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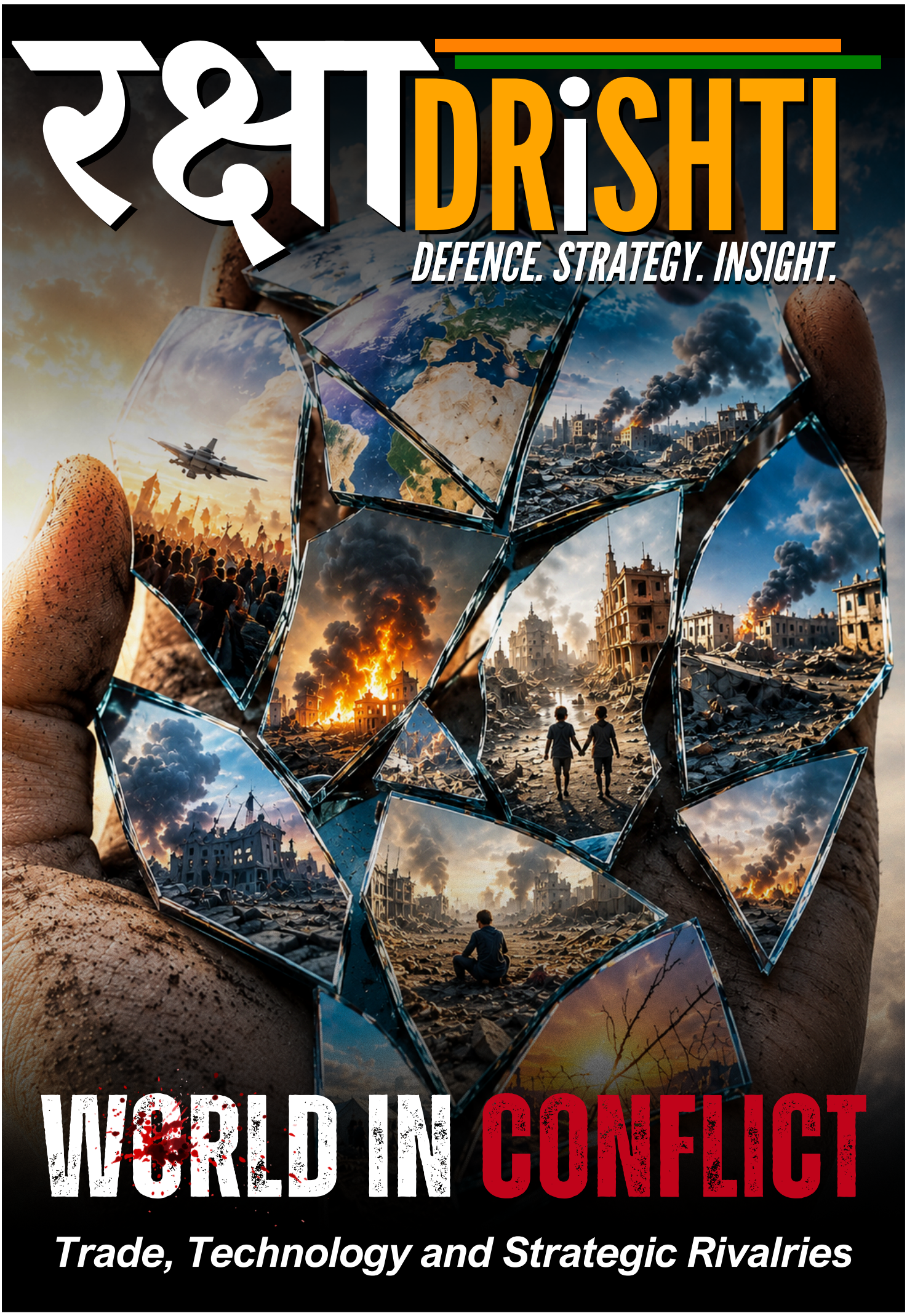

WORLD IN CONFLICT

Trade, Technology and Strategic Rivalries

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Message from the Head of the Institution

The May edition of RAKSHA-DRISHTI engages with the theme of World in Conflict. As a publication of the Amity Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies, the magazine reflects our commitment to serious academic engagement with questions of national security, military reform, and geopolitical change. It demonstrates that our students are not only studying these issues but are analysing them with discipline, depth, and intellectual responsibility.

