerals. With India implementing robust military modernisation programme and focusing on technological self-reliance, demand for critical minerals and RREs will expand. It will be important for India to take reduce dependence on China (Patil, 2024).

India Strives to lessen dependence on China for critical minerals

Finance Minister Nirmala Sitharaman in Union Budget 2024-25 presented in July unveiled a plan to launch a critical mineral mission. It will have a multi-pronged approach from promoting domestic production to recycling and overseas acquisition of critical mineral assets. "Its mandate will include technology development, skilled workforce, extended producer responsibility framework and suitable financing mechanism" the minister announced. Sweeping changes in import tariffs have been introduced to boost processing and refining of critical minerals in India. Custom duties on 25 critical minerals such as lithium, cobalt, and copper have been slashed to zero. Earlier, import duties on these minerals ranged from 2.5 per cent to 10 per cent. Duties on graphite, silicon quartz, and silicon dioxide have been reduced from 5 – 7.5% to 2%. The government has taken first step in right direction realising that dependency on China and others comes with its own attendant risks. India is heavily dependent on China to meet requirements of critical minerals. Around three-fourths of country's requirements of lithium and lithium-ion, which are critical for electric vehicle batteries, are imported from China. The source of critical minerals is geographically concentrated. China accounts for 79% of Graphite and 60% of rare earth mineral reserves. Around 55% of total lithium reserve is found in Australia while Congo has around 70% of world's cobalt reserve. The concentration is even high in processing, with China dominating across the board. Countries that are at an advantage are those who have discovered deposits with critical minerals and those who have established large critical mineral processing capacity.

Addressing a Business 20 meeting during India's G20 presidency, Prime Minister Narendra Modi warned that control of critical minerals by a few countries would lead to new form of colonialism. Only few countries dominating mineral resource exploration, refining and processing capabilities have led to geopolitical monopoly of critical mineral resources. Critical minerals play crucial role in India's strategic and economic future, particularly in ensuring national security and driving transition to greener energy resources. As India's economy grows, demand for batteries, energy storage systems and other advanced technologies will continue to rise. Critical minerals are essential in meeting this demand (Keshri, 2024).

Global Collaboration for Sourcing Critical Minerals

India, due to limited availability of resources and processing facilities of critical minerals within the country, is now collaborating with different countries for smooth operation of entire critical material value-chain from mining, processing to manufacturing activities. The Resilient Supply Chains Initiative (SCRI) between India, Australia and Japan agreed in September 2020, and agreement among Quad countries to set up working group on critical materials and technologies is step in right direction. India and Australia have also signed Critical Minerals Investment Partnership for working towards investment in critical minerals projects to develop supply-chains between the two countries. In 2020, India, through KABIL, signed an agreement with an Argentinian firm to jointly explore lithium. Australia's Critical Minerals Facilitation Office (CMFO) and KABIL had recently signed an MoU for reliable supply of critical minerals to India. In June 2023, India joined Minerals Security Partnership (MSP), a US-led alliance of 14 developed countries. India is exploring its mode of association over critical minerals through KABIL with countries like Brazil, DR Congo, Chile, Argentina, Mongolia etc. An MoU has been signed on possibility of exploration of lithium in Argentina. Thus, India has taken right steps for creating an ecosystem for accelerated exploration and production of critical and new age minerals. It will definitely support India's vision to become self-reliant and developed nation, while leading global efforts on climate change and sustainability (Satija, 2023).

Critical Mineral Asset Acquisition by Khanij Bidesh India Ltd. (KABIL)

KABIL has signed agreement with state-owned enterprise of Catamarca province of Argentina on 15.01.2024. First ever project for Lithium has been started for exploration and development of 5 adjacent lithium brine blocks covering an area of about 15703 Ha. KABIL signed MoU with Critical Mineral Office (CMO), Department of Industry, Science and Resources, Govt. of Australia in March 2022. Due diligence of projects for selection of lithium and cobalt projects for investment through KABIL, through off take arrangements started.

International Collaboration

1. **Mineral Security Partnership (MSP)**
- MSP is a collaboration of 14 countries and EU.
- MSP is considering 32 projects of Critical Minerals in different countries.
- Indian companies showing interest in MSP projects.

2. **Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technologies (iCET)**
- Announced in May 2022.
- Annual iCET review meeting held on 17th June 2024 in New Delhi.
- 12 Projects prepared for taking up under iCET by involving GSI, and IREL along with concerned institutes / organisations in USA.

3. **Indo-Pacific Economic Framework (IPEF)**
- US led initiative bringing together 14 partner countries, launched in May 2022.
- Ministry of Mines presented in Trade Promotion Workshop under IPEF Critical Mineral Dialogue on 30th September 2024, highlighting India's initiatives to develop critical mineral value chain and auctioning of critical / strategic mineral blocks in India.

4. **India – UK Technology and Security Initiative (TSI)**

- India – UK Technology and Security Initiative launched on 24th July 2024.
- Ministry of Mines is in the taking up research projects related to Critical Minerals under India – UK TSI.

5. **Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (Quad)**

- Strategic security forum involves – India, USA, Australia, and Japan.
- At 2023 leaders' summit, partners announced Quad statement of "Principles on Clean Energy Supply Chains in Indo-Pacific".
- Quad partners have set up Quad investors network (QIN) with working group focusing on clean energy and critical minerals.

6. **Bilateral MoUs**

- To develop bilateral cooperation with countries having rich mineral resources and advanced technologies. Ministry of Mines entered into MoUs with Governments of various countries such as Australia, Argentina, Chile etc.

Strategic Policy Recommendations and Future Strategy Roadmap

In light of India's geological potential, evolving policy framework, and persistent structural constraints, India's critical mineral strategy must be anchored in realism while remaining forward looking. To translate these goals into reality, a multi-pronged strategy is recommended and several strategic directions merit priority (Monappa, 2026):

Scale up Domestic Exploration and Processing: Increase spending on geological surveys and incentivise private-sector exploration in frontier regions. Utilize advanced technologies (GIS mapping, satellite surveys) and expand Mineral Exploration Trust. Fast-track approvals and lease auctions to speed project starts. Build dedicated Mineral Processing Parks to enable local refining of lithium, nickel, REEs, etc., and upgrade existing smelters.

Financial De-risking: The mining value chain is long and capital-intensive. Public-sector undertakings (PSUs) and development banks should play anchor-investor roles. Government loans and grants can de-risk early exploration, while EXIM Bank can offer special lines of credit to mining ventures. Establishing an insurance fund or political-risk guarantee would encourage foreign investment in mining. Performance-based subsidies can ensure state recoups support only when projects succeed.

Circular Economy and Recycling: Promote recycling of e-waste, batteries and industrial scrap to reclaim critical minerals. Provide financial incentives for battery recycling plants and research into rare-earth recovery. This not only eases demand on mines but also aligns with sustainability goals. International Institute for Sustainable Development (IISD) and partners estimate that scaling up recycling could cut new mining needs by 25–40% for key minerals by 2050.

Strategic Stockpiles: Follow NCMM's lead in building reserves of critical minerals, analogous to petroleum reserves. Maintain buffer stockpiles to tide over temporary export disruptions.

International Cooperation and Standards: Continue diversifying import sources via bilateral resource pacts and multilateral forums. Negotiate supply-chain cooperation with allies. Advocate for global fair-trade rules on minerals.

Capacity Building: Train skilled workforce in mining and metallurgy, and support R&D for extraction / processing technologies. Establish Centres of Excellence to innovate low-impact mining.

Regulatory Reforms: Simplify land acquisition and environmental clearances for strategic mineral projects, while ensuring sustainability. Streamline auction process to be transparent and speedy. Periodically update critical minerals list to reflect technological changes, and conduct national risk assessments.

Whole-of-Nation Approach: Domestic exploration, processing and manufacturing capacities must be strengthened while simultaneously exercising smart diplomacy and building resilient trade partnerships. Embedding critical minerals security into Make in India, Atmanirbhar Bharat and green industrial missions ensures that India's energy transition and technological modernization remain stable. This integrated strategy safeguards long-term economic growth, strategic autonomy and national resilience in an uncertain global landscape

The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act (MMDR) 2025.

The Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act (MMDR) 2025 marks a watershed moment in India's strategic planning for critical mineral security. Government's decision to allocate Rs.34000 Crores for National Critical Minerals Mission, including global exploration and acquisition of 24 critical commodities by 2030-31, demonstrates a bold and forward-thinking approach. This move positions India alongside global powers competing for secure access to vital resources essential for technology, renewable energy and industrial growth. The legislation signifies transition from reactive measures to proactive action, aligning with national visions of Atmanirbhar Bharat and Viksit Bharat. As global race for critical minerals intensifies, India's success will depend on effective implementation of a robust strategy. This requires strengthening integrated approaches designed to address challenges across critical minerals exploration, acquisition and value-chain spectrum, ensuring India not only secures supply but also builds global leadership (Chatterjee, 2025).

Leveraging International Partnerships for Technology and Supply Security.

