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Power Without Restraint: How South Asia Is Caught in Trump's America-First Crossfire

The Mother of All Deals: India-EU FTA and partnership at Geopolitical Crossroads

The Relevance Of Indo-Pacific In An Emerging Arctic Century

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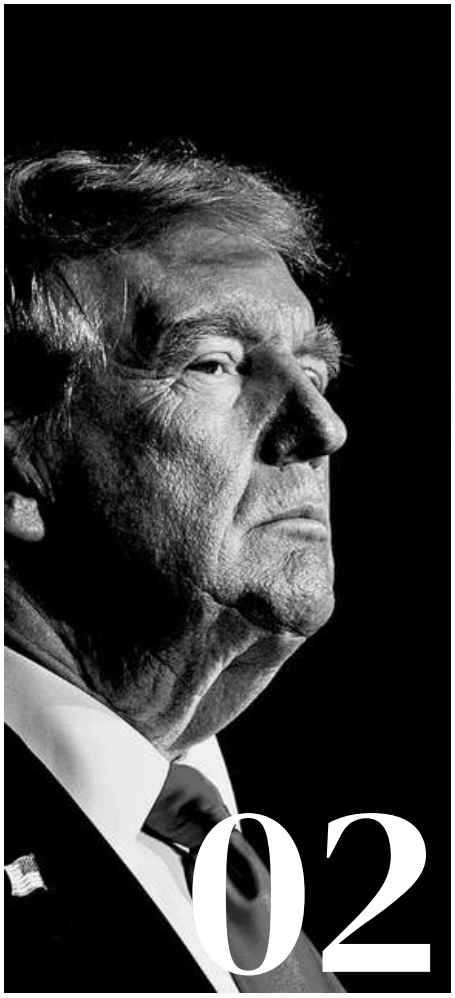


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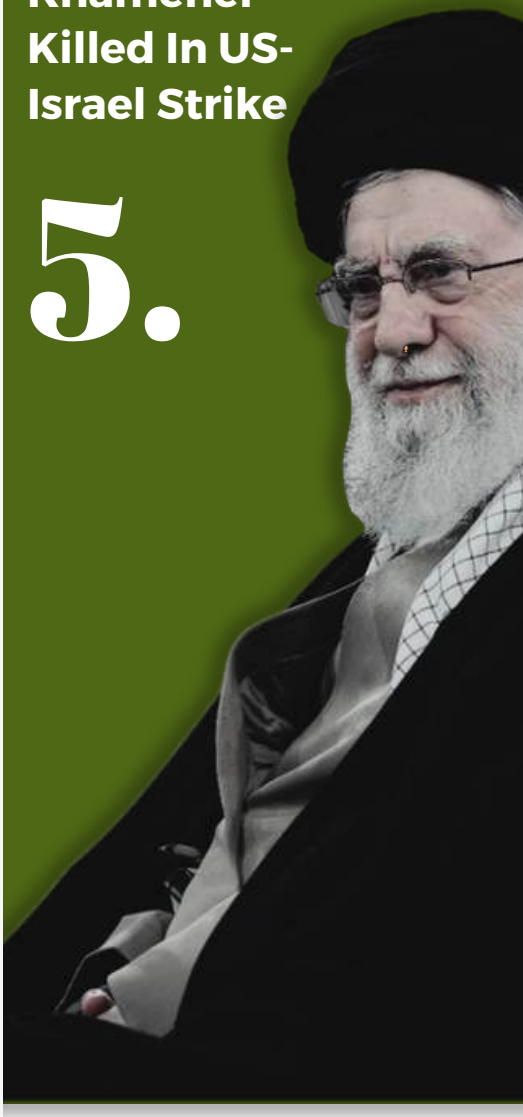
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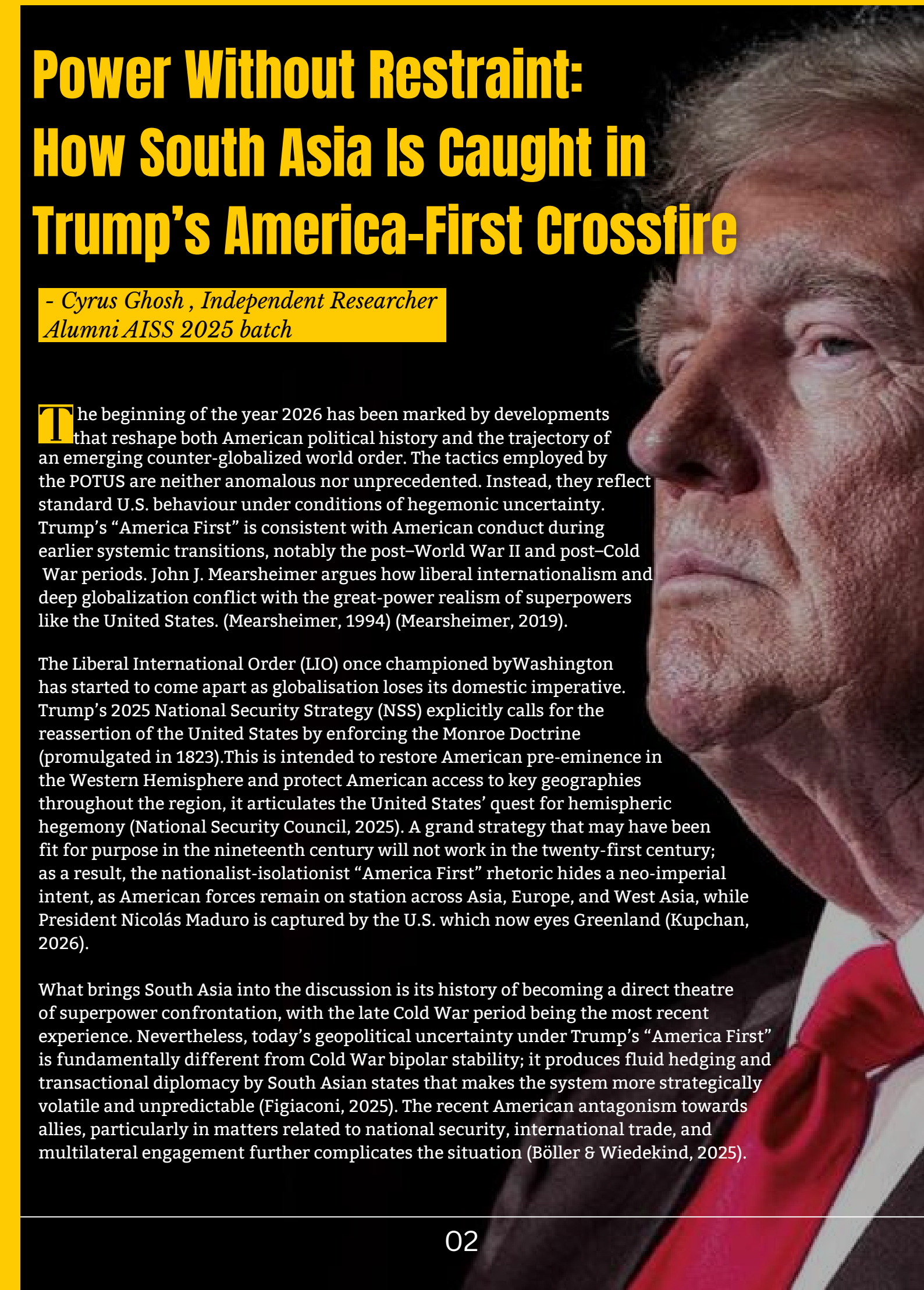
India and Australia Advance Defence and Indo-Pacific Cooperation



THE GALLORE

Power Without Restraint: How South Asia Is Caught in Trump's America-First Crossfire

- Cyrus Ghosh , Independent Researcher
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The beginning of the year 2026 has been marked by developments that reshape both American political history and the trajectory of an emerging counter-globalized world order. The tactics employed by the POTUS are neither anomalous nor unprecedented. Instead, they reflect standard U.S. behaviour under conditions of hegemonic uncertainty. Trump's "America First" is consistent with American conduct during earlier systemic transitions, notably the post–World War II and post–Cold War periods. John J. Mearsheimer argues how liberal internationalism and deep globalization conflict with the great-power realism of superpowers like the United States. (Mearsheimer, 1994) (Mearsheimer, 2019).

The Liberal International Order (LIO) once championed byWashington has started to come apart as globalisation loses its domestic imperative. Trump's 2025 National Security Strategy (NSS) explicitly calls for the reassertion of the United States by enforcing the Monroe Doctrine (promulgated in 1823).This is intended to restore American pre-eminence in the Western Hemisphere and protect American access to key geographies throughout the region, it articulates the United States' quest for hemispheric hegemony (National Security Council, 2025). A grand strategy that may have been fit for purpose in the nineteenth century will not work in the twenty-first century; as a result, the nationalist-isolationist "America First" rhetoric hides a neo-imperial intent, as American forces remain on station across Asia, Europe, and West Asia, while President Nicolás Maduro is captured by the U.S. which now eyes Greenland (Kupchan, 2026).

What brings South Asia into the discussion is its history of becoming a direct theatre of superpower confrontation, with the late Cold War period being the most recent experience. Nevertheless, today's geopolitical uncertainty under Trump's "America First" is fundamentally different from Cold War bipolar stability; it produces fluid hedging and transactional diplomacy by South Asian states that makes the system more strategically volatile and unpredictable (Figiaconi, 2025). The recent American antagonism towards allies, particularly in matters related to national security, international trade, and multilateral engagement further complicates the situation (Böller & Wiedekind, 2025).



South Asia & America First: implications and expectations

What appears to be Eurocentric turbulence now has the potential to become systemic in the future. While South Asia faces regime changes and domestic issues such as illegal immigration and transnational terrorism, Trump's tariff-based diplomacy and withdrawal from multilateral forums create a Waltzian state of nature (Waltz, 1979).

The region, however, expects greater bargaining space due to U.S. transactionalism, as India leverages U.S. policy to deepen its defense and tech cooperation (e.g., drones, semiconductors) without entering a formal alliance, while preserving relations with time-tested friends like Russia. Countries like Pakistan, a major Non-NATO Ally (MNNA), benefit significantly from China and Russia through major economic investments (CPEC), energy security aspirations (proposed Russian gas pipelines), and enhanced defense cooperation (Chinese military tech). Sri Lanka adeptly navigated its debt crisis by securing crucial IMF-backed restructuring with the West and India while simultaneously negotiating separate debt relief from its largest bilateral creditor, China, allowing it to unlock IMF tranches and manage its diverse creditor base to avoid collapse and maintain strategic options. Meanwhile, countries like Nepal, Afghanistan and Bhutan experience isolation and aid uncertainty, with lesser diversification options pushing regional powers to compete to fill the power vacuum.

To address these challenges, South Asia must pursue strategic solutions rooted in regional empowerment and resilience. Enhancing regional institutionalism is critical to diminishing reliance on external hegemonies. Strengthening of pre-existing regional forums for security and economic cooperation would enable internal conflict management and trust-building independent of great-power influence, akin to ASEAN's multilateral dialogue and conflict prevention mechanisms. Diversified strategic partnerships balanced by adherence to clear principles are necessary to mitigate transactional volatility. South Asia should cultivate multiple partnerships with major powers while upholding commitments to rules-based order and transparency, reflecting the European Union's strategic autonomy in balancing relations with the U.S., China, and Russia.