Publications such as this play a vital role in shaping analytical maturity within an academic community. They encourage structured argumentation, responsible scholarship, and informed debate, qualities essential for future practitioners, scholars, and policymakers in the security domain. The depth of research and clarity of thought reflected in this issue are encouraging indicators of that growth.

I congratulate the editorial team and all contributors for their professionalism and dedication. May RAKSHA-DRISHTI continue to grow as a forum for rigorous inquiry and constructive dialogue, strengthening our academic community and contributing meaningfully to the wider strategic discourse

Best wishes for continued success



Brig. (Dr.) Anand Kumar Tewari (Retd) brings over 33 years of experience in educational administration through distinguished service in university education and the Indian Army. He held senior appointments, including Additional Director General and Deputy Director General Military Training (Army Education), Chief Instructor and Principal AEC Training College, and Vice Principal of Sainik Schools. He earned a PhD (2013–15) on Chinese geopolitics, developing a prognostic model, and is a Chinese language expert in strategic studies.

Jai Hind....



Message from the Faculty Coordinator

It gives me immense pleasure to present the latest edition of RAKSHA-DRISHTI, the Department Magazine dedicated to exploring contemporary issues in defence, strategic affairs, and global security. The cover story theme , "*Mapping the Conflicts that are Rewriting the Rules of War*," is both timely and significant, reflecting the profound transformations taking place in the nature of warfare and international security.

The emergence of artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, cyber operations, drone warfare, and hybrid threats has blurred the boundaries between war and peace, state and non-state actors, and military and civilian spheres. Understanding these evolving dynamics is essential for future scholars, practitioners, and policymakers in the field of strategic studies.

This edition showcases the intellectual curiosity, analytical rigour, and creativity of our students, who have engaged deeply with these complex developments through their articles, essays, and reflections. Their contributions demonstrate a keen awareness of the rapidly changing strategic landscape and reaffirm the importance of informed academic discourse in addressing contemporary security challenges.

As Faculty Coordinator and Mentor, I extend my sincere appreciation to all contributors, reviewers, and readers whose enthusiasm and commitment have made this publication possible. I encourage every reader to engage with the diverse perspectives presented in these pages with an open, critical, and analytical mindset.

I would also like to express my heartfelt gratitude to Brig (Dr) Anand Kumar Tewari (Retd.), Head of Institution, whose constant support, guidance, and encouragement continue to inspire our academic endeavours and contribute significantly to the growth of the department.

My special congratulations go to Ms. Arushi Anthal and the entire editorial team for their dedication, hard work, and vision in bringing this edition to fruition. Their efforts have ensured that RAKSHA-DRISHTI remains a vibrant platform for intellectual exchange, scholarly engagement, and informed debate.

I wish this publication continued success and hope it inspires meaningful reflection on the challenges and opportunities that define the evolving character of conflict in the twenty-first century.

Best wishes for continued success



Col (Dr) Subodh Kumar Shahi (Retd) is Associate Professor at AIDSS. He was commissioned in Mechanised Infantry (Recce &Sp), has more than 36 yrs of illustrious career in Indian Army. An alumni of Sainik School Amaravathinagar and Defence Services Staff College (DSSC), Wellington. He holds PhD in International Relations from Pondicherry Central University.

Jai Hind....



Message from the Editor's Desk

Most conversations about global conflict begin with the wrong unit of analysis. We reach for the headline war, the one with a recognisable front line, a named aggressor, and a body of international commentary telling us how to feel about it. Ukraine fits this template. Gaza, in its own way, does too. Everything else gets folded into the background noise of a world that has always been violent, messy, and somehow continued.

This issue is an argument against that convenience.

The cover story that opens this edition does not attempt to rank conflicts by casualty count or strategic significance. It attempts something more uncomfortable: to hold six simultaneous, structurally distinct wars in view at the same time, and to ask what the full picture reveals that any single conflict, examined in isolation, cannot. The answer is not reassuring. What the full picture reveals is a world whose understanding of conflict has not kept pace with conflict itself.

We tend to think of war as a recognisable event. Two states, a declaration, armies in motion, and eventually a settlement or stalemate. That template was never complete, but it was serviceable for a certain era of international relations. It is no longer serviceable.