India should more effectively utilise government to government and plurilateral partnerships to access advanced processing technologies and diversify supply chains. Platforms such as Mineral Security Partnership and Quad offer opportunities not only for diplomatic coordination but for concrete collaboration in exploration, processing and downstream manufacturing. Through such frameworks, India can pursue investments in midstream facilities, collaborative research on separation technologies and structured technology transfer arrangements that go beyond transactional licensing. Overseas asset acquisition should be pursued selectively to complement domestic resources. KABIL can play catalytic role by taking strategic equity positions in foreign mines and integrating them with Indian or jointly operated processing facilities (World Trade Center, 2026).

National Exploration Partnership.

India's mineral wealth remains vastly underexplored, for critical minerals lithium, cobalt, nickel and rare earth element. While Geological Survey of India (GSI) has strong legacy of baseline mapping, India lacks high-resolution, 4D geological datasets necessary for predictive exploration. The MMDR Act 2025, with its emphasis on exploration and sovereign funding, creates opportunity to reimagine India's exploration ecosystem. A scientific knowledge-driven strategy must form backbone of this pillar (Chatterjee, 2025). GSI should spearhead National Mineral Mapping programme integrating advanced geophysical, geochemical, isotopic and remote-sensing datasets. These efforts should culminate in comprehensive subsurface geological models and Mineral Fertility Maps, developed collaboratively with Notified Private Exploration Agencies (NPEAs) through Regional Mineral Targeting (RMT) programmes for critical minerals in India. GSI's role should be of premier science provider, delivering high-quality, pre-competitive datasets to guide exploration. NPEAs should leverage their agility and innovation using National Mineral Exploration Trust (NMET) funding to conducting extensive pre-competitive exploration and systematically test high-priority targets generated by mineral fertility analyses. Public-private synergy will align state-backed scientific infrastructure with private enterprise capabilities, dramatically improving exploration efficiency, accelerating discoveries and positioning India closer to global best practices (Chatterjee, 2025).

Consolidating Research and Development Efforts

India should move decisively toward creation of formal, mission-oriented R & D consortia focused on critical mineral benefication, separation and manufacturing. A coordinated task force bringing together BARC, IREL, CSIR laboratories, IITs and select private sector leaders could be mandated to deliver a defined pipeline of pilot and demonstration-scale projects. Rather than spreading public funding thinly, resources under NCMM and allied programmes should be concentrated on limited number of flagship facilities capable of de-risking technologies to semi-commercial scale (World Trade Centre, 2026).

A Pro-investment financial ecosystem

On financial side, creation of domestic critical mineral trading platform can introduce price transparency, reduce investment risk and enable hedging. Linking India's exploration sector to Indian Mineral Industry Code (IMIC) – aligned with global reporting standards will further enhance credibility. Encouraging investors to list on NSE and BSE would unlock vast domestic capital empowering explorers and miners to deploy risk capital effectively (Chatterjee, 2025).

Developing Integrated "Mine-to-Magnet" Corridors

India should aim to establish integrated "mine-to-magnet" corridors that bring together successive stages of critical minerals value-chain within defined geographical clusters. These corridors would integrate mining or imported feedstock handling, chemical separation, metal and alloy production, magnet manufacturing and proximity to end-use industries (World Trade Center, 2026).

Building Leadership in Processing, R & D, and METS

Critical minerals security extends beyond securing raw materials, ability to process, refine and innovate across value-chain will determine India's strategic autonomy. China controls nearly 70% of global processing capacity for key minerals like lithium, rare earths and cobalt, making India highly vulnerable. The MMDR Act, 2025 rightly emphasises research and development, but scale and ambition of India's efforts must increase significantly to achieve parity with global leaders. Allocating 20 – 30% of NMET budget to extractive metallurgy R & D is critical to bridging 'lab-to-factory' gap. National research institutions should work along with private sector to design and commercialise cost-effective and environmentally sustainable extraction and processing technologies. These efforts should prioritise clean separation of rare earths, low-carbon lithium extraction, battery recycling and green metallurgy for base metals. India's recently approved urban mining initiative, which focuses on recovering strategic minerals from e-waste and mine tailings, is another bold step in building a circular economy. However, beyond primary and urban mining, India's real competitive advantage could lie in developing world-class Mining Equipment, Technology and Services (METS) ecosystem. The METS sector refers to network of technology providers, engineering firms and service companies that support entire mining value-chain. India's METS strategy must include innovation grants for NPEA and startups to develop cutting-edge exploration tools and autonomous mining systems; establishing National Mining Innovation Clusters to bring together academia, industry and technology firms; and export promotion of Indian-developed mining software and green processing technologies. By investing heavily in processing and METS, India can create high-skilled jobs and strengthen its technological sovereignty. This will enable India to transition from being a minerals producer to global provider of mining innovation, giving it decisive edge in 21st century race for critical minerals (Chatterjee, 2025).

Strengthening Policy Coherence and Institutional Coordination

Policy coherence and institutional coordination must be strengthened to support execution. Critical minerals intersect with mining, atomic energy, industry, environment, trade and defence, making fragmented governance a significant risk. The NCMM should be empowered with both authority and resources to act as genuine coordinating platform, aligning exploration priorities, processing investments, recycling initiatives and stockpiling decisions with projected domestic demand under electric mobility, renewable energy, electronics manufacturing and defence roadmaps. Regular, credible public reporting on critical mineral reserves, production, project pipelines, and import dependence would improve transparency and investor confidence. Clear timelines for approvals, predictable regulatory processes and structured mechanisms to resolve centre-state and community-industry issues will be essential (World Trade Center, 2026).

Way Forward – From Vulnerability to Leadership

India's journey in critical minerals is moving from margins of policy thinking to mainstream, shaped by climate commitments, clean energy goals and growing uncertainty. For many years, India's assets have remained unused due to regulatory restrictions, limited coordination and gaps in technology. Recent policy reforms, launch of national critical minerals mission, production incentives and involvement of new public institutions signal a clear intent to change this and build a more strategic approach to critical mineral development. Translating intent into outcomes will not be easy.

Developing a complete domestic ecosystem from extraction to manufacturing will require sustained investment, access to advanced processing know-how and careful handling of environmental and community concerns (World Trade Center, 2026). India's decisive reforms, ambitious sovereign funding, and forward-thinking policy intent provide strong foundation for securing critical mineral supply-chains. The challenge lies in execution. The integrated approach outlined – national exploration partnership, pro-investment financial ecosystem, globally competitive processing and METS ecosystem - together form an integrated blueprint for India's transformation (Chatterjee, 2025). India has identified five critical minerals like Lithium, Cobalt, Nickel, Copper, and REEs and remains pivotal for driving its clean energy transition and achieving technological independence. The launch of NCMM in 2025 marks a transformative initiative to secure domestic supply chains, boost exploration, and cut reliance on imports. With combined government and private investment outlay exceeding ₹34,000 crore for 2025-31, mission aims to identify 1,200 deposits, scale recycling capacities, and foster innovation through Centres of Excellence. The nation's trade partners vary depending on the mineral, with country-wise relationships evolving rapidly due to global supply chain volatility, technological needs and policy initiatives. India is almost 100% import-dependent for lithium, cobalt, and several other minerals. China is single largest supplier for most critical minerals which notably are lithium, REEs, graphite, and cobalt holding substantial sway over India's supply chains. Emerging partnerships with Australia (lithium, cobalt), Peru, Chile, and Argentina (lithium, copper) reflect India's strategic efforts to diversify supply and reduce reliance on China. This dependency underscores strategic urgency to enhance domestic production capabilities and diversify sources internationally to reduce geopolitical risks and supply disruptions. The critical minerals prioritized underpin key sectors such as electric vehicles, renewable energy, advanced electronics, and defence. Lithium, cobalt, and nickel predominantly serve batteries and alloys, while copper is vital for power infrastructure and grid modernization. REEs, crucial for high-tech and defence applications, have significant import footprint on India's supply chain, necessitating focused domestic capabilities. India's critical minerals sector faces significant import dependency risks, especially for lithium, cobalt, nickel, and REEs, all crucial for India's clean energy ambitions. This heavy reliance underscores urgency for domestic resource development and diversification of import sources. India's critical minerals market is set for robust growth, projected to exceed $10 billion by 2030, growing at compound annual growth rate (CAGR) of over 12%, driven by structural and policy-driven demand dynamics. This robust expansion is driven primarily by nation's ambitious renewable energy target of 500 GW by 2030, rapid adoption of EVs and significant growth in advanced manufacturing sectors. Structurally, surge in EV adoption, renewable energy expansion and advanced manufacturing are driving unprecedented demand for lithium, cobalt, nickel, copper and rare earth elements. Policy initiatives such as NCMM are enhancing domestic exploration and capacity building with projected investment of ₹34,300 crore through 2031. Efforts to develop 270-kilotonne recycling capacity and foster innovation through multiple Centres of Excellence are expected to further strengthen supply chain and reduce import dependency, positioning India for a multi-billion-dollar market opportunity by 2030. China's October 2025 export controls extended beyond raw materials to processing equipment—centrifuges, vacuum furnaces, and separation systems—targeting capability rather than merely volume. For India, this represents both a challenge and an opportunity. The challenge lies in immediate supply disruptions. India's EV sector depends heavily on imported battery components. China's restrictions on REEs and other critical minerals particularly neodymium-iron-boron varieties essential for EV motors, threaten production timelines and cost structures. The opportunity resides in diversification imperatives. India's membership in MSP, a US-led plurilateral initiative comprising 14 countries, provides frameworks for co-financing and strategic project selection. India's accession to MSP Finance Network connects domestic financial institutions with international counterparts, mobilizing capital for exploration and processing infrastructure. Simultaneously, India is strengthening bilateral partnerships. Agreements with United Arab Emirates and Russia's energy sector entities diversify supplier relationships. Amended MMDR Act, now permits NMET funds to finance overseas acquisitions, providing institutional backing for KABIL's expanding footprint.