Economic interdependence must be institutionalized regionally to raise the costs of conflict. Deepening trade and infrastructure connectivity will create mutual incentives to sustain peace, like how the European Coal and Steel Community economically bound former adversaries through integrated key sectors. Finally, investing in normative state capacity and democratic resilience will fortify governance structures against coercive diplomacy and reinforce regional stability. The transparent institutions of Nordic countries exemplify how robust rule of law can withstand external pressures and preserve sovereignty.

Conclusion

"America First" can be for now understood as a structural recalibration of U.S. power rather than a transient populist deviation, with South Asia consequently exposed to greater strategic risk under conditions of transactional great-power politics. Any durable regional response, however, must account for constraints that complicate prevailing prescriptions. Internal asymmetries like India's material predominance and positional advantage reduce the feasibility of ASEAN-style institutionalism in a region shaped by deep-rooted mistrust and unresolved conflicts. Moreover, American conduct, while presently volatile, should not be presumed permanently erratic as future administrations may selectively revive elements of the liberal order where it serves U.S. interests. South Asia's dilemma, therefore, lies less in responding to U.S. withdrawal or assertion alone than in operating within an increasingly crowded and competitive order lacking dependable external anchors.

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RISING CONFLICT BETWEEN PAKISTAN AND TALIBAN - LED AFGHANISTAN



Conflict has intensified along the border between Pakistan and Afghanistan, with both sides carrying out airstrikes and military attacks.

Pakistan accuses the Taliban government of sheltering militants behind attacks inside Pakistan, which the Taliban deny, increasing fears of a wider conflict.

Strategic Autonomy As Power : India's Answer To Great - Power Rivalry

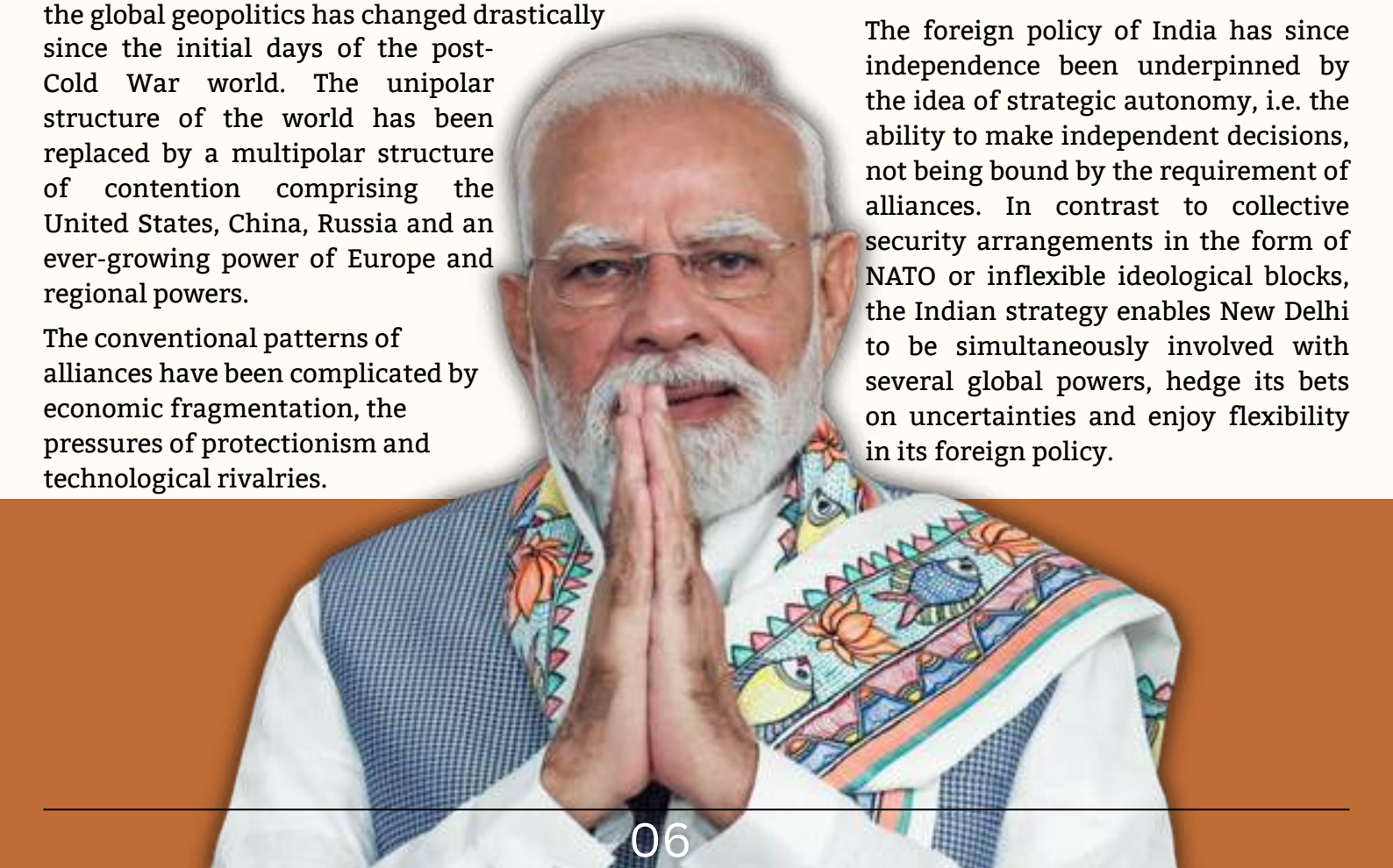
-Asmita Saha, M.A. International Relations, AIIS

India stands at a sharp turning point in a world of growing great-power rivalry, broken multilateralism and re-evaluated alliances. New Delhi is no longer satisfied with being a passive recipient of the international system and has adopted a subtle foreign policy that cannot be easily characterized. This approach referred to as multi-alignment represents the profound nature of Strategic Autonomy of India, the intentional use of the sovereign choice to create partnerships as well as the development of a multipolar world order that suits its interests. Starting into 2026, the global geopolitics has changed drastically since the initial days of the post-Cold War world. The unipolar structure of the world has been replaced by a multipolar structure of contention comprising the United States, China, Russia and an ever-growing power of Europe and regional powers.

The conventional patterns of alliances have been complicated by economic fragmentation, the pressures of protectionism and technological rivalries.

Instead of adhering to one power bloc, India has reacted through its foreign policy to adapt its position in the sea of turmoil through principled pragmatism. In essence, the multi-alignment strategy of India is based on three building blocks of strategic autonomy, diversified alliances and flexibility. It stands not as an ideological revival of non-alignment during the middle of the last century but as an extension of that history into the 21st century, adjusted by economic interdependence, changing power relationships and the needs of domestic security.

The foreign policy of India has since independence been underpinned by the idea of strategic autonomy, i.e. the ability to make independent decisions, not being bound by the requirement of alliances. In contrast to collective security arrangements in the form of NATO or inflexible ideological blocks, the Indian strategy enables New Delhi to be simultaneously involved with several global powers, hedge its bets on uncertainties and enjoy flexibility in its foreign policy.



This has allowed India to foster close relations with the United States particularly via its Indo-Pacific Quadrilateral Security Dialogue (the Quad) and defence technology cooperation even though it has been able to retain strong relations with Russia, China, Europe and the Middle East as well as the wider Global South. Strategic autonomy is not neutral passivity. It is looked on as a strategic act of exploiting the conflicting interests of the great powers to pursue the utmost strategic benefits of India. Like how India is open to western investment, high-tech technology and defence cooperation, but does not renounce close economic and military relations with Russia, especially in military equipment and energy, even when Moscow is drawing closer to China. Striking a balance between Washington, Moscow and Beijing is the key move.

The relationship between India and the United States increased in the past decades strongly due to the shared concerns regarding the emergence of China. There is strategic co-operation in the fields of defence and technology, sharing of intelligence and economic interaction. By virtue of its demographic dynamism, booming economy (with GDP of almost 4 trillion) and strategic location, New Delhi has become an inseparable part of the Western strategies in the Indo-Pacific. The relationship is however conditional and transactional. India is not willing to bow down to the assumptions that it must subordinate its interests to the Washington strategic priorities. This tendency was reflected in the restrained attitude of New Delhi's resistance to the pressure from the U.S. in the trade disputes as well as the perceived U.S. intervention to solve the conflicts between India and Pakistan, a very sensitive issue to the Indian sovereignty.

At the same time, India maintains an established relationship with Russia. Since the period of the Cold War up to the present-day Moscow has positioned itself as a counterbalance to the influence of China in the continent, at the forefront in the sectors of defence equipment, energy and diplomatic services. Although Russia has weakened in the world arena due to sanctions and strengthened its relationship with Beijing, India has insurance in the form of defence and energy relationships with Moscow. The toughest relationship is probably the one with China, a neighbour, a partner in economic relationships and a strategic opponent. Although there have been occasional skirmishes, including the 2020 Galwan Valley clash,relations between New Delhi and Beijing have not been severed, and they have signed mechanisms to control border tensions. China is still one of the biggest trading partners of India and this remains a point that highlights the complicated combination of competition and cooperation that has characterized the relationship between India and China.

Multi-alignment is not confined to equilibrium of relationship with international giants alone. India has nurtured relationships on a regional basis to enhance its global footprints and expansion in terms of economy. In Europe, New Delhi is enhancing its relationship with the EU on the areas of defence, cybersecurity and maritime cooperation and this is reflecting in a common interest in countering their strategic dependence on the hegemonic powers. This expanding involvement is signalled by a draft EU-India framework on cooperation in the field of trade in January 2026. There have also been tangible benefits in the Middle East to India in the form of energy, investment and security cooperation with the Gulf states of Saudi Arabia and the UAE, which have since matured far past remittances and trade into strategic corridors of influence.

The example of India as the leader in the climate and sustainable development programs such as the International Solar Alliance and other joint networks, reflects the role of multi-alignment in supporting the soft power and promoting global common goods.

Furthermore, through the tools of vaccine diplomacy and space collaboration, India hosts alliances with NASA (and bilateral initiatives with Russia), which all demonstrate how India leverages diversified relationships to gain a larger technological and diplomatic presence.

In an uncertain multipolar world, the challenges are difficult to manage. Although the multi alignment strategy is quite sophisticated in a strategic sense, India still has to struggle with some significant challenges in 2026. The world order is no longer being influenced by a hegemon. United States has started to demonstrate the signs of strategic retrenchment as it becomes increasingly preoccupied with domestic interests and transactional diplomacy. European powers want freedom not only in Washington but also in Beijing and China wants to have far-reaching economic and sea power. In this dynamic world, India should always redefine its relationships to prevent strategic drift. The economic aspirations of India, whether they are to be a manufacturing-powerhouse or to realise technology-sovereignty, are reliant upon a stable accessibility to global supply chains, capital and state of art innovation. There is a great barrier posed by desertions of open trade, increasing protectionism and geopolitical segmentation. It is hard to maintain the strategic autonomy when the national interests are bound by the dependence on imports of some other countries like the defence or energy supplies. As an example, the defence modernization in India continues to be dependent on overseas suppliers, and the rare earth minerals are becoming highly disputed in the international markets.