Of the six conflicts mapped in this issue, only one approximates that image. The others are something different: a regional proxy system held together by ideology and arms flows, a territorial dispute resolved by drone in under twenty-four hours while the world's attention was elsewhere, a civil war producing one of the largest displacement crises on earth with almost no sustained coverage, a jihadist insurgency expanding across a region where weak governance, climate stress, and poverty function as a single compound fuel, and a criminal organisation that controls territory, levies taxes, and deploys modified drones while the state it operates within declines, for political reasons, to call the situation a war.

Each of these requires a different analytical vocabulary. Each is also underway right now, simultaneously, making demands on international attention, resources, and political will that the current global architecture is structurally ill-equipped to meet. The United Nations Security Council is deadlocked on several of them at once. Major powers are simultaneously supplying weapons and brokering ceasefires, depending on whose interests are engaged. Attention is distributed not according to need, but according to proximity, ideology, and the quality of the images available.

This issue does not attempt to solve that problem. What it attempts is more modest and, we think, more honest: to describe the problem with enough precision that the reader can begin to think about it clearly. We map the six conflicts, categorise their types, and examine what each reveals about the current state of organised violence in the world. We include a glossary not as a pedagogical exercise but because the language of conflict matters. Calling something a proxy war rather than a civil war, or an insurgency rather than terrorism, shapes what responses seem appropriate and what gets ignored.

There is a particular risk in covering conflict at scale, which is that the accumulation of crises produces a kind of analytical numbness. The numbers grow large enough to lose meaning. The geography becomes abstract. The reader, overwhelmed, retreats to the conflicts they already know. We have tried to resist that outcome by staying close to the structural and the specific: what each conflict is, how it works, what it reveals about the changing character of war, and why it matters beyond its immediate geography.

The world is not at peace. It is not approaching conflict. It is already inside it, in several rooms at once, with the doors mostly closed. The purpose of this issue is to open a few of them.



Arushi Anthal is a PhD Research Scholar at the Amity Institute of Defence and Strategic Studies (AIDSS), Amity University, Uttar Pradesh. She holds a Master's degree in Political Science and an M.Phil. from the Department of Strategic and Regional Studies, University of Jammu. She is also UGC NET JRF qualified in Political Science. In addition to her doctoral research, she serves as a Visiting Faculty at AIDSS, Amity University.

Jai Hind....



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THAT DEFINE.
PERSPECTIVES
THAT MATTER.

SYS.01 98%
SYS.02 92%
SYS.03 88%
SYS.04 91%

GREENLAND
EUROPE
UKRAINE
ASIA
MIDDLE EAST
VENEZUELA

GLOBAL
MONITORING
SYSTEM

NODE 01 CONNECTED
NODE 02 CONNECTED
NODE 03 CONNECTED
NODE 04 CONNECTED

ALL SYSTEMS NOMINAL

CONFLICT ZONES
HIGH TENSION AREAS
MILITARY ACTIVITY

INTEL FEED
LIVE

COVER STORY

IN-DEPTH. INSIGHTFUL. IMPACTFUL

A WORLD WITHOUT CEASEFIRE

MAPPING THE CONFLICTS THAT ARE REWRITING THE RULES OF WAR

By
Rishabh Tiwari, Keshav Babu B,
Tanisha Acharya, Isha Singh
Kshitiz Shekhar
(Editorial Team Raksha Drishti)



Somewhere in the world right now, a city is burning. A family is on the move, carrying what it can. A soldier is holding a trench that should not exist in the twenty-first century, and a child in another country is going to bed without dinner because a supply route was cut off by men with guns who answer to no government. The world is not on the brink of conflict. The world is already in it.

What makes this moment distinct is not that wars are happening; wars have always happened. What is distinct is the sheer variety of what we now call conflict, and how poorly our vocabulary prepares us to understand it. We picture conflict as flags, armies, and declarations of war. But the reality today is far messier. It is insurgencies that outlast the governments fighting them. It is criminal organisations that control territory with the efficiency of states. It is regional wars that pull in proxies and great powers until nobody can remember who started it, or why.

This cover story does not attempt to list every conflict on earth; there are more than forty active ones at the time of writing. Instead, it maps six: chosen deliberately to represent the different shapes that conflict takes in our world. Together, they form an argument. War is no longer only what it used to be.

The six conflicts that follow are not chosen because they are the deadliest or the most strategically significant, though several are both. They are chosen because together, they show what conflict looks like across its full spectrum today. From drone-augmented conventional warfare to jihadist insurgency to criminal organisations that operate with the logic of an army, each snapshot represents a category. Each category is real, and each is underway.