By focusing on building capacity where it matters most and by embedding itself within trusted international supply networks India can move towards greater resilience. If current reform momentum is sustained and implementation is handled with care and consistency, critical minerals sector has potential to shift from long standing missed opportunity to source of strategic strength and international collaboration in global energy transition (World Trade Center, 2026).

The current global concentration of these resources and ability to refine them being restricted to handful of countries exposes a strategic vulnerability but also opens an opportunity for India. By accelerating domestic geological exploration, investing in refining and processing infrastructure, nurturing critical minerals and forging resilient international mineral partnerships, India can convert structural dependency into engine of national power. Doing so will reinforce India's strategic autonomy by building up confidence that India can chart its destiny without fear of external coercion or supply-chain shock. As policy, industry and technology align, India is well-positioned not merely to raise its status in global economy of strategic minerals, but to be seen as a stable and resilient industrial power.

Conclusion

India must move from being passive participant in global supply-chains to becoming a confident producer, processor, innovator and steward of critical minerals. While India is endowed with significant critical minerals potential, unlocking this opportunity requires holistic approach that integrates policy foresight, technological capability, environmental responsibility and human capital development. India also recognises that self-reliance in critical minerals is intrinsically linked to national security. Dependence on limited global sources for materials vital to defence and strategic technologies is a vulnerability India cannot afford. Through collective action, India can emerge as responsible and resilient leader in global critical mineral landscape. Critical Minerals should be viewed not merely as resources beneath the ground, but as enablers of India's future, fueling innovation, strengthening security shape a stronger, more self-reliant nation. India's decisive reforms, ambitious sovereign funding, and forward thinking policy intent provide a strong foundation for securing critical mineral supply-chains. The challenge lies in execution. The integrated approach outlined - national exploration partnership, pro-investment financial ecosystem, globally competitive processing and METS ecosystem - together form an integrated blueprint for India's transformation. This approach positions India not merely as a mineral producer but as global leader in exploration technology, processing innovation, and sustainable mining practices.

Critical minerals security is no longer a sectoral agenda, it is central to India's industrial sovereignty, clean energy transition, and economic competitiveness. India stands at a pivotal juncture. By building strong institutions, incentivisation innovation, and forging global partnerships, the nation can turn vulnerabilities into strengths, diversify its resource base, and lead the global minerals economy. The coming decade must be India's exploration and innovation revolution, a decisive leap from dependency to leadership. As India accelerates its economic growth, clean energy transition and advanced manufacturing ambitions, demand for critical minerals is expected to increase significantly. This acceleration is closely linked to national initiatives such as Viksit Bharat which envisions India as a technologically advanced, self-reliant and globally competitive economy. Achieving goals of Viksit Bharat will require secure and resilient access to critical minerals as they form backbone of sectors such as renewable energy, electric mobility, digital infrastructure and defence manufacturing. Critical minerals represent strategic vulnerability and significant opportunity for India. Apart from exploration and research activities, by learning from global best practices and tailoring them to domestic realities, India can move from position of reactive defender to proactive engagement in global critical mineral supply-chains. A comprehensive critical mineral strategy encompassing resource assessment, overseas partners, domestic processing capabilities and technological innovation will be crucial for ensuring long-term economic resilience, strategic autonomy and sustainable development in an increasingly competitive global landscape.

References:

Chatterjee B. (2025). India's Critical Minerals Mission: From Ambition to Action. https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/india-s-critical-minerals-mission-from-ambition-to-action

Government of India (2023). Critical Minerals for India – Report of the Committee on Identification of Critical Minerals. Ministry of Mines, June 2023.

Joshi, P. (2023). Foreword. Critical Minerals for India – Report of the Committee on Identification of Critical Minerals. Ministry of Mines, June 2023.

Kalantri, V. (2026). Foreword. Rare Earth Elements in India: India's Position in Global Rare Earth Economy. Monograph by MVIRDC World Trade Centre, Mumbai. p.4

Keshri, G. (2024). India strives to lessen dependence on China for Critical minerals, *Deccan Herald*, 19th October 2024. https://www.deccanhearld.com/india/india-strives-to-lessen-dependence-on-china-for-critical-minerals-3239468

Mines and Minerals (Development and Regulation) Act (MMDR) 2025.

Ministry of Mines (2023). Critical Minerals for India. Report of the Committee on Identification of Critical Minerals. Ministry of Mines. June 2023. https://mines.gov.in/admin/download/649d4212cceb01688027666.pdf

Monappa, K.C. (2026). Securing Critical Minerals: India's Imperative for Strategic Autonomy and National Security. India foundation, January 13, 2026. https://chintan.indiafoundation.in/articles/securing-critical-minerals-indias-imperative-for-strategic-autonomy-and-national-security/

National Critical Minerals Mission (2025). https://mines.gov.in/admin/storage/ckeditor/DAY_1_PPT_4-1737542656.pdf

Observer Research Foundation (2026). Programme flyer - National Security Dialogue -Critical Minerals and India: Strategic Dependencies and Defence Preparedness.

Patil, S. (2024). Critical Minerals: Dependence on imports from China poses a security challenge to India. *Deccan Herald*, 19th October 2024. http://www.deccanherald.com/india/critical-minerals-dependence-on-imports-from-china-poses-a-security-challenge-to-india-3239469#

Satija, P. (2023). Critical Minerals – why India's current strategy to become self-reliant is so vital. November 30, 2023. https://www.cnbctv18.com/views/critical-minerals-india-self-reliance-current-strategies-global-collaborations-ministry-of-mines-national-policies-18428911.htm/amp

Sunil Kumar, Chandok, V., Jain, R. (2025). Making India a Hub for Critical Minerals Processing. Report. September 2025. Council on Energy, Environment and Water (CEEW). https://ceew.in/sites/default/files/ceew-making-india-a-hub-for-critical-minerals-processing-web-file-pdf

World Trade Centre (2026). Rare Earth Elements in India: India's Position in Global Rare Earth Economy. Monograph by MVIRDC World Trade Centre, Mumbai.

About the Authors:

Mr. Pradeep V. Kamat is a Management Educator, Versatile Trainer and Senior H.R. Professional. He is frequent contributor in field of Human Resource Management, Strategic Studies and Good Governance. Mr. Kamat has three decades of senior managerial corporate experience in the field of Human Resource Management. He is Visiting Faculty in number of Management Institutes in Mumbai and was Visiting Faculty at Naval War College of Indian Navy at Karanja. Mr. Kamat is a graduate in Economics from University of Mumbai and has passed M.A. in Human Resource Management and Industrial Relations from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai and LL.B. from University of Mumbai. Mr. Kamat was conferred Distinguished Services Award in 1995 for his contribution to Training and Development and Honorary Fellowship in 2016 for his contribution to Human Resource Development by Indian Society for Training and Development, New Delhi. He is Honorary Senior Fellow, Forum for Integrated National Security (FINS), Mumbai and Hon. Executive Editor, FINS Journal of Diplomacy & Strategy. He can be reached at pradeepvkamat@yahoo.co.in

Dr. Neela Kamat was Associate Professor with Gokhale Education Society's College of Education and Research, Parel, Mumbai and has around 25 years of teaching experience and has passed M.Sc. in Geology, M.Ed. and Ph.D. (Education) from University of Mumbai, M.A. (Sociology), M.A. (Psychology) and PG Diploma in Higher Education from IGNOU, New Delhi and PG Diploma in Educational Management from NMIMS University, Mumbai. Her specialisation is Educational Management, Teacher Education, and Educational Assessment. Dr. Kamat has presented papers in National / International Conferences and has been involved in school improvement and training projects in Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh and is Visiting faculty with Department of Education, University of Mumbai for Post Graduate Diploma in Educational Management and Institute of Distance and Open Learning, University of Mumbai for M.A. (Education). She can be reached at kamatneelap@yahoo.co.in

India's Engagement with Taliban 2.O led Afghanistan

Abstract

History has repeated itself and this time it seems forever. Taliban usurped power in Afghanistan in August 2021 leading to flight of people, worsening humanitarian crisis at all levels and giving space to terrorist groups to use Afghanistan as their launchpad. This threatened the entire world, particularly India.

India held the chair at UNSC in August 2021. This paper examines some of the UN Resolutions under India's leadership at having a durable peace in Afghanistan since the return of Taliban 2.O. India has always stood with the Afghan people giving them different kinds of aid and relief material. Afghanistan also gets a considerable amount of funding in India's Union Budget.

India was also caught in a dilemma as to how far it should approach and recognize Taliban 2.O. Over numerous contacts and bilateral visits later, India settled with the policy of 'engagement and not isolation' as a hard-pragmatic choice as Kabul matters to Delhi's security calculus. The bloodless Fall of Kabul also saw a worsening Afghan-Pakistan relation. Thus, it became urgent for India and Taliban 2.O to strike a stable working chord. Though, this relation has its own challenges rooted in morality, ethics, human rights, democracy and also diplomacy.