Beginning in 2026, the foreign policy of India becomes less about Washington, Beijing, and West versus East, but rather optimising its agency and power in a world in which power is diffused, volatility is the new normal. Mult-alignment is not a passive blending of conflicting relations but an active approach of measured involvement, in other words, an approach which attempts to influence a multipolar world where the voice of India counts. The multi-alignment by India is not an intermediate position but a position reflecting in the realities of the 21st century, where alliances are dynamic, power is decentralized and the most valued currency.

IRAN'S SUPREME LEADER AYATOLLAH ALI KHAMENEI KILLED IN US-ISRAEL STRIKE

Iranian state media reported that Supreme Leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei was killed in a U.S.–Israeli strike. U.S. and Israeli officials cited strong indications of his death, marking a major escalation in regional tensions and potential leadership uncertainty within Iran.



Southeast Asia's Climate Actions And The AI Takeover: Issues Need To Be Dealt With Before The Fruits Can Be Harvested

-Abhigyan Duarah, M.A. International Relations, AIIS

The continuous presence of Artificial Intelligence within the global "macro-trends" since 2023 provides a critical perspective on the demand for AI Infrastructure, further defined by its ever-increasing market share in Southeast Asia, which reached US$8.22 billion this year,with an annual growth rate of over 26.25 per cent. This comes at a rather crucial time, when the strategic implementation and adoption of AI within the industrial and economic workforce gains attention, over experimentation.

Southeast Asia, amidst such developments, has been emerging and subsequently positioning itself as a key player in the global digital infrastructure landscape. The e-Conomy SEA report 2024, presented by Google, Temasek, and Bain & Company, highlights the growing profitability within the regional digital economy, complemented by dynamism and adaptability to evolving demands, with profitability growing 2.5x from US$ 4 billion (2022) to US$ 11 billion (2024). This is particularly driven by the increase in funding for data centers in the region, with the surge in demand for data-center capacity driving private investments into newer markets, particularly in Malaysia and Thailand. The region as suc possesses an underlying potential: with its greater general interest towards AI, followed by proactive government support, and a global attempt to diversify markets. In fact, if implemented properly, AI could push regional economic growth by contributing nearly US$ 1 trillion to the region's GDP, representing a 10-18% uplift.

However, what makes the case for AI rather compelling to observe (in this region) is its usage within the field of climate action, particularly on the lines of mitigation and adoption of newer, tech-driven strategies to inculcate efficient measures to deal with the region's ever-evolving climatic conditions. Noting the vulnerability of SEA to spontaneous climatic hazards (with ~700 disasters recorded by the ASEAN Disaster Information Network in the first five months of 2025), as well as medium-to-long-term predictions of consequences due to rising sea levels, AI systems, and their integration within the regional and individual climate policies has a potential to enhance preparedness and subsequently adopt sustainable and resilient practices. Accordingly, results are being observed: Singapore's Public Utilities Board (PUB) has invested and incorporated Smart Water Technology, which uses AI-powered machine learning to analyze data regarding leaks, water demands, and optimization of water usage. This has enabled the Board to conserve water resources through optimized distribution and predictive maintenance, and has equally reduced energy consumption by optimizing water treatment operations. Similarly, Bangkok's implementation of the AI NowCast system enables early prediction of rainfall by about 3 hours, enhancing flood preparedness.



Yet, the contemporary undertakings towards adoption as well as utilization of AI systems towards mitigating climate risks and adopting sustainable practices have been rather nuanced, at best. This article, as such, attempts to highlight three prominent aspects of risks being faced by the region in the adoption and utilization of AI and ClimateTech:

First, the emerging digital divide brought forward by sparse and unequal distribution of AI systems and subsequent infrastructures to support the same, highlighting the pre-existing economic inequalities that the region faces. Whilst the region has been observing credible success stories in terms of experiencing a digital renaissance, the practical effect of it remains limited. Only two-thirds of the region's population has access to the internet, leaving ~150 million adults without any access. Stark differences in access to such necessities limit the localization of AI within the workforce, particularly in rural areas that are heavily dependent on agriculture for sustenance. Consequently, the digital divide equates to a literacy divide, as well as an access divide, thereby mirroring socio-economic inequalities that these regions currently face. Less availability of skills to access AI tools, a lack of IT infrastructure to educate people about safeguarding identity and information amidst digitization, and the unavailability of awareness about the strategic and ethical use of AI have created disparities, particularly among communities affected by disasters and uncertain climatic conditions. At the same time, intraregional disparity remains equally observable, with stark differences between the digital economies amidst ASEAN states highlighting varied access and utilization of AI infrastructure for mitigating climate risks, exposing less technologically advanced states to vulnerability to climate change.

Second, connected to socio-economic disparity and gaps in universal digital integration among the states in the region, is the growing threat of piracy and cybersecurity. As the region continues to develop individual and regional digital economies, it simultaneously becomes more exposed to significant piracy

and data security concerns brought by the heightened activities of organized cybercrimes in the region. According to the April 2025 report by UNODC, the region has become a hotbed for transnational cybercrimes, driven by a surge in large-scale scam operations run by complex criminal networks. With the region lacking a comprehensive and proactive approach to deal with the evolving usage of digital technologies by cybercriminals, the threats relating to data breaches, data poisoning, and exploitation of backdoors have heightened considerably, thereby compromising personal security, as well as the AI into providing credibility and trustworthy information about climate risks. Furthermore, a lack of regulatory frameworks can lead to the misuse of data by organizations and AI technology providers, resulting in disinformation and biased decision-making regarding climate action. Mechanisms for safeguarding data and addressing breaches, therefore, require significant development.

Third, a growing concern about the environmental impacts of AI and data centers. Whilst the demand for AI and data centers pushes forward its integration in climate risk assessment and adaptation measures, it further puts SEA at a crossroads, for one, data centers powering AI are energy-intensive, particularly using significant energy to store and process data. The International Energy Agency estimates that data centers and transmission networks each account for 1-1.5 per cent of global energy consumption and are equally responsible for 1 percent of energy-related Greenhouse Gas (GHG) emissions in 2022. Surging demand for data centers in the region, as such, could not only increase the region's overall energy usage but also increase its overall GHG emissions, undoing contemporary efforts to reduce said emissions. Equally, heightened usage of water consumption could put significant strain on existing resources, which could trigger further demand amidst rapid urbanization and climate change impacts.

Such distinctive issues being persistent in the region, as such, heighten the need to inculcate comprehensive and proactive policy frameworks to balance implementation and innovation, whilst equally maintaining security and reliability of AI in mitigating immediate climate risks, and subsequently acquiring measures to adapt sustainable solutions. One particular step shall be towards enhancing multilateral collaboration and subsequent regional integration, which has been observed in initiatives such as ASEAN's Guide on AI Governance and Ethics, and the Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA). However, amidst the contemporary economic and climate volatility that the region faces, the need to acquire concrete solutions becomes imperative. Increased regional transparency through defining climate data and the establishment of quality standards for such data remains vital. Additionally, establishing and standardizing protocols for data privacy and security, as well as measures to note and report data breaches, is something the region needs to inculcate in comprehensive policy frameworks. Further undertakings to enforce sustainability requirements for data centers and prioritizing "green data centers" shall be encouraged heavily through public and private players alike.

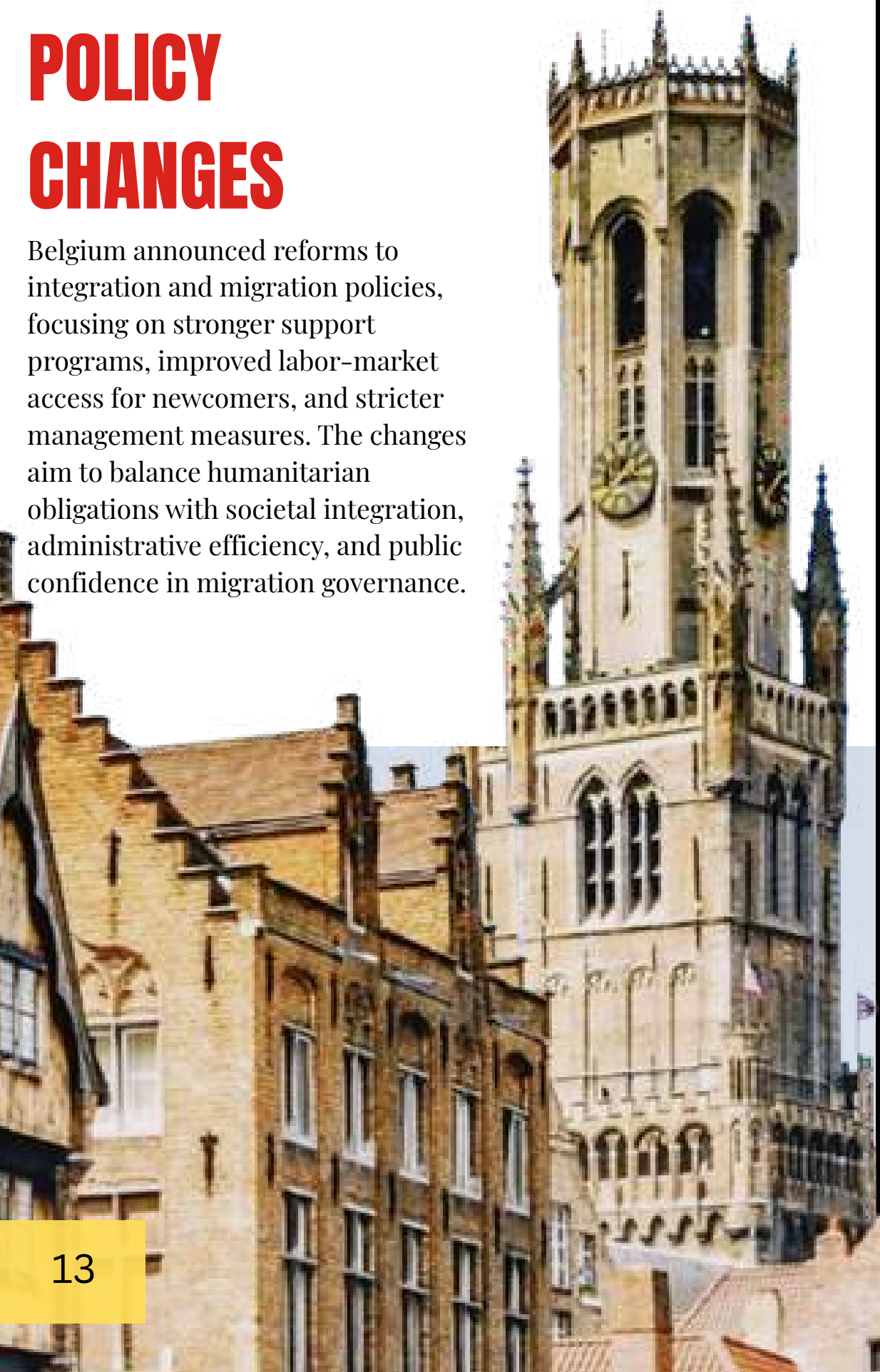
In the end, to ensure a sustainable usage of AI within climate action, it remains a necessity for the region to acquire comprehensive and region-wide undertakings that not just build on AI's positive notes, but also deal with the existing limitations. Without careful consideration and the member states' attempt to balance multilateral commitments with domestic requirements, any actions could undermine the positive undertakings, making them counterproductive, at best.