01. The Russo-Ukrainian War

Type: *Conventional War*

On the 24th of February 2022, the Russians launched a Special Military Operation in Ukraine to 'demilitarise and denazify Ukraine' as stated by President Putin in his speech addressing the invasion. The actual motive was to topple the regime in Ukraine and stop it from joining NATO, which would have led to the deployment of western weapons right at Russia's borders; a line Moscow considered inviolable. As of now, Russia controls almost 20% of Ukraine's land, including key regions like Donbas and the southern regions of Kherson and Zaporizhzhia. While these gains seem substantive, the Russians have also faced massive losses; it is estimated that Russia has lost more than 1.2 million men. Ukraine has had some successful counterattacks, seizing back around 470 km^2 in 2026 so far, and repelling repeated Russian pushes, particularly near Sloviansk and Kostyantynivka.

All of this becomes a very major topic of discussion as the stakes are too high for everyone around the globe. This war has affected trade, food security, and energy supply chains simultaneously. Many countries have faced shortages of military equipment and spare parts. It has also challenged prewar assumptions that modern warfare, driven by technology, would make attrition and trench warfare obsolete.

This conflict has proved those assumptions wrong, stressing that armies still need to master fundamental conventional capabilities, clearing trenches, conducting ambushes, holding ground, even as technology adds new dimensions.

What makes this conflict unique in the modern era is the expanded role of drones. A variety of systems are in use across the spectrum: large, costly drones for long-range strike and reconnaissance; and at the smallest unit level, cheap FPV drones for both observation and attack. These inexpensive systems carry an asymmetric advantage against costly legacy systems like tanks, forcing armies to rethink their relevance. The use of satellite services like Starlink for strike guidance and communications, and the documented use of encrypted social media by soldiers to communicate with command, raises important questions about the future of battlefield communications that no military doctrine has yet fully answered.

02. The West Asia Regional War

Type: *Regional Conflict System*

The continuing crisis in West Asia is not a single conflict but several confrontations in tandem, the latest being the war in the Gaza Strip. These escalations began following the attack on Israel by Hamas in October 2023. The response from Israel was swift and massive, and now the entire region faces an unprecedented crisis involving security, sovereignty, and the geometry of power. Iran stands as the central instigator, operating through proxies: Hezbollah from Lebanon, the Houthis from Yemen, and various militia networks across Iraq and Syria.

There are two defining dimensions to this crisis. The first is the struggle for territory and sovereignty between Israelis and Palestinians, a wound decades in the making, now bleeding openly. The second is the contest for regional dominance between Iran and US-backed states, with Israel as both combatant and flashpoint. Israel's policy of deterrence, hit hard, hit early, hit decisively, has defined the military logic of this phase. But deterrence has not produced stability; it has produced escalation. The absence of a functional peace process and the weaponisation of the Red Sea by the Houthis have added maritime security to a crisis that was already multi-layered.

For India, this is not a distant crisis. Energy security is directly at stake, a major portion of India's crude oil imports originate in West Asia. Eight million Indian nationals live and work in the region; their safety and remittances are economically significant. Any disruption to Red Sea trade routes affects India's exports to Europe. And diplomatically, India maintains strong relationships with Israel, the Palestinian Authority, Saudi Arabia, and the UAE simultaneously, a balancing act that grows more difficult as the region grows more polarised. The west asian crisis, in other words, arrives at India's doorstep through energy, people, and trade, whether or not New Delhi wishes to be involved.

03. The Nagorno-Karabakh Conflict

Type: *Territorial Disputes*

Nagorno-Karabakh is a landlocked enclave in the South Caucasus: Armenian in population, internationally recognised as part of Azerbaijan, and contested by both for more than three decades. The roots of the dispute lie in the Soviet era, when the region was administered as an autonomous oblast within Soviet Azerbaijan despite its overwhelmingly Armenian majority. When the Soviet Union collapsed, the enclave's Armenians sought unification with Armenia, and a brutal war erupted between 1988 and 1994, ending in an Armenian victory and de facto control of the territory. The frozen conflict that followed was periodically punctuated by skirmishes, diplomatic failures, and competing narratives about history and legitimacy.

In September 2023, Azerbaijan launched a lightning military offensive; a 24-hour operation that effectively ended Armenian control of the enclave. More than 100,000 ethnic Armenians fled the region within days, one of the fastest and most complete episodes of forced demographic change in recent European history. The operation was decisive, asymmetric, and almost entirely ignored by a world preoccupied with Gaza and Ukraine. Azerbaijan had used Israeli-supplied drones, Turkish strategic support, and years of military modernisation to reverse a three-decade-old outcome in less than a day.