This paper mostly attempts to trace the events and incidents of India's approach and engagement with Afghanistan led by Taliban 2.O after the events of August 2021.

Keywords: India, Afghanistan, Taliban 2.O, Pakistan, S. Jaishankar, Amir Khan Muttaqi.

Background

15 August 2021 - while India celebrated its 75th Independence Day, a magnanimous event was unfolding in Kabul, Afghanistan - the return of the Taliban to Afghanistan after 20 years of semi - abeyance. Once again, the churn in Afghanistan confirmed the saying that 'Afghanistan is the graveyard of empires'. The British, the Soviets and now the Americans had to leave Afghanistan - exhausted and defeated.

Afghanistan and India share historical and civilizational ties since many centuries. With a shared baggage of colonialism and two common neighbours - Pakistan and China, India understands the necessities and demands of the Afghan people. From 1996-2001, India had supported the Northern Alliance in its resistance against the Taliban. The events happening in the last 2 decades were of great impact, interest and significance to the world's most populous country but sadly India had little to no say in determining the final outcome of the 'War on Terror'. Speaking of Afghanistan for the decade of 1980s, India's External Affairs Minister, Dr. S. Jaishankar, quotes in his book, The India Way, "it appears that India misjudged the extent to which Western countries would utilize it to damage the USSR". [1]

Whatever happens in Kabul, stays in Kabul - was not going to be a reality as multiple countries had a stake in the events, including India. This political earthquake will also affect the fractured India-Pakistan ties.

Initial Days and UN initiatives

When it became imperative for America & NATO to exit Afghanistan, they raced to sign the Doha Peace Agreement with Taliban 2.0 on 29 February 2020. One of the points of the 'Joint Declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America for Bringing Peace to Afghanistan' was "The United States re-affirms its commitments regarding support for the Afghan security forces and other government institutions, including through ongoing efforts to enhance the ability of Afghan security forces to deter and respond to internal and external threats, consistent with its commitments under existing security agreements between the two governments. " [2] Despite these guarantees, the Americans fled Afghanistan on their warplanes in August 2021. The scenes from that departure were reminiscent to the Fall of Saigon, 1975. The then Indian ambassador to Qatar, P. Kumaran had represented India at the ceremony. India was extremely cautious about the agreement keeping in mind the concerns that will emerge once Afghanistan falls to Taliban 2.O. This was seen in India's subsequent response to media queries, wherein Delhi did not "welcome" the agreement nor mentioned "Taliban". [3]

There were attacks at Gurudwara Har Rai Sahib in Kabul in March 2020, and Gurudwara Dashmesh Pita Sahib Sri Gobind Sahib Ji in Kabul on 18 June 2022. The attacks led to the loss of life of around 25 people and injured around 11 people, including one Indian national. India had strongly condemned both the terrorist attacks which targeted innocent civilian life.

Fast forward to August 2021, India had the UNSC presidency. Under India's chairship, the UNSC unanimously adopted 5 press statements of which 3 were on Afghanistan. On 3rd August 2021, the UNSC adopted a press statement that recalled the UNSC Resolution 2513 which affirmed that there was no military solution to the situation pertaining in Afghanistan. The press statement reiterated that the UNSC does not support the restoration of an "Islamic Emirate" in Afghanistan. Only time will tell if states across the world would adhere to this ideology.

As anticipated, chaos and mayhem followed. On 26th August 2021, a blast rocked the Hamid Karzai International Airport in which over 300 people were killed. It was claimed by the Islamic State in Khorasan Province. The fear that Afghanistan could not be managed by Taliban 2.O, and other terrorist groups controlling it, came true.

The UNSC Resolution 2593 also showed a subtle shift in India's earlier reticence about recognising Taliban's new role in the country. Showing a pragmatic acceptance of the Taliban's role as security provider in the country from thereon, it noted the Taliban's commitment to allow for the safe passage of both Afghan and foreign nationals wanting to leave the country and urged the "relevant parties" to work with international partners to strengthen security. This tacit acknowledgement of the Taliban's new role was also evident in the press statement of 27 August which preceded the resolution. In a break from the statement passed on 16 August which still considered the Taliban as one of the actors supporting terror inside Afghanistan, the 27 August statement dropped the reference to the Taliban's support to other terror outfits. [4]

It was India's humble and pure efforts at bringing the world together through the UN to speak in unison in affairs relating to Afghanistan. Apart from the high-level meetings in New York, the political tremors will give rise to yet another humanitarian crisis that will require India's attention to be on ground in Kabul through Operation Devi Shakti.

Operation Devi Shakti

Due to India's huge population and ever-expanding diaspora, it always has to play some role in conflicts across the globe. The threats emanating from Afghanistan to the well-being, security and life of Indians in Afghanistan and also to the people from minority religions in Afghanistan made it necessary for India to launch Operation Devi Shakti.

Under this operation, a total of 669 people were evacuated from Afghanistan comprising 448 Indians and 206 Afghans. This also included 74 members of the minority community from Afghanistan, primarily Afghan Sikhs, who carried with them 2 Swaroops of Guru Granth Sahib and some ancient Hindu manuscripts. A total of 15 people of other nationalities from Nepal, Lebanon and Uganda were also rescued. Seven flights - six operated between 16 and 25 August 2021 and the last flight on 10 December 2021 had brought these people back. All Indian nationals who had sought repatriation to India were evacuated. [5] [6]

In view of the rapid deterioration in the security situation in Afghanistan, especially after 15 August 2021, a 24 * 7 Special Afghanistan Cell was set up in the Ministry of External Affairs to facilitate repatriation and other requests from Afghanistan. In the month of August alone, the Cell responded to 3436 telephone calls, 9581 WhatsApp messages and 4569 emails. [7]

The rescue efforts are in sync with India's approach of 'Vasudhaiva Kutumbakam' (which will be the theme of India's G20 Presidency in 2023) and its vision to be a 'Vishwa Guru' especially to the Global South (which will culminate into the Voice of the Global South Summit).

Aid

To heal Afghanistan from its wounds was utmost necessary. India carried out multiple humanitarian tranches to Afghanistan for the welfare and well- being of Afghan people that share brethren ties with Indians.

An earthquake struck Afghanistan on 22 June 2022. As a true friend, partner and a 'First Responder', India immediately dispatched 27 tons of emergency relief assistance in two flights consisting of essential items including family ridge tents, sleeping bags, blankets, sleeping mats, etc. The relief consignments were handed to the United Nations Office for Coordination of Humanitarian Affairs (UNOCHA) and Afghan Red Crescent Society (ARCS) in Kabul. [8] This was a crucial step in India's 'Neighbourhood First' and 'Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief' approach.

The first ever India Central Asia Joint Working Group (JWG) on Afghanistan had its first meeting on 07 March 2023 in New Delhi, India. Some outcomes of the JWG were [9]

- India announced that it will dispatch 20,000 MTs of wheat assistance to address the humanitarian situation in Afghanistan in partnership with the United Nations World Food Programme (UNWFP) through the Chabahar Port in Iran.
- On the request of the United Nations Office on Drugs and Crimes (UNODC), India offered capacity building training courses for the relevant agencies/ stakeholders in the area of countering illegal drug trafficking.

As of December 2024, several shipments of humanitarian assistance consisting of 50,000 MTs of wheat, 300 tons of life saving essential medicines, 1.5 million doses of COVID vaccines, 27 tons of earthquake relief aid, 40,000 litres of pesticides, 100 million polio doses, 11,000 units of hygiene kits for the drug de-addiction programme and 500 units of winter clothing to Afghanistan. These consignments were handed over to the Indira Gandhi Children Hospital, Kabul and UN specialized agencies, namely, World Food Programme (WFP) and World Health Organization (WHO). [10] India also gifted one million doses of India made COVAXIN to Iran to administer to Afghan refugees in Iran.

In June 2025, India organized a five-day Jaipur foot camp in Kabul. Around 75 prosthetic limbs were successfully fitted by Bhagwan Mahaveer Viklang Sahayata Samiti (BMVSS), Jaipur, giving hope of further deepening our Track 1.5 diplomacy with Afghanistan. [11]

On 14 April 2026, India delivered 13 tons of BCG vaccines and related dry material to the Ministry of Public Health, Afghanistan to augment Afghanistan's child immunization programme against tuberculosis. Earlier, 7.5 tons of life saving cancer medicines were also delivered. [12] [13]

Allocations to Afghanistan in India's Budget

Following the US invasion, India emerged as the largest regional donor for Afghanistan with pledges of almost US$ 3 billion. Flagship initiatives included but not limited to - Afghanistan India Friendship Dam (Salma Dam), Afghan Parliament building, 218 km. Zaranj Delaram highway and the restoration of Stor Palace. [14] Dr. S. Jaishankar mentions in his book, The India Way, that "India positioned itself as a sympathetic but understanding partner willing to work to American comfort levels". [15]

In the Union Budget 2022-23, the first full financial year under Taliban, India slashed its developmental assistance to the war-torn country to Rs. 200 crores, down 43% from Rs. 350 crores in Budget 2021-22, when Kabul was under a democratic government. [16]

The allocation to Afghanistan remained the same in Budget 2023-24, Rs. 200 crores. Indian Parliament was informed that, through the allocation from the same Budget, approx. Rs. 57 crores were utilized as Humanitarian and Disaster Relief Assistance (HADR) on 15 countries, mostly from Global South, including Afghanistan, under budget heads 'Technical and Economic Co-operation'. [17]

The return of the Taliban negatively affected multiple projects in Afghanistan. For example, restoration work on the 65-hectare ancient fortress Bala Hissar in Kabul remained on pause. The Agha Khan Trust for Culture (AKTC) Afghanistan planned to complete it by 2022 after the work began in 2020. The Indian government had signed a MoU with Kabul pledging approximately US$ 1 million. Taliban has been pressing India to resume these works back. [18]

In the fiscal year 2023-24, the country got aid worth Rs. 220 crores, Rs. 20 crores more than allocated. Afghanistan saw an allocation worth Rs. 200 crores in the Union Budget 2024-25. In the revised budget, the figure had got down to Rs. 50 crores.