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BELGIUM MIGRATION & INTEGRATION POLICY CHANGES

Belgium announced reforms to integration and migration policies, focusing on stronger support programs, improved labor-market access for newcomers, and stricter management measures. The changes aim to balance humanitarian obligations with societal integration, administrative efficiency, and public confidence in migration governance.





The Mother of All Deals: India-EU FTA and partnership at Geopolitical Crossroads

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Introduction

India and the European Union (EU) have concluded the negotiations over the Free Trade Agreement (FTA) that would see the EU drop tariffs on 99.5% of items India exports to the region, with most of the goods and items becoming tariff-free once this agreement comes into effect. India has given tariff concessions on 97.5% of trade value between the two economies.

The Prime Minister of India, Narendra Modi, hosted the President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, and the President of the European Council, AntónioCosta, at the India-EU Summit and as the chief guests of the 77th Republic Day of India.

The long-awaited free trade agreement is expected to significantly and gradually expand the overall trajectory of two-way engagement, as it will open new opportunities for cooperation in diverse areas.

Mother of All Deals – FTA between India and the EU

India and the European Union announced the conclusion of the Free Trade Agreement (FTA), an important milestone and one of India's most strategic economic partnerships. This agreement is designed as a modern, rules-based trade partnership, as the FTA responds to contemporary geopolitical and geo-economic challenges. Apart from that, it enables deeper market integration between the world's 4th largest and the world's 2nd largest economies.

The combined market, estimated at over Rs. 2091.6 lakh crores (US$ 24–27 trillion approximately), will bring unparalleled opportunities for the 2 billion people of India and the EU. This FTA unlocks significant potential for trade and innovation. The FTA delivers unprecedented market access for more than 99% of Indian exports by trade value, while preserving policy space for sensitive sectors and reinforcing India's developmental priorities.

ndia has gained preferential access to the European market across 97% of the tariff lines, covering 99.5% of trade value.

Key labour-intensive sectors (such as textiles, apparel, marine products, leather, footwear, chemicals, plastic/rubber, sports goods, toys, and gems and jewellery), which comprise more than Rs. 2.87 lakh crores ($33 billion) of exports and currently face import duties ranging from 4% to 26% in the EU, are crucial for employment generation and will enter zero duty, or in other words, become tariff-free from the entry into force of the FTA in the EU market. These sectors are poised to benefit from the liberalisation of tariffs and enhanced competitiveness, enabling deeper integration into global and European supply chains and creating job opportunities in both India and the European Union.

On the other hand, India is offering 92.1% of its tariff lines, which covers 97.5% of EU exports. Of these, 49.6% of tariff lines will have immediate duty elimination, while 39.5% of tariff lines are subject to phased elimination over 5, 7, and 10 years. Around 3% of the products are subject to TRQs for apples, pears, peaches, and kiwi fruit.

Imports of the EU's high-technology goods are expected to diversify India's import sources, thereby reducing input costs for businesses, benefiting consumers, and creating opportunities for Indian businesses to integrate into global supply chains.

Bilateral trade between India and the EU has demonstrated sustained growth, valued at approximately Rs. 11.5 lakh crores ($136.54 billion) in 2024–25, with India exporting $75.85 billion (Rs. 6.4 lakh crores) to the EU. India-EU trade in services reached Rs. 7.2 lakh crores ($83.10 billion) in the year 2024.

Both India and the EU recognise that trade and economic relations continue to shape the foundation of the India-EU bilateral partnership. Both sides reaffirm their commitment to strengthening trade linkages, investment avenues, and enhancing global supply chains.

This India-EU Free Trade Agreement is hailed as a major historic milestone in the strategic partnership, calling for timely implementation to further enhance and unlock opportunities as a driver of shared prosperity and resilience, followed by concluding an agreement on Geographical Indications to ensure effective protection of iconic products, boosting trade opportunities, further deepening India-EU customs cooperation, along with strengthening the India-EU bilateral macroeconomic dialogue.

The India-EU FTA negotiations were first launched in 2007. The talks were suspended in 2013 and later relaunched in 2022. The 14th and last formal negotiation round took place in October 2025, following intersessional discussions at technical and political levels.

The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, said during the India-EU Summit on January 27, 2026:

"The EU and India make history, deepening the partnership between the world's biggest democracies. We have created a free trade zone of 2 billion people, with both sides set to gain economically. We have sent a signal to the world that rules-based cooperation still delivers great outcomes. And best of all, this is only the start — we will build on this success and grow our relationship to be even stronger."

India-EU Partnership beyond the Free Trade Agreement

The President of the European Commission, Ursula von der Leyen, along with the President of the European Council, António Costa, paid a state visit to India on January 25–27, 2026, as chief guests of the 77th Republic Day of India. President von der Leyen and President Costa wereaccompanied by a high-level delegation, including EU Trade Commissioner Maroš Šefčovič and the EU High Representative for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy and Vice-President of the European Commission, Kaja Kallas. This was the first-ever visit of EU leaders as guests of honourfor the Republic Day, followed by the historic visit of the EU College of Commissioners led by President von der Leyen to India on February 27–28, 2025.

Apart from the FTA, the leaders of India and the EU welcomed the signing of the India-EU Security and DefencePartnership, the first such overarching defence and security framework between the two sides that will deepen ties in the domains of maritime security, defence industry and technology, cyber and hybrid threats, space, and counter-terrorism, among others. Furthermore, they welcomed the launch of negotiations on a Security of Information Agreement that will facilitate the exchange of classified information and pave the way for stronger cooperation in areas related to security and defence.

The leaders adopted "Towards 2030: India-EU Joint Comprehensive Strategic Agenda" to elevate strategic cooperation between both sides. The Joint Comprehensive Strategic Agenda aims to accelerate progress across five key pillars:

prosperity and sustainability, technology and innovation, security and defence, connectivity and global challenges, and enabling factors such as skills, mobility, business, and people-to-people ties.

Conclusion

The India-EU Free Trade Agreement represents more than a trade pact: it marks a strategic recalibration in a rapidly evolving global order. As supply chains are restructured and geopolitical uncertainties deepen, both India and the European Union have recognised the need for closer economic as well as diplomatic and strategic partnerships. The FTA reflects a pragmatic convergence that is driven by shared interests in growth and stability, instead of complete political or normative alignment. Despite differences on governance and human rights, India and the EU have demonstrated the ability to compartmentalise disagreements while advancing cooperation on trade, technology, and defence security.

The FTA and Defence and Security Partnership enhance India's integration into global supply chains, high-technology sectors, and security, positioning the EU as a key partner in India's Indo-Pacific outlook as well as the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC).

Ultimately, the India-EU FTA serves as a foundation for a deeper strategic partnership, with the potential to shape economic cooperation and contribute to a more balanced multipolar world.

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SOUTH AFRICA ORDERS EXPULSION OF ISRAELI ENVOY

South Africa expelled Israel's top diplomat Ariel Seidman, saying he disrespected the country, and violated diplomatic rules. They declared him "persona non grata" therefore, ordered him to leave within 72 hours. Israel responded by expelling South Africa's diplomat, as tensions rise over South Africa's strong criticism of Israel's actions in Gaza.



INDIA'S 'LORD'ING OVER ENGLAND IN ICJ

Book Review

– Swamini Joshi, B.A. Global Affairs, OP Jindal University

If there are two countries in the global forum which Indians always like to get the better of- it would be Pakistan and England. The rivalry is clearly seen in the field of sports, given the celebrations which follow throughout the country after winning a cricket match against them. But it can also be seen in the field of diplomacy, though it is far more subtle.

An example of this was when India won a seat in the prestigious International Court of Justice (ICJ) by defeating the UK in 2017. This win demonstrated a slow but steady shift in the global power balance, with India taking center stage and leading the change. The assertiveness that Indian diplomats showed during the elections put India in the spotlight and showcased its growing might. The victory feels sweeter after knowing that India managed the near-impossible as this will be the first time that the UK won't be having a judge on the International Court of Justice (George), also known as the World Court since 1946

This diplomatic victory is explained in detail by the person who was at the helm of the operation, Syed Akbaruddin, a former diplomat in his book "India vs UK: The Story of an Unprecedented Diplomatic Win" (HarperCollins Publishers India). The ICJ comprises 15 judges, five of which are elected regularly after three years. Britain's judge Sir Christopher Greenwood was hoping to be elected for a second term. His victory was almost guaranteed, when Lebanon pulled a rabbit out of the hat. The former ambassador of Lebanon entered the competition hoping to win the election. Given his extensive experience at the UN and his good rapport with many ambassadors, he won a seat reserved for candidates of Asia. The candidate of India, Justice Dalveer Bhandari who was looking forward to that seat had to now try his luck from the seat reserved for European diplomats (Landale). This meant that the UK and India had to contest an election for a place in the ICJ. a Having a judge in the ICJ would have supported India's case of backing Kulbhushan Jadhav and would have provided a voice for India against Pakistan's terrorist activities. Thus, getting a place in the World Court was integral to India. For this, India was ready to take the bull by its horns.

While Sir Christopher Greenwood, UK's candidate was backed by the UN's Security Council, Justice Dalveer Bhandari had the strong support of the UN General Assembly. Both the countries were trying their level best and using their respective contacts to win the candidacy. Syed Akbaruddin has elaborated in the book, how the entire team spent days securing votes for India. India was hesitant of the Security Council's veto power and thus focused extensively on the General Assembly

The BBC writes that UK was considering using an arbitration process called the 'Joint Conference' which has never been used before since the formation of the United Nations to call off the election, but gave up on the idea after realising that it may not get the support from other Security Council members and feared that this will make the competition too bitter and affect Britain's economic and security ties with India (Landale). The Joint Conference mechanism required the countries to choose three countries from both the General Assembly and the Security Council, and then a single candidate would be elected based on the votes. The fact that Britain had to even consider such a huge process, was in itself a success for India. This contemplation came after the UK won nine out of fifteen UNSC votes, and India won a majority in the General Assembly. But for this Conference to take place, the UK needed the backing of all Security Council members. The other UNSC members strongly opposed the idea. Sensing the opposition, the ambassadors of the two countries, Syed Akbaruddin and Matthew Rycroft informally met to discuss the matter. India made it clear that it had no intention to back out of the election and was firm in its resolve. The reason for India's confidence was its majority in the General Assembly and the fact that few Security Council members had assured India that they will not support Britain's proposal of Joint. Conference. Realising that there was no way out, Britain withdrew its candidacy.

Matthew Rycroft asserted that the UK was happy that the seat was going to a "close partner" like India (Landale). Following England's withdrawal, Justice Dalveer Bhandari won with an overwhelming majority in the General Assembly and won all fifteen seats in the Security Council as well. Working closely with the Indian diplomats, Justice Bhandari worked hard to rally votes for himself. The UNSC members have always been known to support each other firmly. The fact that India managed to pull the votes of the permanent members as well, shows its diplomatic outreach. Syed Akbaruddin explains how the UK tried to use pressure tactics with India internally as well to withdraw from the elections.

The then-External Affairs Minister of UK, Boris Johnson had even tried to call India's then- Foreign Minister, Sushma Swaraj to discuss the election. But following Akbaruddin's advice, she did not answer. This was the first time that a Security Council member did not have a judge on ICJ, and also the first time that a sitting member lost to another sitting member.