Nagorno-Karabakh matters beyond its small geography. It demonstrates that frozen conflicts can thaw rapidly and violently, that military technology procurement from the right partners can rewrite the balance of power, and that the international community's attention is not evenly distributed; some crises are watched obsessively, others are resolved by force while the cameras point elsewhere. For students of strategic studies, the enclave's fall is a lesson in how power, timing, and diplomatic exhaustion combine to change facts on the ground.

04. The Civil War in Sudan

Type: *Humanitarian Crisis*

Millions of people in Sudan are surviving on just one meal a day. Seventy percent of the country's population is living in poverty, and some fourteen million people have been forced to flee their homes: these figures reflect families torn apart, children out of school, livelihoods lost, and a generation whose prospects are steadily diminishing. The war in Sudan began on 15 April 2023 and has become one of the most devastating conflicts in the region. It is a power struggle between the Rapid Support Forces (RSF) and the Sudanese Armed Forces (SAF). Primarily centred in the capital city of Khartoum, it rapidly spread across the country. Sudan, the third largest country in Africa by area, gained independence in 1956. Its history has been marked by political instability and conflict. Between 2003 and 2005, there was widespread bloodshed in Darfur resulting from President Omar al-Bashir's government's systematic violence against civilian populations; a crisis the International Criminal Court ultimately classified as genocide.

Al-Bashir was overthrown in a military coup in 2019 and replaced with a transitional government. That transitional government was itself overthrown by the SAF and RSF acting in concert. But in April 2023, tensions between the leaders of the two forces, General Abdel Fattah al-Burhan of the SAF and General Mohamed Hamdan Dagalo of the RSF, exploded into open war.

Leaders of both groups have refused to halt the violence. With regional and international actors taking sides, all attempts at mediation have failed. This 'abandoned crisis' is leading to mass killings, widespread sexual violence, and starvation used as a weapon of war, and it is doing so almost entirely off the front pages of international newspapers. Sudan is a lesson in how a country can collapse in plain sight while the world's attention is elsewhere. The urgency is real. The silence around it is not.

05. The Sahel Insurgency

Type: Expanding Insurgency

The Sahel region is a dry strip of land south of the Sahara Desert that spreads across Mali, Burkina Faso, and Niger a region now trapped in a spiral of violence driven by jihadist-insurgent groups like Jama'at Nusrat al-Islam wal-Muslimin (JNIM) and the Islamic State in the Greater Sahara (ISGS). These groups have been fighting against the weak and corrupt governments that existed in the region, and against the later governments formed by military coup, known as Juntas. They control large rural areas, block roads, burn villages, and recruit young men. In recent times, these groups have even clashed with each other in Niger while simultaneously keeping pressure on cities through fuel blockades and raids. The juntas expelled French and UN peacekeeping forces and brought in Russian mercenaries later reorganised as Africa Corps and formed the Alliance of Sahel States. The violence has only grown worse, particularly in Burkina Faso, which now records some of the highest rates of terrorism-related deaths anywhere in the world.

The Sahel is the region most affected by terrorism globally, accounting for roughly half of all terrorism deaths worldwide and governments have still failed to regain meaningful control. Violence has been spreading for over a decade with no sign of recovery. Millions have been displaced, many migrating to neighbouring countries, straining already fragile states.