The Union Budget 2026-27 hiked India's development assistance to Afghanistan by 27%, raising the allocation from Rs. 100 crores in 2025-26 to Rs 150 crores. [14] One also has to look at the figures retrospectively, India had allocated Rs. 350 crores to Afghanistan in the 2021-22 Budget, in comparison, the cumulative allocation has dropped down. The budget allocation to neighbouring states also aligns with the Indian foreign policy principles of 'Gujral Doctrine'.

The allocation to Afghanistan controlled by the Taliban has been met with criticism from certain quarters. The then Delhi Chief Minister, Arvind Kejriwal, had criticised this move believing that this was at the expense of cutting the funds of education, health and Delhi! [19]

Looking beyond India - another view emerging from US' the Special Inspector General for Afghanistan Reconstruction (SIGAR) is that the Taliban has no legal right to access billions of dollars allocated for Afghanistan, as it is a United Nations sanctioned terrorist group, not recognized as a de jure legitimate government and remains subject to severe sanctions.

Shashi Tharoor, who chairs India's Parliamentary Standing Committee on External Affairs, believes that "Engagement without ethical guardrails risks normalising repression; isolation without pragmatic engagement risks strategic setbacks". [20]

It is projected that the monetary disbursement would not be directly given to the Taliban but through different international organizations/ NGOs (some of the names have been mentioned in this piece) as a 'gift to the people of Afghanistan' as seen pasted in many consignments sent across from Delhi. It is for Delhi to cautiously and skilfully navigate the sandstorm that has arisen from the Hindu Kush.

Contacts and Bilateral Visits

The upswing in ties as observed by Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Afghanistan, first on 25 December 2015 while returning back from Russia and then on 04 June 2016, were severely affected after 2021.

After the Taliban took over, India's ambassador to Qatar, Deepak Mittal, met top Taliban negotiator Sher Mohammad Abbas Stanekzai, the Head of Taliban's Political Office in Doha, at the Indian embassy in Qatar on 31 August 2021. The meeting was arranged on the request of the Taliban. It marked the first officially acknowledged meeting between the two sides in recent years. [21] Stanekzai is also a former Afghan military officer who had received his training at Indian Military Academy (IMA). He was 20 years old when he joined 44 other foreign cadets of the Bhagat Battalion's Keren Company at IMA, Dehra Dun. [22]

Multiple neighbouring countries were quick to 'accept' the Taliban. India proceeded with caution and deployed a technical team in Kabul in June 2022 "to closely monitor and coordinate the efforts of various stakeholders for the effective delivery of humanitarian assistance and in continuation of our engagement with the Afghan people". [23] Prior to this, another Indian team had visited Kabul to oversee the delivery operations of Delhi's humanitarian assistance to Afghanistan and met with senior members of Taliban as well. During the visit, an assessment of the security situation was also conducted. This team which was led by the then Joint Secretary J.P. Singh, who headed the Pakistan-Afghanistan-Iran (PAI) desk at the Ministry of External Affairs, also met the acting Foreign Minister of Afghanistan Amir Khan Muttaqi. It is important to note that India's contact with Kabul was for the 'Afghan people' and not for the de facto establishment ruling Afghanistan. Vivek Katju, who served as Indian Ambassador to Afghanistan during 2002-05 welcomed the visit by the Indian team believing that "An engagement with the Taliban would at least give an opportunity to convey Indian concerns directly and encourage those elements within the group who wish to open up its diplomatic choices". He also hoped for a permanent Indian presence in Kabul as it would be "better for the pursuit of national interests in the external sphere. This is not an exercise in evangelism but the cold and undeterred pursuit of interests, which often requires supping with the devil — of course, with a long spoon". [24]

This psychological warfare and emphasis on imagery is also put forth by Robert Greene in multiple of his books. This is also an example of soft feminist diplomacy which was earlier seen when India's then External Affairs Minister, Sushma Swaraj met President Hassan Rouhani of Iran on 17 April 2017 where she was wearing a pink sari and covered her head with a shawl. Her attire fired up Twitter (now X) with one tweet referring to her as "a pink potato sack". [25] Similarly, IFS Jharwal had worn a salwar kameez with full sleeves and head cover. India cannot afford to leave the space vacuum with respect to our ties with Islamic states, not everyone has the liberty to have a Marietje Schaake moment. [26] Critics, mostly trolls, opined that India has kow-towed to the medieval thinking of Taliban but what they fail to understand is, in realpolitik, such steps act as a springboard - one takes a step 'back' to leap multiple steps forward for a larger cause and benefit. Diplomacy doesn't always work on morality or ethics but also on difficult pragmatic choices.

On 05 November 2024, J.P. Singh met Taliban's acting defence minister Muhammad Yaqoob Mujahid for the first time in Kabul. Yaqoob, the son of Taliban founder Mullah Omar, had not publicly interacted with Indian interlocutors in the past. During the same meeting Singh also met with acting foreign minister Amir Khan Muttaqi and former President Hamid Karzai. Karzai, while appreciating India's cooperation with the people of Afghanistan, said that more attention should be paid to the education and training of Afghan youth along with developing trade and easing travel between the two sides. [27]

On 08 January 2025, India's Foreign Secretary met the acting Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, Amir Khan Muttaqi in Dubai, UAE. The two sides evaluated the ongoing Indian humanitarian assistance programmes. The Afghan Minister appreciated and thanked the Indian leadership for continuing to engage and support the people of Afghanistan. Keeping in mind the urgent need for development activities "it was decided that India would consider engaging in development projects in the near future, in addition to the ongoing humanitarian assistance programme". In this meeting it was mutually agreed upon that the two sides would promote sports cooperation, mainly cricket which was deeply valued by the young generation of Afghans, and to promote the use of Chabahar Port for furthering trade and commercial activities which will also give a boost to the International North South Transport Corridor (INSTC). [28]

The events of 2025 will take the bilateral relations between India and Taliban 2.O led Afghanistan to more significant levels.

On 22 April 2025, a deadly terrorist attack was carried out in Pahalgam, Union Territory of Jammu and Kashmir, India which claimed the lives of 26 innocent civilians. This was the most severe attack in terms of civilian casualties since the Mumbai attacks of 26 November 2008. In response to this attack, backed by and originating from Pakistan, India carried out Operation Sindoor beginning from 07 May 2025 until a mutually agreed ceasefire was implemented from 10 May 2025. This operation was a precision based military strike on 9 terror camps, 4 located deep within Pakistan and 5 in Pakistan occupied Kashmir. These locations were key command centres of Jaish-e-Mohammed and Lashkar-e-Taiba. [29]

It is ironic that the Taliban regime, a globally recognized and sanctioned terrorist outfit, condemned the attack and expressed their sympathy "to the families of those who lost their lives in this incident. Such acts threaten the security and stability of the region". This is the same regime in its earlier version from 1996-2001 that had given a safe haven for the hijackers of Indian Airlines Flight 814 to land in Kandahar in December 1999. Nevertheless, this tragic terrorist attack in Pahalgam paved the way for a diplomatic thaw via a telephone call and a landmark visit 5 months later.

Dr. S. Jaishankar, India's External Affairs Minister, officially spoke to Amir Khan Muttaqi on 15 May 2025. In a post on X, S. Jaishankar deeply appreciated the acting Afghan Foreign Minister's condemnation of the Pahalgam terrorist attack. India also trashed reports that appeared in Pakistan media that attempted to link the Taliban with the developments in Kashmir. "We welcomed his firm rejection of recent attempts to create distrust between India and Afghanistan through false and baseless reports," S. Jaishankar added in his message. [30]

In the same phone call, according to Taliban's Director of Communication Hafiz Zia Ahmed, Muttaqi requested the Indian Minister to provide more visas to Afghan nationals especially to those seeking medical attention. He also mentioned that bilateral trade, release and return of Afghan prisoners in Indian jails, and development of the Chabahar Port in Iran were discussed. [31]

Before the debut phone call, senior Indian diplomat Anand Prakash visited Kabul on 27 April as tensions between Delhi and Islamabad, in fact Rawalpindi, peaked over cross-border terror links. Mr. Prakash held a meeting with Amir Khan Muttaqi as well.