Even though Britain is underplaying the situation by saying that it is happy for India, this diplomatic event brings forth a big change in global politics. It shows India's growing influence in the United Nations and challenges the supremacy of the P5 members.

The unprecedented majority that India received in the General Assembly also shows the confidence that developing countries have in India. The UNGA vs UNSC debate has been going around for quite a while. The ICJ elections proved to be a strong reminder of how in the newly emerging world order, the General Assembly was not always going to be overshadowed by the Security Council. The country's win at the International Court of Justice was well-deserved. India's victory also strengthened its demand for a permanent UNSC seat.

While India's military and economic prowess was witnessed by the world, the untapped talent of India's diplomacy was brought to the forefront by this event. It demonstrates the rising power of a Third-World country against a nation which had once been its colonial master. This feat is definitely a turning point in India's diplomatic history. Winning the ICJ seat was crucial for India, and the country's diplomats did not disappoint. Using all our strengths wisely, Justice Dalveer Bhandari, who continues as an ICJ judge even today, was re-elected. Having a judge in the World Court helped India immensely, with Kulbhushan Jadhav being granted consular access.



After the result was declared, Prime Minister Narendra Modi congratulated him, calling it "a proud moment for us" (Vicky). The then-External Affairs Minister Sushma Swaraj also tweeted- "Vande Mataram - India wins election" (Vicky). India was firm in its decisions and refused to step down, which led to the nation's victory. From being the country which had once voluntarily given up its Security Council seat to now challenging a Security Council member in ICJ, it showcases a shift in India's foreign policy objectives and puts national interests first.

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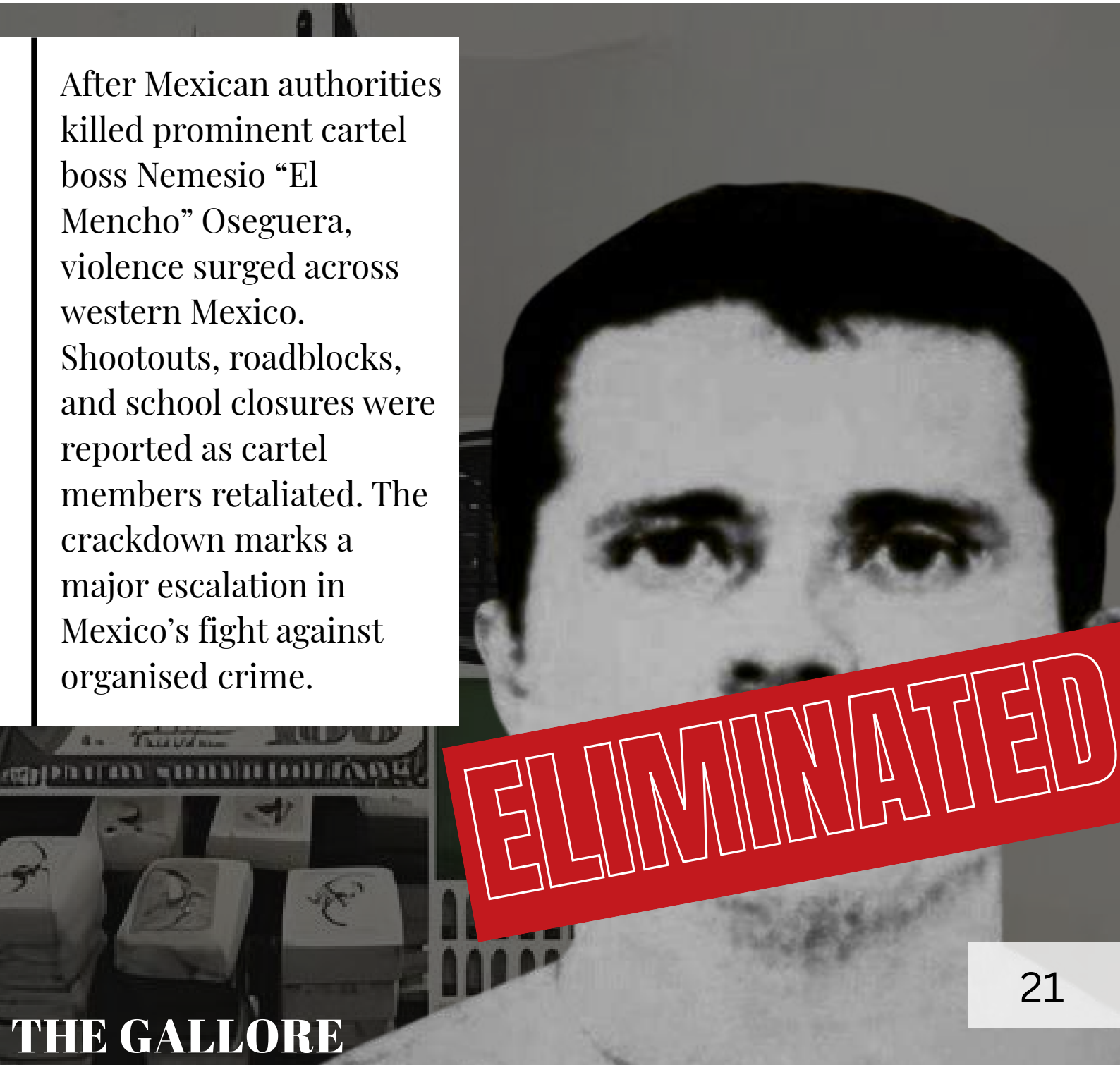
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VIOLENCE ERUPTS IN MEXICO AFTER CARTEL BOSS EL MENCHO KILLED

After Mexican authorities killed prominent cartel boss Nemesio “El Mencho” Oseguera, violence surged across western Mexico. Shootouts, roadblocks, and school closures were reported as cartel members retaliated. The crackdown marks a major escalation in Mexico’s fight against organised crime.



CUBAN SECURITY FORCES EXIT VENEZUELA AS US PRESSURE MOUNTS

Interim President Delcy Rodriguez replaces Cuban security with Venezuelans. Cuban security officials were removed from positions in the DGCIM counter-intelligence unit. Ending their alliance between Cuba, Venezuela is seen as a key goal of the Trump administration.



Editorial.





The Return of Hard Power to Geopolitics, Or Did It Ever Go Away ?

-Manjyot Kaur, Amity Institute of International Studies, Amity University Noida

Introduction

The world finally took a much needed breath of relief when the socialist bloc, the USSR, disintegrated in the 1980s (formally in 1991). The cold war had come to an end. The expectation of a surprise nuclear strike was no more. The US was the only remaining 'superpower' which, with time, blended into the contemporary multipolar world, making people wonder if major powers were now obsolete.

Contemporary geopolitics gave rise to phenomenons like globalisation, interdependence and international institutions. The world created them in hopes of preventing taxing wars or conflicts. The 1990s saw a shift from territorial war to trade competitiveness between nations. Soft power started setting in. Exchange of culture, trade and information started shaping the execution of modern geopolitics. There seemed close to no scope of a military entanglement again.

However, this illusion of a prosperous world with no violence was soon broken in the early 2020s. It was yet again proven that when the core interests of a nation are threatened or harmed, military power shall be used as a decisive instrument of statecraft. This marked the return of hard power dominating over economic tools in times of crisis.

Why Hard Power Never Really Disappeared

There was a premature widespread belief that post Cold-War, military force was overtaken by 'soft power'; flaunting itself through cultural exchanges, economic interdependence and the growth of many international institutions. In reality, the use of 'hard power'; coercive force and economic sanctions, never really disappeared, but was rather disguised. The return of great-power competition, with the emergence of industrial-scale war, proves that hard power remains a monumental element in international politics.



In reality, the security dilemma never ended. The realist theory believes that there is no central power governing world politics, and all nations must rely solely on themselves to survive and protect national interest. To adhere to this, when one nation strengthens its defenses, the other nation perceives it as a threat and arms itself as well. This inescapable cycle alludes that military strength is vital in maintaining state survival.

Even though deterrence encourages the resuming of diplomacy, it only works when it is visible. Deterrence is not just a passive concept, it is a proactive and credible threat of retaliation and its consequences, aimed to discourage the adversary from acting up. If a nation lacks capable and deployable military forces, deterrence fails. The threats of coercive forces and economic sanctions shall be able to compel compliance when diplomacy fails. In these times of strategic ambiguity, capability is determined through showcased credibility rather than treaties or soft power diplomacy.

Even the liberal peace theory is flawed when it comes to geopolitical considerations. The Liberal Internationalistic View refers to shared norms, democracy and economic interdependence creating peace. It relies on the belief that international actors prioritise economic gain over traditional security. In the contemporary world, actors prioritise survival and relative gains, leading to the failure of the liberal peace framework.

Economic interdependence may heighten the cost of war, but it still cannot completely avoid it. Depending on other states for essential supplies like energy and technology can be perceived as a vulnerability instead of being a reason for peace. This encourages nation states to use hard power to control the supply.

The War in Ukraine: Return of Interstate Territorial War
Russia's full scale invasion of Ukraine marked the beginning of one of the most intense and brutal state-on-state conflicts opposing two modern militaries in recent memories. Even though Russia inhibits qualitative and quantitative military, Ukraine has shockingly put up a strong resilience. This rumpled Russia's plans of a quick victory and elongated the conflict into a full-fledged war of attrition.

This has enabled the reaffirmation of hard power back into geopolitics along with bringing back long-scale conventional war again. The use of traditional tanks, trenches and artillery is back; there is no use of cyber war dominance or economic sanctions. Nuclear deterrence is navigating escalation limits, which is again only considered through demonstrative and credible military and nuclear capabilities. Proxy dynamics have also entered the situation. Soft power resources like energy or economic tools are secondary to the decisions made in the battlefield. This represents that territorial control yet again determines negotiation power.

The Israel–Palestine Conflict: Persistence of Kinetic Conflict

The Israel-Palestine conflict, rooted in historical territorial disputes rather than solely religious differences, has evolved into one of the most complex and protracted conflicts in modern international relations. While it is often referred to as a religious dispute between Jews and Muslims, a more academically nuanced study shows the roots of the conflict are fundamentally territorial, falling in the sovereignty of Palestinian Lands.

This war has proven that even non-state actors (Hamas in this case) can ignite an interstate-level military response. It also represents urban warfare and civilian vulnerability, strengthening the thesis that immediate security of a nation will always be priority to them over soft power tools. Technology cannot replace boots on ground. This war is an outcome of limits of both diplomacy and deterrence, and it is in dire need of regional military balancing. This imparts the lesson that even in a heavy-surveillance world, conflicts threatening core interests or national security of a country will be dealt with force.

The Militarisation of Regions

Indo Pacific:
The Indo-Pacific is militarising as other countries and bolstering their maritime capabilities to deter China. The region is investing in naval power, with Japan expanding its arsenal, Australia looking forward to sovereign missile production and India accelerating its defense modernisation. The US and its allies are implementing a 'denial defense' strategy, particularly to counter Japan, Taiwan, Philippines and Indonesia. Alliances are shifting their nature from voluntary agreements to 'security first' pacts such as AUKUS and strengthening QUAD.

Europe:
EU defence expenditure is experiencing a decade-long rise, with 2025 expenditure reaching €381 billion. Germany has created a €100 billion special fund to help modernise its armed forces. Europe is transforming to a 'war footing', with defense procurement exceeding €100 billion in 2025. This includes doubled investment in ammunition, air defense, and combat, such as France doubling its defense budget by 2027 compared to 2017.

West Asia:
West Asia seems to be experiencing a transformation in its conflicts. They're now driven by proliferation of low-cost, high-impact technologies. Missile and drone technology have become an integral part of battlefield strategy. The widely famous 'drone wars' are often seen in regional conflicts.

Conclusion

The world is not moving away from economics or diplomacy; rather, it's moving towards re-establishing military power as the ultimate security guarantor. The world is not post-war; rather, it's post-illusion. The illusion that with increased interdependence, wars are a thing of the past seems to have disappeared, replaced by a harsh reality in which Hard Power has re-emerged at the forefront of international relations.

In this "new normal," the capacity to project Hard Power and retain technological superiority has re-emerged as the first, rather than the second, pillar of national sovereignty. This is an era that requires a new strategy in which diplomacy doesn't happen in a vacuum, but rather in tandem with a capable and efficient defense force that's ready to defend national interests. The "new normal" is not just about managing interdependence; rather, it's about recognizing the reality that in a world in which security is contested, security is the foundation upon which all other endeavors—economic, social, or diplomatic—are pursued.

The Relevance Of Indo-Pacific In An Emerging Arctic Century

~Malavika A M, M.A. International Relations, AIIS



Introduction

For the last couple of decades, the predominant region for geopolitics has been the Indo-Pacific. The trajectory for global trade, security alliances, and power rivalries has all been shaped by the Indo-Pacific: from the Malacca Strait to the South China Sea, and from India's strategic rise to China's assertiveness. However, as the Arctic continues to warm and new trade routes develop, an important question emerges: Will the Indo-Pacific become irrelevant in the coming decades? If there are workable trade routes and strategic hubs emerge in the Arctic, then will this constitute an overall shift in the centre of gravity of global trade and Geopolitical dynamics?

This article argues that while the Indo-Pacific may experience a form of reduced centrality as a result of shifting geopolitics and the introduction of Arctic trade routes, it will not lose its overall relevance. Instead, there will be an increase in the overall breadth of global Geopolitical interest rather than a total reallocation of interest. Although the Arctic may gain importance, the demographic size, economic size, and supply chain centrality of the Indo-Pacific will provide it with strategic importance.

Emergence of the Arctic

The decrease in Arctic sea ice is creating more shipping routes that connect regions of the world and significantly reduce travel times between Europe and East Asia. The three new primary maritime routes that now exist as a result of climate change are known as the Northern Sea Route (NSR) along the Russian coast, the Northwest Passage through Canada's Arctic archipelago, and the emerging Transpolar Sea Route across the Central Arctic Ocean. Shipping goods from Shanghai to Rotterdam via the NSR has reduced the transit time by 10-15 days compared to using the Suez Canal. Reduced fuel use and expedited deliveries make the regions' shipping corridors economically appealing as they become increasingly relevant to global supply chains.

Russia has heavily invested in militarizing and commercializing the NSR, with advanced icebreaker fleets and infrastructure in the Arctic region. China has declared itself a "near-arctic state" and identified the region as a component of its Polar Silk Road initiative, while all Arctic nations, including the United States, Canada, Norway, and Denmark, are bolstering their Arctic strategies. The rush to establish sovereignty over seabed resources, including oil, gas, and rare earth minerals, has intensified due to the competitive environment these three routes create.

The potential for increased commercial access to new Arctic shipping routes throughout more months of the year represents a change to how a large volume of Europe-Asia trade can be routed away from existing chokepoints in the Indo-Pacific (e.g., through the Straits of Malacca and South China Sea), which ultimately diminishes the strategic centrality of the Indo-Pacific maritime corridor for global trade.

Relevance:

Militarization:-

Trade is not the only factor driving Arctic activity; there is also a growing military dimension to Arctic strategy and competition. The Russian Federation has resumed its construction of military bases along its Arctic coastline that had been abandoned after the Soviet Union collapsed, and it has deployed advanced strategic missile systems throughout its Arctic region. NATO's military activities in the Arctic have also notably increased through expanded Arctic exercises and operations. The accession of Finland and Sweden to NATO enhances the Euro-Atlantic security architecture across the Arctic.



In addition to expanding maritime access due to melting ice resulting from climate change, increased submarine routes, early warning systems for missile defenses, and missile trajectories across polar areas significantly increase the strategic significance of the Arctic region. Furthermore, as the Arctic becomes increasingly navigable, it will represent a new arena for maritime military competition.

Energy and Resources

One of the factors contributing to the reduced significance of the Indo-Pacific is the global shift toward renewable energy. The Arctic is believed to contain approximately 13% of all undiscovered global oil and 30% of all undiscovered natural gas reserves. As nations seek energy security through the transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy, there will likely be increased extraction of energy from the Arctic.



Additionally, the Arctic ocean bottom is thought to hold many of the critical minerals needed to develop battery technologies and renewable energy systems. If these resources are made available and commercially viable, supply chains may increasingly shift northward. Moreover, the use of Arctic shipping routes decreases the dependence on Middle Eastern energy corridors and Indo-Pacific shipping lanes, and traditional chokepoints for strategic leverage

Structural Advantages of the Indo-Pacific

It is too early to call for the decline of the Indo-Pacific Region based on these shifting dynamics. Continued advantages held by the Indo-Pacific Regions to create an unprecedented structure that cannot be replicated through any of the proposed new projects in the Arctic.

1. The Indo-Pacific includes the largest concentration of the global population. The populations of South and South-East Asia alone will include a significant portion of the world's working-age population. India will remain one of the largest economies in the world, and the ASEAN nations will likely remain centers of both manufacturing and innovation.

1. The Indo-Pacific Region will produce an extremely significant proportion of global GDP and the world's productive capacity. China continues to be the world's largest manufacturing base; India is rising as a manufacturing and service base, and Vietnam, Indonesia, and Malaysia are increasingly tying into the world's global value chains. The northern shipping routes are unlikely to have a significant effect on the concentration of production clusters in the Indo-Pacific Region.

1. Market size also matters. As the region contains the fastest-growing cities and shares, it will continue to drive the demand for goods and services globally, regardless of the relative efficiency of the transportation route.

Conclusion:

Hence, rather than seeing the end of one geopolitically significant region being supplanted by another, geopolitical attention will simply be redistributed through dilution of exclusive dominance. The Arctic will emerge as a crucial geopolitical arena, but the structural basis of the Indo-Pacific indicates that it will remain relevant despite changing transport patterns and diversifying raw material sources. Neither the largest production centers nor the highest demand centers will move away from the Indo-Pacific. The global system will comprise several geo-centers with parallel centers of gravity; the Arctic will develop as a new strategic frontier, and it too will contain economic masses of sufficient size and pools of human resources to ensure the continuing significant relative importance of the Indo-Pacific to the Arctic.

The question that will emerge over the next several years is not whether the Indo-Pacific has or will lose its relevance, but rather how the Indo-Pacific's role will change within the developing complex and geographically diverse global system.

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RETHINKING STRATEGIC AUTONOMY : HAS INDIA BECOME SUBORDINATE TO SANCTIONS POWER?

~ Nivedita Jain, M.A. International Relations, AIIS

Strategic Autonomy implies a nation's ability to make independent and sovereign decisions and take actions that align with its national interests, without being constrained or dictated by external pressures. Strategic autonomy has been the foundation of nation-states since the Peace of Westphalia in 1648. It promises territorial Integrity, non-intervention, and legal equality to all states, regardless of size or power, under international law. Though the concept has never truly been absolute, as constraints appear time and again with stronger powers threatening the weaker ones with consequences if they do not align with the former's interests. Major proof has been the Cold War era, when both of the powers compelled the world to choose a side and even gave the ultimatum - 'He that is not with us, is against us'. Even before that, pre-world war alliances, Napoleonic wars in Europe and other instances have showcased that countries compromise on their strategic autonomy under pressure from their alliance partner, fear of a stronger power, or for their national interest considerations.

However, in the current era, especially under 'Trump exceptionalism', there has been a renewed attack on the strategic autonomy of nation-states. The capability of the US to bring the world to its knees is especially highlighted under the current scenario, as the US has never before extracted the price of maintaining public goods to such an extent. India has been one of the prime targets of the current US regime:



1. **CAATSA and Defence Procurement restrictions**

India purchased the S-400 missile system from Russia. Though India ultimately avoided sanctions, it had to request a waiver from the U.S. Congress, making its defence decisions contingent on U.S. legislative discretion. Strategic autonomy depended on American approval. This is not autonomy but 'negotiated permission'.

2. **Technology Denial Regimes: Digital Dependency**

Export controls on semiconductors, advanced computing, and AI technology targeting China affect India indirectly because the supply chains are integrated, and the whole tech ecosystem is Western-controlled. High-end semiconductor manufacturing is inaccessible without Western approval. India's ambition to become a semiconductor hub thus depends on Western firms and compliance with export control regimes. Autonomy here is 'conditional integration'.

3. **The Russia-Ukraine War: Conditional Defiance**

Even though India chose non-alignment in the Ukrainian War and increased Russian oil imports, along with abstaining in UN votes, the defiance was largely conditional. India did not join the alternative blocs aggressively, did not recognise the annexed territories despite Russia being its strategic partner, or break from the Western Financial systems.
Most Russian oil payments were structured to avoid triggering Western Financial retaliation. So, India's behaviour cannot be called 'defiance', rather 'calibrated compliance'.

4. **Western Alignment pressure**

India is pushing FTAs with its Western partners like the EU, UK, and Australia. Engagement with these powers, however, is linked to ESG compliance norms, Supply chain transparency, and human rights-linked trade conditions. India must align with regulatory standards accordingly. This is not autonomy but rule absorption.

5. **Strategic Hedging or Strategic Dependence?**

India's attempts at maintaining strategic autonomy through participation in groups like QUAD appear contradictory when defence imports increasingly shift to the U.S., and the Indo-Pacific strategy aligns with US containment of China. The idea of non-alignment suffers a blow when such de facto alignment happens without formal treaty obligations.



Why is India compromising on its strategic autonomy?

In a globalised financial system, the majority of global trade is cleared in USD. Also, Indian banks operate through Western financial networks and are exposed to US secondary sanctions risks. Even when India is attempting Rupee-Ruble trade mechanisms and alternative payment systems, they remain limited in scale. When monetary sovereignty is conditioned on external forces, strategic autonomy becomes hollow.

Further, under globalisation, supply chains can be weaponised, and finance can become a political tool. In a condition when India's growth model depends directly on access to Western capital markets, technology transfers and export access, this dependence limits policy autonomy and deviation from Western norms. Strategic autonomy remains rhetorical, and materially, it is left constrained.

Though India asserts that it is 'Strategically Aligned' or it is an 'Issue-based alignment', and the current scenario is not a compromise but 'strategic accommodation', however, it can't be denied that, though India is not subordinated formally, as it is structurally embedded in a sanctions-governed global system, deviation from it carries an economic cost.

Yes, India resisted pressure to cut Russian oil imports, avoided joining formal alliances, promoted Global South Diplomacy and pursued diversified energy sourcing despite US pressure; however, this autonomy exists within narrowing parameters defined by sanctioning powers. The moment a crackdown happens, India has to roll back its autonomous exercises.