October 2025 visit of acting Foreign Minister Muttaqi to India

The highlight between India and Taliban 2.O relations came when the acting Foreign Minister of Afghanistan, Amir Khan Muttaqi, visited India on a week-long visit from 09-15 October 2025. This marked his first high-level trip to India since Taliban snatched power in 2021. Muttaqi, who is sanctioned by the UNSC, was given a travel ban exemption to visit India. During the visit, the minister interacted with India's EAM S. Jaishankar, visited think tanks like Vivekanand International Foundation, and the Darul Uloom Deoband. Muttaqi also interacted with the Afghan refugees and business communities and attended several press conferences.

At the meeting, between Dr. S. Jaishankar and Muttaqi, in Hyderabad House, there were no flags of either side — India, thus evaded a diplomatic challenge and a probable faux pau. The Indians addressed him as Foreign Minister of Afghanistan — not getting into the Republic vs Emirate debate. [32]

Some of the outcomes of the visit were [33]

- construction of a 30-bed hospital by India in Kabul's Bagrami district.
- construction of an Oncology Centre and a Trauma Centre in Kabul.
- establishment of five Maternity Health Clinics in the provinces of Paktika, Khost and Paktia.
- as a special gesture, India will gift 20 ambulances to the Afghan people.
- welcoming of the commencement of India Afghan Air Freight Corridor.
- importantly, the Afghan Minister reiterated the commitment that the Afghan government will not allow any group or individual to use the territory of Afghanistan against India.
- India also agreed to upgrade its financial mission in Kabul and receive Taliban diplomats.

Muttaqi also attended a high-level interaction with industry leaders, organized by the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI). During this meeting, resumption of direct flights between Amritsar and Kabul was announced. This announcement was hailed by Vikramjit Singh Sahney, a Rajya Sabha MP, who chaired the meeting, believing that "this is a historic step that can be a game changer for trade and industry in Punjab". He emphasized that the resumption of flights will significantly benefit farmers, traders and MSMEs on both sides, with a strong focus on trade in agri-products, dry and fresh fruits, handicrafts, and pharmaceuticals. [34]

A delegation of persecuted Afghan Hindus and Sikhs also met the Minister and urged him for the restoration of ancient Hindu temples and Gurudwaras in Afghanistan. The delegation also requested the government in Kabul to appoint Hindus and Sikhs in high-ranking positions. The exodus brought around 5000 Hindus and Sikhs from Afghanistan to India, many are now Indian nationals. The delegation, led by Afghan Minorities Council in coordination with the Indian World Forum, comprised around 30 prominent members from both the communities who had come to India. Indian World Forum President Puneet Chandhok said that "we hope that the present regime will ensure fool proof rights of minorities living there". [35] The ghosts from the past might wonder whether Taliban commits to this on ground.

The press conference done by the Minister on 11 October 2025 at the Afghan Embassy was marred with controversies as women journalists were not 'allowed' to attend. The Afghan side responded that only a select few invitees had gone to journalists who were all men. This gender apartheid policy was met with severe backlash. The Editors Guild of India, the Indian Women's Press Corps (IWPC) and the Network of Women in Media, India (NWMI) issued strong statements, calling the exclusion "highly discriminatory". [36] Also, the irony of the setting for Muttaqi's 30-minute press conference could not have been more visible – the Taliban flag on a table in front of him, and a painting of the Bamiyan Buddhas (destroyed by the Taliban in 2001) on the wall behind. 2 days later, after severe pressure and condemnation, the minister did another press conference wherein female journalists attended occupying front row seats. "There can be no normalisation of a regime that erases women", opined Zahra Nader, the editor in chief of Zan Times, which covers human rights issues in Afghanistan, on this press conference episode. [37]

Another major event of this almost week-long trip was Muttaqi's visit to the Darul Uloom Deoband in Saharanpur, Uttar Pradesh. Historically, during the late 19th and early 20th centuries, Deoband Islam played a significant role in the nation-building process through the movement of scholarly networks that extended from India via Afghanistan to the vast lands of the Arab world. Considering Afghanistan's historical trajectory with Deoband Islam (from an intellectual pursuit to ideological extremism), the Minister's visit to India's Deoband underscores many concerns for New Delhi's strategic community. Apparently, the ideological foundations of the Taliban is rooted in the religious doctrine associated with the Darul Uloom Deoband in India. Therefore, India should tread with caution over Taliban's attempt to revive its strategic interests as a part of intellectual and ideological diplomacy. This visit could not have been possible without the knowledge and tacit or explicit consent of the Indian government. The Deoband should not be used by both sides as just gaining strategic leverage over Islamabad but rather how Delhi and Kabul can use it as a bridge between them. [38] [39]

Subsequently, in November 2025, Alhaj Nooruddin Azizi, the Taliban's Minister of Commerce and Industry visited India for discussions on bilateral trade, investment and broader economic cooperation. This was followed by a visit in December 2025 by the Taliban Health Minister, Noor Jalal Jalali, focused on strengthening cooperation in the healthcare sector, including pharmaceuticals.

Apart from meeting India's External Affairs Minister, Minister Azizi also held delegation level talks with India's Commerce and Industry Minister, Piyush Goyal and met Minister of State for Commerce and Industry, Jitin Prasada. Minister Azizi also visited the India International Trade Fair (IITF 2025), where several Afghan traders had set up stalls. He interacted with various exhibitors and toured the cultural display at the IITF. Minister Azizi's delegation held meetings with the Agricultural and Processed Food Products Export Development Authority (APEDA), Cotton Textiles Export Promotion Council (TEXPROCIL), Cotton Corporation of India (CCI), Apparel Export Promotion Council (AEPC), Manmade and Technical Textiles Export Promotion Council (MATEXIL), PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI), Associated Chambers of Commerce and Industry of India (ASSOCHAM), and Pharmaceutical Export Promotion Council of India (PHARMEXCIL). They discussed modalities for the long-term supply of agricultural products, medicines, and other essential commodities to Afghanistan. [40]

Taliban's Health Minister Jalali held a bilateral meeting with India's Health and Family Welfare Minister, J.P. Nadda. He also met MEA's Minister of State, Kirti Vardhan Singh and Ayush Ministry's Minister of State (Independent Charge), Prataprao Jadhav. The Afghan Minister participated in the 2nd WHO Global Summit on Traditional Medicine held in New Delhi. To gain an understanding of India's tertiary healthcare system, the Afghan delegation visited AIIMS, New Delhi and a few other hospitals. A technical visit to Centre of Excellence in Unani Medicine, Jamia Hamdard University, was also arranged. The delegation also held meetings with the Central Drugs Standard Control Organisation (CDSCO), Food Safety and Standards Authority of India (FSSAI), and Hospital Services Consultancy Corporation Limited (India). They also participated in interactive business sessions with the Federation of Indian Chambers of Commerce and Industry (FICCI), PHD Chamber of Commerce and Industry (PHDCCI) and Pharmaceuticals Export Promotion Council of India (Pharmexcil). [41] Prior to the Minister's visit, India delivered 63,734 doses of Influenza and Meningitis vaccines to Kabul. [42]

The dilemma on who should run the Afghan Embassy?

Going with the international consensus, India has not recognized the Taliban government.

Soon after Taliban took charge of Afghanistan in 2021, the functioning of the Afghan Embassy at Delhi and Consulate General in Mumbai and Hyderabad remained with the diplomats appointed by the democratic government of the Afghan Republic. Whom to give the charge and recognize as the official representative from Afghanistan remained a thorny issue for Raisina Hills.

The diplomats appointed by the previous regime continued to work as a stateless mission, mostly helping Afghan nationals in India. It was reduced to a ceremonial and a symbolic role. Power struggle soon arose between the diplomats and Taliban which asked the ambassador to be removed and be replaced with their own appointee. On 02 June 2023, the then MEA's spokesperson Arindam Bagchi commented that this was an "internal matter" for the embassy to resolve. [43] Critics argued that on India's part, it was sadly an abdication of duties as the host country.

Farid Mamundzay, the ambassador appointed by President Ashraf Ghani reportedly left India sometime in mid-2023. In late September 2023, a statement carrying the seal of the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan (not to be confused with Islamic Emirate, the name given by the Taliban) announced the closure of the Embassy of Afghanistan in Delhi. The announcement had been anticipated for a while, especially after a report which stated that a letter had been sent from the mission to the Ministry of External Affairs informing it of the impending closure. In its official communication, the Embassy of Afghanistan blamed multiple factors including lack of cooperation from the Government of India and a lack of resources to operate any further. Furthermore, the embassy urged the Indian government to fly the flag of the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan over embassy premises. It also urged Delhi to hand over the mission to a "legitimate government" of Afghanistan sometime in the future.