India's strategic autonomy today resembles a bounded sovereignty. Its choices are real, but only within the invisible perimeter drawn by global financial and technological gatekeepers.



DIGITAL SOVEREIGNTY IN THE 21ST CENTURY

– Richa Saxena, M.A. International Relations, AIIS

Throughout much of its earliest history, the Internet has typically been viewed by both policymakers and scholars as an unregulated and open place. They also believed that digital networks would help lessen the significance of international boundaries and increase global coordination.

Before the advent of the Internet, it was founded on principles such as openness, freedom of expression and little governmental regulation. Much of the Internet's foundation has made up how both governments and technological companies interact with one another in the digital realm.

Though, this understanding gradually changed. For example, in the last ten years, governments are beginning to perceive the digital domain as a part of their security, economic development and political stability.

As a result of concerns over cyberattacks, data breaches and reliance on foreign technology providers, many nations now feel a need to limit their openness in the digital realm.

Countries are showing increased interest in controlling the public's data, digital infrastructure and online platforms within their borders. This transformation is occurring because of concerns over security, economic competitiveness and technological dependence. Consequently, the internet is becoming less of a purely technical network and more of a political/economic entity influenced by national policy and interests.

Digital Sovereignty is an important aspect of modern geopolitical reality, as countries are seeking more control over digital systems and the internet is less and less a single, open global network. Instead, it is becoming more influenced by national laws, and regional regulations rightfully so.

Understanding What Is Digital Sovereignty

Digital sovereignty generally refers to the ability of a state or political community to exercise authority over its digital environment. It also involves regulating technology companies and protecting national digital interests. In many ways, the concept is an extension of traditional sovereignty. Just as states control their physical territory, they are now trying to exercise control over their digital spaces.

This includes decisions about where data is stored, who has access to it, and which technologies are used in important sectors such as finance, communication, defence and more.

The discussion of digital sovereignty mainly focuses on three main elements:
1. Data governance includes rules about storage of data, privacy of people, and that the confidential data that should not cross border.
2. The control over infrastructure such as networks, cloud services, and hardware.
3. Digital platforms are regulated by means of rules governing online content and how to protect consumers.

Digital data is becoming increasingly important in the way our global economy works, which adds weight to these issues. As data becomes a valuable resource, governments will consider how it should be managed, especially as it relates to issues surrounding national security and economic development.

Different Approaches to Digital Sovereignty

There are a few different approaches to digital sovereignty that countries adapt to, and these different methods have emerged which are shaped by political systems, economic priorities and security concerns.

1. The Open and Market-Driven approach

In this approach, the internet remains largely open and globally connected. Governments do allow cross-border data flow and usually depend heavily on private technology companies to build and manage digital infrastructure.

A primary objective is new technology, economic growth, and sharing information freely between individuals.

Additionally, this model is indicative of how the internet was originally envisioned as a decentralized, open system encouraging/completing with/technological advancement but with limited government interference.

2. State-Centered Model

The state can assert much greater authority over online content, data flows, and digital infrastructure for the goal of surveillance and public safety through additional policies including localized data storage, content regulation, and government control over major digital platforms.

The state model is typically associated with concerns regarding national security, political stability, or reducing impacts from outside influences.

3. The Regulatory or Rights-Based Approach

The government focuses on this model to try to protect privacy, ensure fair competition, and regulate large technology companies. Though, their emphasis is on legal frameworks, consumer rights and data protection.

Digital sovereignty refers to the protection of citizens' rights and building robust economies. Governments have tried to reduce reliance on international [foreign] technology providers while keeping up their commitments as global partners, by keeping open digital borders for products and services.



Geopolitical Drivers of Digital Sovereignty

Global factors affecting the rise of digital sovereignty include: However, note: The rise in digital sovereignty is closely linked to underlying geopolitical factors. There are several reasons why sovereign nations are becoming increasingly aware of, and responsive to, these issues.

1. Cybersecurity and National Security

Cybersecurity is increasingly important to many countries today. There are a lot of things that use computer systems that are very important to our lives, including financial institutions (banks), energy, transportation, communications, etc.
For this reason, countries are much more wary than before about using foreign technology companies to provide critical infrastructure to their citizens.
Many countries are currently exploring ways to build their own domestic capacity and enhance their ability to withstand cyber-attacks.

2. Economic Competition and Technological Rivalry

The use of technology is increasingly becoming a key component of the global economic competition. Data, artificial intelligence, and digital services represent some of the most important sources of growth in the economy. As a result, governments want to guarantee that their domestic industries will have the ability to compete on an equal footing with foreign companies in these sectors.
Governments are putting money into developing their digital infrastructure, providing support for local technology businesses, and creating regulations to protect their economic interests.

3. Dependence on Foreign Technology

Another major issue is reliance on a select few global technology companies. Various countries rely on foreign technology firms for communication platforms, cloud services, and various types of software systems. This type of dependence raises a number of important questions regarding economic independence, the jurisdiction of law, and the ability to exert political power.
In order to address these issues, some governments are creating incentives for domestic substitutes or regional digital solutions. These and other efforts are intended to reduce dependence on external vendors while stillallowing countries to have access to international markets.

The Fragmentation of the Internet

With digital sovereignty's rise comes a fragmented internet that has many political and legal implications. Some observers refer to this fragmented internet as the "splinternet," where different parts of the world will have different digital systems and rules.

Some recent developments indicate this trend:

1) The enactment of laws that require data to remain in a given country, such as data localization laws.
2) Regional laws and regulations that define how companies can do business with technology.
3) Many different technology systems have emerged in many parts of the world.

As a result of these developments, companies that operate globally will face increasing regulatory complexity in the future. They may also limit the free flow of information and data. At the same time, governments may gain greater control over digital activities within their territories.

The global digital economy still depends on shared technical standards, cross-border data flows, and interconnected infrastructure. Many states are therefore trying to balance national control with continued participation in global networks.

Possible Futures for the Internet

The future of the internet will depend on how countries manage the relationship between sovereignty and global connectivity.

1. Internet Fragmentation

Fragmentation of the Internet would result in many countries forming independent "digital blocs" based on shared attributes such as geographical location, language, or culture. Each bloc would have its own set of platforms, regulations, and governance structures.
As a result, cross-border data flows will become severely limited and international governance over the Internet will erode.

2. Hybrid Model

A hybrid model is likely to emerge whereby the Internet will be a globally connected network of computers, but individual states and regions will exert control over how data flows and how their respective platforms operate.
Countries will have some control over their own digital economy (through controls on market access), yet also continue to be a part of the global digital economy.

3. Increased International Cooperation

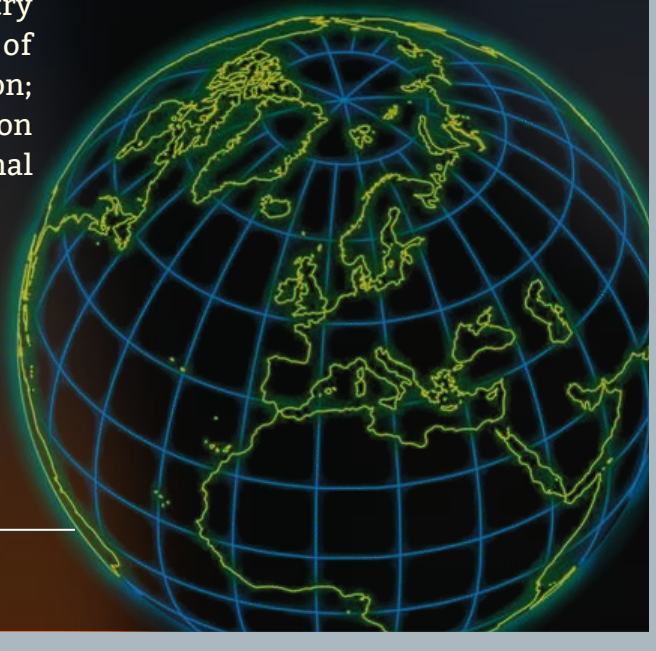
Another possibility is for nations around the world to collaborate on establishing a stronger system of shared global governance for the Internet. By working collectively, countries can come together to develop uniform rules regarding issues such as cybersecurity, privacy/security of data, and regulation of digital platforms.
The end result would be an Internet which fulfills its role (of being globally connected) whereas also establishing an environment which helps to resolve disputes related to both state sovereignty or creation of level playing field to enable digital commerce.

Conclusion

The idea of digital sovereignty has developed into an important component of today's global landscape. Governments around the world would like to take control of the entire ecosystem (data, infrastructure, and online platforms) of digital technology as there is a profound impact on the economy, politics, and national security.

Each country's model for digital sovereignty is representative of that nation’s values and priorities. Some countries will prefer an open model, while others lean toward using the authority of the state to establish a heavily regulated or controlled system that emphasises privacy and limits competetion.

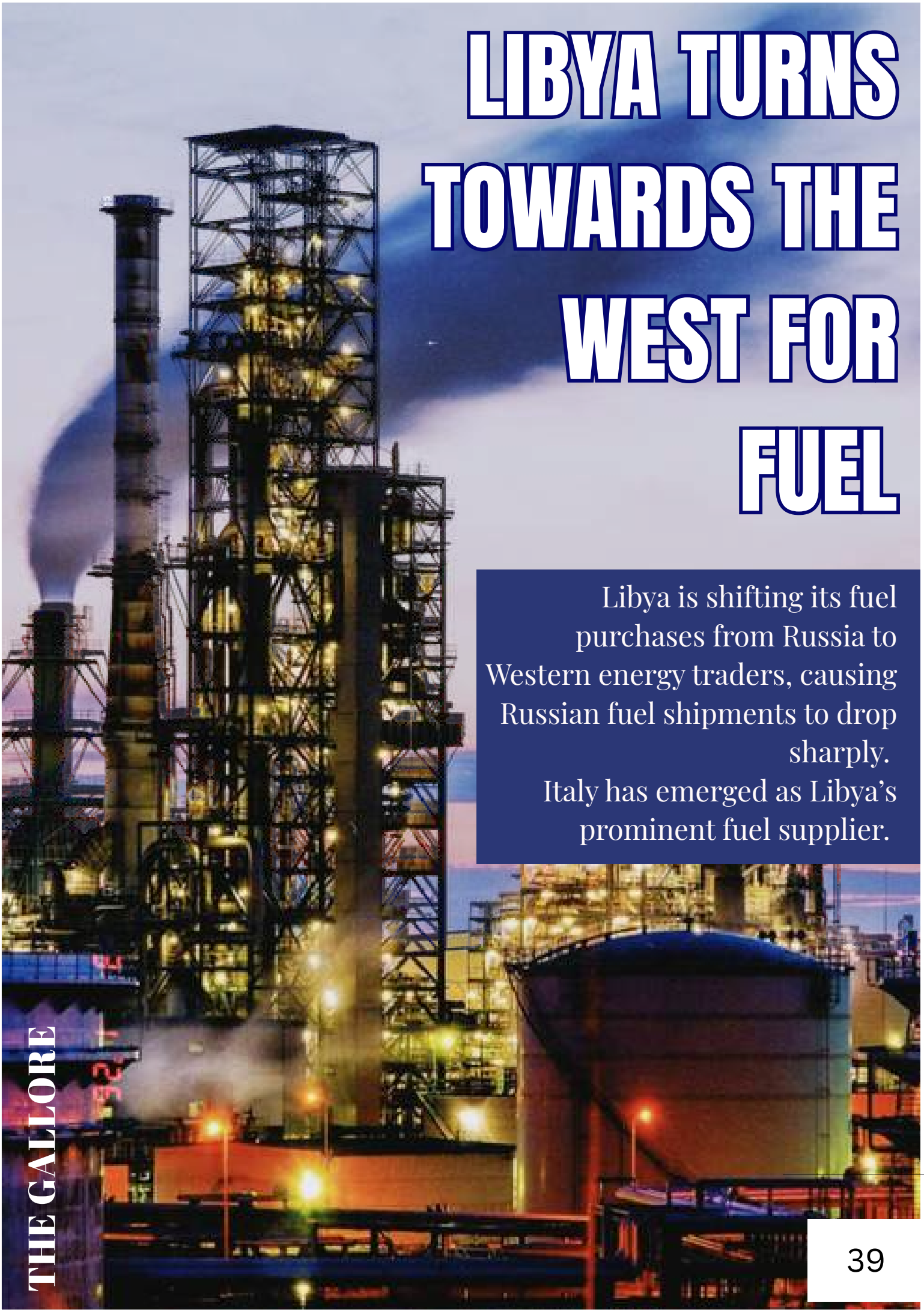
With the continued development of national and regional law that shape how the global internet functions, each country will continue to use the technical and economic aspects of how the internet is developed for international collaboration; however, the ultimate outcome in cyberspace will centre on how nation-states choose to balance their own national authority with global interdependence.