As the Embassy saga continued, Afghan Consul General in Mumbai, Zakia Wardak, and Acting-Consul General in Hyderabad, Sayed Mohammad Ibrahimkhil, confirmed that they would continue carrying out their duties. On 04 May 2024, Zakia Wardak resigned after she was caught smuggling/ concealing gold at the Mumbai Airport. [44]

As relations between India and the Taliban eased and came closer, it became necessary to have Taliban representatives taking charge of the Embassy. As noted earlier, 2025 marked a drastic change in relations between Delhi and Kabul. This sentiment was further observed, after Afghan Minister Muttaqi's visit to India in October 2025, when it was agreed upon that the charge of the Afghan Embassy would be given to the Taliban. In mid-January 2026, Mufti Noor Ahmad Noor, who previously served as the Director General of the First Political Department at Afghanistan's Ministry of Foreign Affairs, formally assumed charge as the Charge d'Affaires (CDA) at the Afghan Embassy in Delhi. Around the same time, the Taliban had assigned Ikramuddin Kamil, an Afghan student in India, responsibility for consular affairs in Mumbai, reflecting the regime's improvised yet pragmatic approach to overseas representation under conditions of non-recognition. Along with this, India upgraded its technical mission in Kabul to a full-fledged embassy and appointed Karan Yadav as CDA.

The Muttaqi visit thus laid the institutional groundwork for the subsequent embassy transition and signalled India's readiness to deepen functional ties, falling short of diplomatic recognition.

As Muttaqi & Dr. S. Jaishankar were securing ties between their respective states in Delhi in October 2025, the after effects of a courtship gone sour could be seen happening simultaneously as Pakistan carried out airstrikes in Afghanistan

India, Afghanistan and Pakistan

Tim Marshall writes in his book, Prisoners of Geography, "Geography is clearly the fundamental part of the 'why' as well as the 'what'. It might not be the determining factor, but it is certainly the most overlooked". This annotation can be best seen in the bilateral and multilateral relations between India, Afghanistan and Pakistan, more importantly in the events that have occurred after 15 August 2021.

History is witness that the West, led by USA, funded the mujhahids in Pakistan to wage a war against the Soviets after it invaded Afghanistan in 1979. This singular event has given birth to almost all the catastrophes in Afghanistan and Pakistan and as a common neighbour India got affected in unfathomable ways never seen before with respect to the issue of insurgency and terrorism in Jammu and Kashmir. Former Indian ambassador to Afghanistan (2008-10), Jayant Prasad, writes "India has a stake in ensuring that terrorist groups against India do not use Afghan territory. Despite assurances, Indian security forces have been reporting the recovery of US made M-4 carbines from deceased terrorists after encounters in Kathua, Reasi, Kishtwar, Akhnoor, Poonch, Rajouri, Kupwara, and most recently in the Dachigam area near Mount Mahadev. The M-4s were left behind in Afghanistan when US forces withdrew from Afghanistan". [45]

In this section, the paper attempts to trace and understand the incidents that will bring India and Taliban closer due to the actions of Pakistan after 2021. Op. Sindoor has been addressed in the above section.

Imran Khan, the then Prime Minister of Pakistan is reportedly to have said that Afghanistan has broken the shackles of slavery after the Taliban captured Kabul. Little did he and Pakistan know that the euphoria emerging out of this takeover will come to bite Pakistan harder through Tehreek e Taliban Pakistan (TTP), Islamic State, al Qaeda and other terror groups. Pakistan asserts that the Afghan Taliban safely harbours the TTP - a claim Afghan Taliban repeatedly denies. Taliban does not recognize and accept the Durand Line that divides the Pashtun tribe. [46]

Pakistan believes that its Pashtun population is sympathetic to the terrorist that harbour in Afghanistan. Due to this sentiment, the two forces have often clashed at the border leading to military and civilian deaths. Pakistan has routinely carried out airstrikes in Afghanistan. The Taliban has responded in the same language. Thus, the Defence Minister of Pakistan, Khawaja Muhammad Asif, has termed this as an "open war", undermining a fragile ceasefire that was signed in October 2025.

On 22 February 2026, India's MEA strongly condemned Pakistan's airstrikes on Afghanistan as "It is another attempt by Pakistan to externalise its internal failures. India reiterates its support for Afghanistan's sovereignty, territorial integrity and independence." [47] On 14 March 2026, India again condemned yet another strike by Pakistan that caused the "... destruction of civilian infrastructure. This is yet another act of aggression by a Pakistani establishment that remains hostile to the idea of a sovereign Afghanistan". [48]

The politics of language was seen at its peak when India released a statement that unequivocally condemned Pakistan's airstrike on the Omid Addiction Treatment Hospital in Kabul on the night of 16 March 2026 calling it "barbaric", "cowardly", "unconscionable act of violence", "criminal" and a "massacre". India rightly believed that the facility can by "no means be justified as a military target". [49] The WHO estimated that more than 400 people were killed and another 250 were injured. [50]

India, once again, asked Pakistan to respect Afghan sovereignty and territorial integrity and criticised its "reckless behaviour" that were a "direct threat to regional peace and stability". Further, India noted that "this attack was carried out during the holy month of Ramzan, a time of peace, reflection, and mercy among Muslim communities across the world, makes it all the more reprehensible. There is no faith, no law, and no morality that can justify the deliberate targeting of a hospital and its patients".

It is noteworthy to observe that in the same month Israel and the USA waged a war on Iran. The statements and observations put forth by India were mild as compared to the strong words used by India with respect to the actions of Pakistan.

Conclusion and End Thoughts

The world might have seen the Islamic Revolution in Iran in 1979 as undemocratic and unacceptable but over the course of time it accepted the Ayatollah and the Islamic regime as sovereign representatives of Iran. Similarly, this time the Taliban is here to stay unless another invasion happens, most likely not, therefore it is prudent for India to engage and not isolate Taliban and Afghanistan.

The meetings and outcomes from the visits of the three Afghan Ministers in late 2025 should see its successful completion and implementation otherwise it would just be reduced to rhetoric. Kabul and Delhi must overcome the challenges that are not in their control and which negatively affects them, so that they do not become another Chabahar or meet the fate of the Turkmenistan-Afghanistan-Pakistan-India (TAPI) pipeline.

India must actively participate in the regional forums like Moscow Format, SCO - Afghanistan Contact Group, Heart of Asia - Istanbul Process, for a durable and inclusive peace in Afghanistan. India must continue to place its 'Afghan led, Afghan owned and Afghan controlled' principle at the centre of all discussions. This thought process was evident when India aligned with countries like Pakistan, China, Russia at the 7th Moscow Format Consultations for Afghanistan, in October 2025, to indirectly reject US President Donald Trump's plan to takeover Bagram Air Base. [51]

Pakistan should not be the determining factor in binding or breaking Indo - Afghan ties. Also, India must realise that any efforts at peace in Afghanistan would require strong backing and support from Pakistan. Therefore, it is necessary for Pakistan to be at the table.

The Taliban seem to have an optimistic outlook towards India. The people from the land of the Ganga do not carry any negative feelings to the people from the land of the Helmand. Hence, it becomes utmost important for Delhi to continue to press issues of human rights particularly of women and children, democracy, right to education for all, welfare of minorities, with Kabul. Delhi seems to be not in favour of voicing out the concerns openly; even if it addresses these issues behind closed doors, it's a game well played.

Shashi Tharoor, a former UN Under Secretary-General, comments that "Engagement does not require moral whitewashing, but it does require constant public scrutiny and clear red lines". [20] Maybe the conditions for delivery of humanitarian assistance can be tied to fulfilment of these criteria by the Taliban. India can take the help of friendly Islamic states like Saudi Arabia, Qatar and UAE to talk to the Taliban to come to 21st century norms of civility.

A stable, durable and peaceful Afghanistan is beneficial not just for India but for the entire world.

Disclaimer: Events in the paper are covered upto April 2026.

References:

[1] S. Jaishankar, The India Way, HarperCollins Publishers India, 2020, p. 86.

[2] US Department of State, "Joint declaration between the Islamic Republic of Afghanistan and the United States of America for bringing peace to Afghanistan.," 29 February 2020. [Online]. Available: https://www.state.gov/wp-content/uploads/2020/02/02.29.20-US-Afghanistan-Joint-Declaration.pdf.[3] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 29 February 2020. [Online]. Available: https://www.mea.gov.in/response-to-queries.htm?dtl/32442/official+spokespersons+response+to+media+queries+on+the+the+issuance+of+a+joint+declaration+between+the+afghan+and+us+governments+in+kabul+and+signing+of+the+ustaliban+agreement+in+doha.

[4] S. Shekhawat, India's Stakes in Taliban-Ruled Afghanistan, 01 August 2023. [Online]. Available: https://www.orfonline.org/research/india-s-stakes-in-taliban-ruled-afghanistan.

[5] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 25 March 2022. [Online]. Available: https://www.mea.gov.in/lok-sabha.htm?dtl/35073/QUESTION_NO3879_FINANCIAL_AID_TO_AFGHANISTAN.

[6] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 03 December 2021. [Online]. Available: https://www.mea.gov.in/lok-sabha.htm?dtl/34590/QUESTION_NO1093_SIKHS_EVACUATED_FROM_AFGHANISTAN.

[7] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 03 December 2021. [Online]. Available: https://www.mea.gov.in/lok-sabha.htm?dtl/34583/QUESTION_NO1031_FLIGHT_OPERATIONS_TO_AFGHANISTAN.

[8] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 24 June 2022. [Online]. Available: https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35440/Earthquake_Relief_Assistance_for_the_people_of_Afghanistan.

[9] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 07 March 2023. [Online]. Available: https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/36333/Joint_Statement_of_the_First_Meeting_of_the_IndiaCentral_Asia_Joint_Working_Group_JWG_on_Afghanistan.