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LIBYA TURNS TOWARDS THE WEST FOR FUEL



Libya is shifting its fuel purchases from Russia to Western energy traders, causing Russian fuel shipments to drop sharply.
Italy has emerged as Libya's prominent fuel supplier.

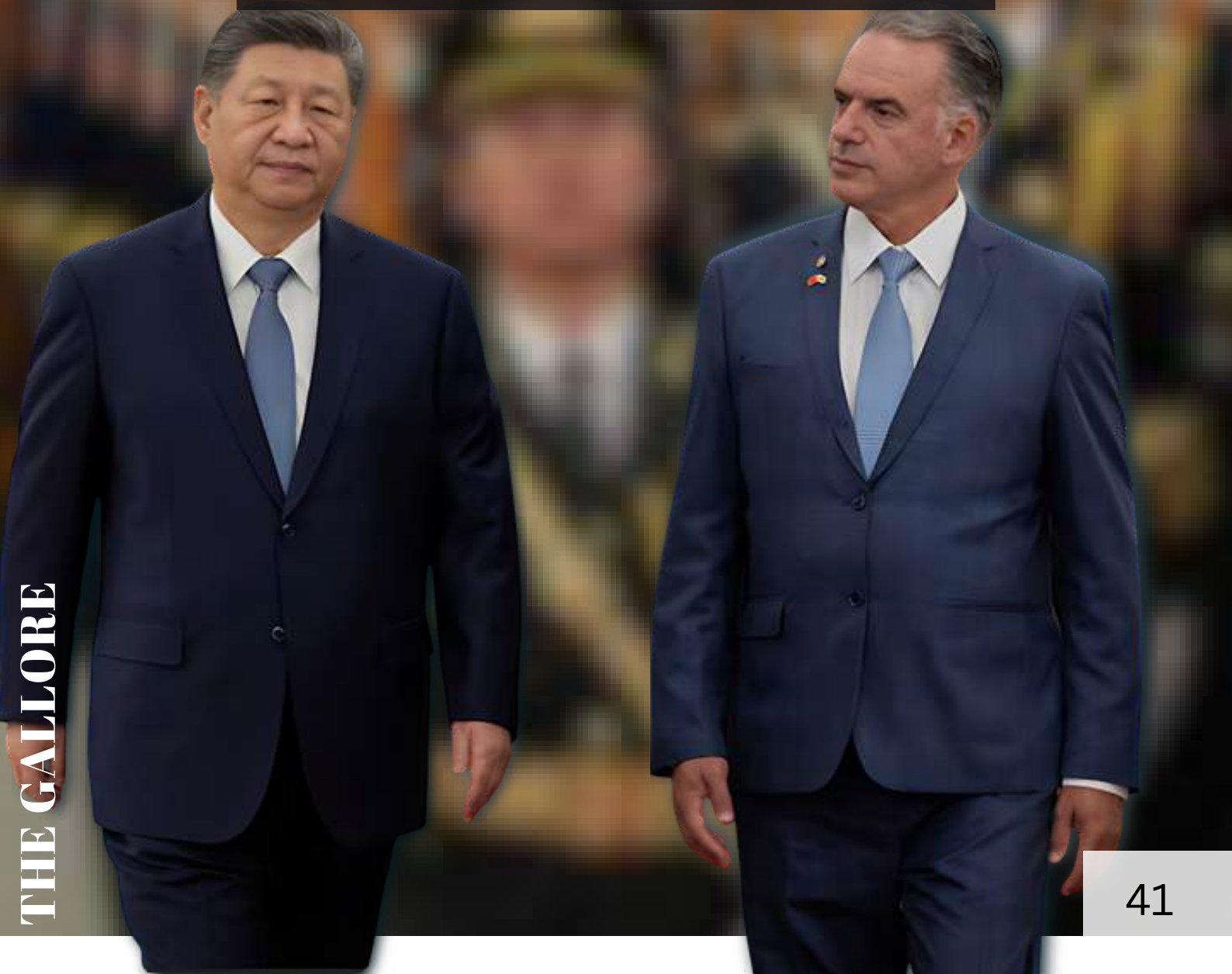


INDONESIA-AUSTRALIA SIGN NEW SECURITY TREATY

Indonesia and Australia have signed a new defence and security agreement covering maritime cooperation, intelligence sharing, and counter-terrorism. Both sides say it is meant to strengthen regional stability rather than target any specific country.

CHINA AND URUGUAY AMPLIFYING MULTIPOLAR WORLD MESSAGE

Chinese president XI Jinping and Uruguay's leader emphasised on building an "equal, multipolar world" in Beijing, reflecting China's diplomatic outreach in southern America during great power competition.





US STEPS UP AID TO CUBA WHILE CHOKING OFF FUEL SUPPLY

The U.S. is sending an additional $6 million in humanitarian aid to Cuba after Hurricane Melissa. At the same time, the U.S. is tightening fuel restrictions, blocking oil supplies and worsening Cuba's energy shortages.

NOTE FROM THE HEAD OF THE INSTITUTE

It is with a profound sense of purpose that I share this message with our readers in the latest edition of Global Mirror—a publication that has emerged as a distinctive forum for intellectual engagement, critical reflection, and scholarly expression within and beyond the Amity Institute of International Studies. Global Mirror serves as more than a chronicle of current affairs; it is a curated academic platform where rigorous analysis meets thoughtful insight into global dynamics.

The contemporary international system is defined by rapid transformations—shifts in strategic alignments, the reconfiguration of economic orders, technological disruptions, and evolving normative frameworks. In this milieu, the discipline of International Relations demands nuanced inquiry grounded in theory, empirical evidence, and ethical reflection. It calls upon scholars, practitioners, and students alike to interpret complexity with clarity, to engage with contradictions with intellectual honesty, and to contribute constructively to debates that shape policy and thought.

This edition of Global Mirror reflects these commitments. The contributions assembled here demonstrate analytical discipline, conceptual depth, and an earnest effort to bridge theory and practice. Our student researchers and faculty contributors explore a range of critical themes—geopolitical shifts, institutional responses to global challenges, normative debates on governance, and interdisciplinary perspectives on security and cooperation. Each piece affirms our belief that rigorous scholarship is indispensable to understanding and addressing pivotal global issues.

At AIIS, we view International Relations not as an abstract field of study, but as a living dialogue between ideas and human experiences. Behind every geopolitical calculation lie human aspirations, vulnerabilities, and stories of resilience. As educators and learners, we are entrusted with the task of nurturing analytical acumen while remaining attuned to the human contexts that frame global interactions.

I extend sincere gratitude to our editorial team, faculty mentors, and contributors whose dedication and intellectual curiosity make Global Mirror a vibrant academic endeavor. I also thank our broader academic community and readers for engaging with the magazine thoughtfully and critically.
As you explore this edition, I invite you to read not merely with comprehension, but with reflection—recognising the interconnectedness of global phenomena and our individual roles as informed citizens, scholars, and agents of positive change.

Warm regards



Prof. (Dr.) Nagalaxmi M Raman
Director and Head
Amity Institute of
International Studies

NOTE FROM THE FACULTY COORDINATOR

It is with great satisfaction that Amity Institute of International Studies presents the February 2026 Issue of Global MirrorQuarterly magazine. There is something quietly remarkable about watching students move from being consumers of international news to becoming its interpreters. That transition, from reading about the world to writing about it, is precisely what Global Mirror represents.

In an era where global developments travel swiftly across borders, reshaping economies, redefining security and reconfiguring diplomacy, it is no longer enough to merely observe the world. This February 2026 issue is the result of considerable effort, honest intellectual curiosity, and no small amount of perseverance from a group of students who chose to do something more. They identified issues worth examining, formed arguments worth reading, and saw a project through from its earliest draft to its final page, entirely on their own. The research articles, commentaries, and news analyses featured in this issue demonstrate the students' efforts to explore the world today. I would like to place on record my appreciation for the editorial board, whose commitment to maintaining both academic rigour and readability throughout this process has been evident.

It is my sincere hope that this magazine continues to serve as a platform where students engage critically with global affairs, refine their analytical voice, and contribute meaningfully to scholarly conversation.

Collaborative editorial work of this kind demands patience and discipline, and they have demonstrated both. My congratulations to the editorial board, and my best wishes for the editions ahead.

Best Regards



Dr. Akriti Khajuria
Assistant Professor
Amity Institute of International Studies
Amity University, Noida

EDITOR'S NOTE



Poulina Banerjee
Editor in Chief

Dear Reader,

We bear witness to a world that rarely stands still and so our work as scholars remains simple: keeping the spirit of inquiry alive by asking pertinent questions that reveal to us the world we inhabit. The articles in this issue emerge from that very attempt.

The Global Mirror has always been a place where such words find company. Writing my first note as Editor-in-Chief, I am reminded that this publication exists because of the community that sustains it.

After a long pause, this new edition returns with a few changes of its own. We have introduced an Editorial section, a column dedicated to the voices within our own editorial team. Another important change is that The Global Mirror will now be a quarterly publication. Moving to four issues a year gives us the time to think more carefully about what we publish and how we bring each issue together.

From the next edition onwards, we hope to collaborate with the different regional clubs of our department and feature their pieces in an attempt to give equal space to stories from each part of this world.

This magazine stands because of the relentless efforts undertaken by the hardest-working and most earnest team one could ask for, whose patience and care hold every page together. The Global Mirror is truly a product of their dedication.

To everyone who writes for us and everyone who reads us, I pay my sincere gratitude. As scholars of global politics, we grapple with the challenge of thinking critically under tight time constraints. In times like these, it becomes particularly important to keep our intellectual curiosity intact. I hope that The Global Mirror continues to be propelled by the voices of the youth, for the youth.

Warm regards

MEET THE TEAM



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Manjyot Kaur
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