[10] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 08 January 2025. [Online]. Available: https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38898/Foreign_Secretarys_meeting_with_the_Acting_Foreign_Minister_of_Afghanistan.

[11] Ministry of External Affairs WhatsApp Channel, Government of India, 29 June 2025.

[12] Ministry of External Affairs WhatsApp Channel, Government of India, 14 April 2026.

[13] Ministry of External Affairs WhatsApp Channel, Government of India, 22 January 2026.

[14] D. A. Ghosh, India's Aid Boost to Taliban-Ruled Afghanistan and the Evolving Delhi-Kabul Engagement, 10 February 2026. [Online]. Available: https://www.icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=3&ls_id=14213&lid=8638.

[15] S. Jaishankar, The India Way, HarperCollins Publishers India, 2020, p. 90.

[16] N. Basu and K. Pia, India cuts developmental aid to Taliban-ruled Afghanistan by 43%, big jump for Bangladesh: Budget, 22 February 2022. [Online]. Available: https://theprint.in/diplomacy/india-cuts-development-aid-to-taliban-ruled-afghanistan-by-43-big-jump-for-bangladesh-budget/819483/.

[17] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 2024 December 2024. [Online]. Available: https://www.mea.gov.in/rajya-sabha.htm?dtl/38686/QUESTION+NO+1196+ALLOCATION+FOR+DISASTER+RELIEF.

[18] P. Krishnakutty, Taliban effect? Ancient Kabul citadel's revamp in limbo without help from 'non-responsive' India, 22 December 2022. [Online]. Available: https://theprint.in/diplomacy/taliban-effect-ancient-kabul-citadels-revamp-in-limbo-without-help-from-non-responsive-india/1251324/.

[19] X post, @ArvindKejriwal, 04 February 2023. https://www.indiatoday.in/india/story/arvind-kejriwal-asks-right-to-fund-afghanistan-budget-2023-by-cutting-new-delhi-funds-2330441-2023-02-04

[20] S. Tharoor, India's Taliban outreach requires reconciling principle with pragmatism, 30 October 2025. [Online]. Available: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/shashi-tharoor-india-taliban-reconciling-principle-pragmatism-10334731/.

[21] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 31 August 2021. [Online]. Available: https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/34208/Meeting_in_Doha.

[22] The Economic Times, Top Taliban Leader Stanikzai trained by Indian Military Academy, 20 August 2021. [Online]. Available: https://economictimes.indiatimes.com/news/defence/indian-military-academy-trained-top-taliban-leader-stanikzai-in-1982/articleshow/85480484.cms?from=mdr.

[23] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 23 June 2022. [Online]. Available: https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/35437/Deployment_of_a_technical_team_in_Embassy_of_India_Kabul.

[24] V. Katju, Why India must engage Taliban, 07 June 2022. [Online]. Available: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/india-afghanistan-visit-taliban-7955692/.

[25] N. Razdan, Foreign Minister Sushma Swaraj's 'Iran Look' Fires Up Twitter, 18 April 2016. [Online]. Available: https://www.ndtv.com/india-news/foreign-minister-sushma-swarajs-iran-look-fires-up-twitter-1396716.

[26] DW.com, EU MP's outfit sparks indignation in Iran, 09 June 2015. [Online]. Available: https://www.dw.com/en/dutch-politicians-outfit-sparks-indignation-in-iran/a-18506039.

[27] Y. Seli, Indian delegation holds key discussions in Afghanistan on humanitarian aid, trade, 07 November 2024. [Online]. Available: https://www.newindianexpress.com/nation/2024/Nov/07/indian-delegation-holds-key-discussions-in-afghanistan-on-humanitarian-aid-trade.

[28] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 08 January 2025. [Online]. Available: https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/38898/Foreign_Secretarys_meeting_with_the_Acting_Foreign_Minister_of_Afghanistan.

[29] Press Information Bureau, Government of India, 14 May 2025. [Online]. Available: https://www.pib.gov.in/Pressreleaseshare.aspx?PRID=2128748&reg=3&lang=2.

[30] X post, @DrSJaishankar, 15 May 2025. https://x.com/DrSJaishankar/status/1923036293656871262?lang=en

[31] G. Jeelani, India-Pakistan Conflict: Why EAM Jaishankar's phone call with Taliban Foreign Minister is historic, 16 May 2025. [Online]. Available: https://www.livemint.com/news/india/indiapakistan-conflict-why-eam-jaishankars-phone-call-with-taliban-foreign-minister-is-historic-11747366350153.html.

[32] S. Roy, At Jaishankar-Muttaqi meet in Delhi, Two Afghanistan flags, no women journalists - and the Bamiyan Buddhas, 11 October 2025. [Online]. Available: https://indianexpress.com/article/india/at-the-jaishankar-muttaqi-meet-in-delhi-two-afghanistan-flags-no-women-journalists-and-the-bamiyan-buddhas-10300120/.

[33] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 10 October 2025. [Online]. Available: https://www.mea.gov.in/bilateral-documents.htm?dtl/40193/India__Afghanistan_Joint_Statement_October_10_2025.

[34] Y. Rana, Amritsar-Kabul flights to resume: Afghan minister Amir Khan Muttaqi, 14 October 2025. [Online]. Available: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/city/chandigarh/amritsar-kabul-flights-to-resume-afghan-minister-amir-khan-muttaqi/articleshow/124535227.cms.

[35] A. Pandit, Afghan Hindus and Sikhs meet foreign minister Muttaqi; urge restoration, maintenance of gurudwaras, temples, 14 October 2025. [Online]. Available: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/india/afghan-hindus-and-sikhs-meet-foreign-minister-muttaqi-urge-restoration-maintenance-of-gurdwaras-temples/articleshow/124533731.cms.

[36] G. Pandey, A photo worth a thousand words: Taliban minister with Indian female journalists, 13 October 2025. [Online]. Available: https://www.bbc.com/news/articles/c4gze7ely6vo.

[37] Z. Nader, Taliban leader in India: It's complicity, not diplomacy, 15 October 2025. [Online]. Available: https://indianexpress.com/article/opinion/columns/taliban-leader-in-india-its-complicity-not-diplomacy-10307100/.

[38] S. Awasthi, Deoband and the Taliban: Faith, Diplomacy and India's Theological Opportunity, 10 October 2025. [Online]. Available: https://www.orfonline.org/expert-speak/deoband-and-the-taliban-faith-diplomacy-and-india-s-theological-opportunity.

[39] D. A. Kotokey, Mawlawi Muttaqi at Deoband: A Convergence of Geopolitics, Deobandism and Intellectual Diplomacy, 24 October 2025. [Online]. Available: https://www.vifindia.org/article/2025/october/24/Mawlawi-Muttaqi-at-Deoband.

[40] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 25 November 2025. [Online]. Available: https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/40335/Visit_of_Minister_of_Industry_and_Commerce_of_Afghanistan_to_India.

[41] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 22 December 2025. [Online]. Available: https://www.mea.gov.in/press-releases.htm?dtl/40556/Visit_of_Afghan_Minister_of_Public_Health_to_India.

[42] Ministry Of External Affairs WhatsApp Channel, Government of India, 04 December 2025.

[43] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 02 June 2023. [Online]. Available: https://www.mea.gov.in/media-briefings.htm?dtl/36642/Transcript_of_Weekly_Media_Briefing_by_the_Official_Spokesperson_June_02_2023.

[44] The New Arab, Afghanistan's only female diplomat resigns in India after gold smuggling allegations, 05 May 2024. [Online]. Available: https://www.newarab.com/news/afghan-female-diplomat-resigns-india-gold-smuggling.

[45] J. Prasad, Talibanstan Dilemma, 14 August 2025. [Online]. Available: https://timesofindia.indiatimes.com/toi-plus/international/talibanstan-dilemma/articleshow/123308749.cms.

[46] T. Devasher, The Pashtuns, HarperCollins Publisher India, 2022.

[47] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 22 February 2026. [Online]. Available: https://www.mea.gov.in/response-to-queries.htm?dtl/40814/Official_Spokespersons_response_to_media_queries_regarding_Pakistans_airstrikes_on_Afghanistan.

[48] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 14 March 2026. [Online]. Available: https://www.mea.gov.in/response-to-queries.htm?dtl/40911.

[49] Ministry of External Affairs, Government of India, 17 March 2026. [Online]. Available: https://www.mea.gov.in/Speeches-Statements.htm?dtl/40915.

[50] X post, @DrTedros, 17 March 2026. https://x.com/DrTedros/status/2033854477531267460

[51] The Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Russian Federation, 07 October 2025. [Online]. Available: https://mid.ru/en/foreign_policy/international_safety/2052216/.

[52] D. A. Ghosh, India's Aid Boost to Taliban-Ruled Afghanistan and the Evolving Delhi-Kabul Engagement, 10 February 2026. [Online]. Available: https://www.icwa.in/show_content.php?lang=1&level=3&ls_id=14213&lid=8638.

About the author:

Prof. Aniruddha Phadke is an Assistant Professor and Incharge of the Political Science Department at Maharashtra College, Mumbai.

Disclaimer: The opinions expressed in this publication are those of the authors. They do not purport to reflect the opinions or views of the FINS or its members.