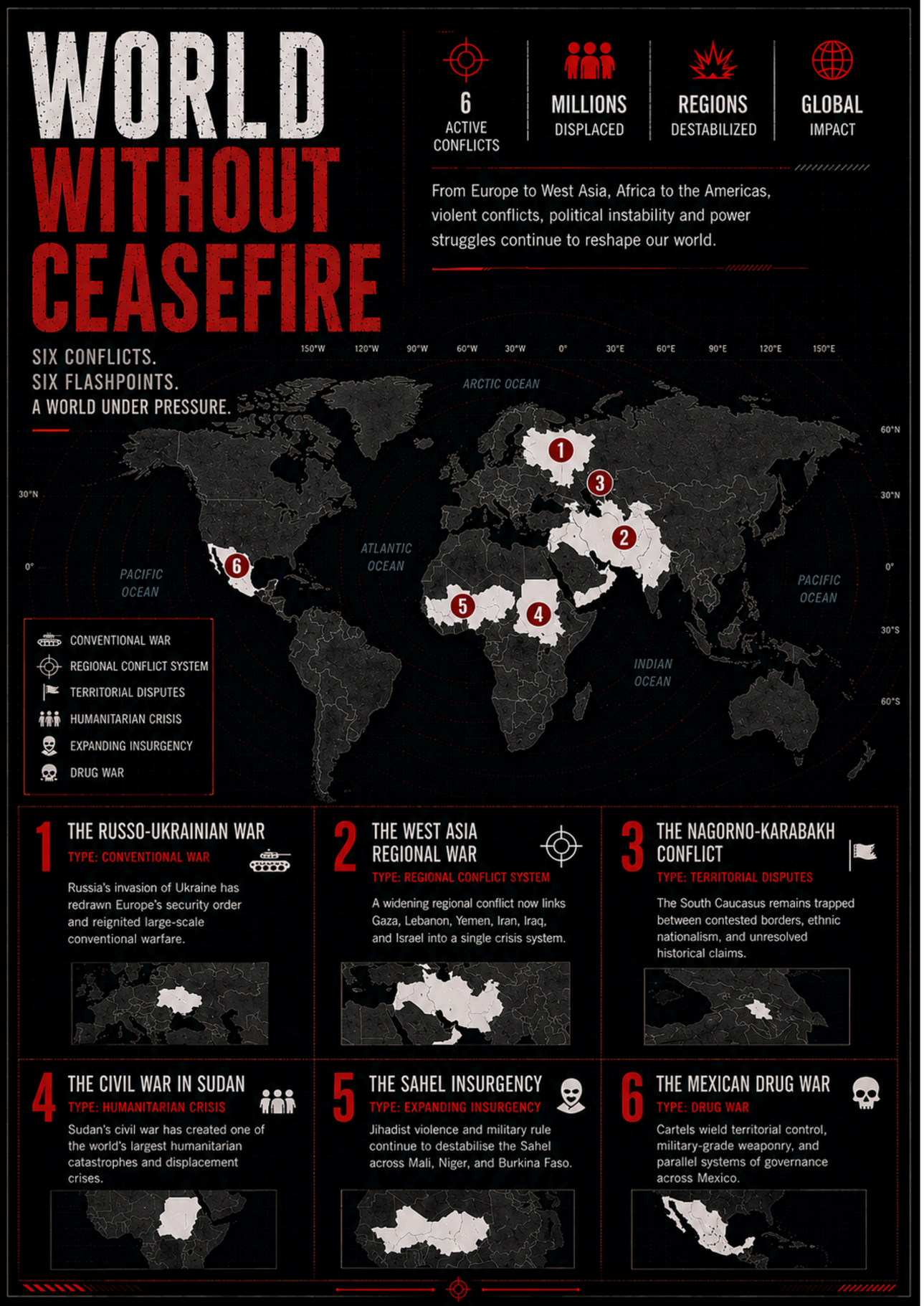
What makes this conflict distinct is the compound nature of its fuel: weak and corrupt governance, rapid population growth, poverty, climate change, and ethnic grievances are not separate problems that happen to coincide. They feed each other. The insurgency grows not despite the conditions but because of them. Addressing the violence without addressing the conditions is a strategy that has been tried, and has failed.

06. The Mexican Drug War

Type: *Drug War*

Mexico does not appear on most lists of countries at war. Its government is elected, its cities have functioning economies, its flag flies at the United Nations. And yet since 2006, when the Mexican government launched a military-led offensive against drug cartels, more than 450,000 people have been killed in cartel-related violence a death toll that exceeds many acknowledged wars. The Sinaloa Cartel, the Jalisco New Generation Cartel (CJNG), and a rotating cast of smaller organisations do not simply sell drugs. They control territory, levy taxes on businesses and farms, recruit and conscript young men, run their own intelligence networks, and deploy weapons (including drones modified to drop grenades) that mirror the tactics of non-state armed groups in conventional conflict zones.

The Mexican state has not lost the war in any official sense, but in significant parts of the country particularly in Sinaloa, Michoacán, Tamaulipas, and Guerrero the cartel is the effective government. It provides order, enforces rules, and punishes disobedience. When rival groups clash over territory, the battles resemble military operations: coordinated attacks, blocking of roads, siege tactics, and the deliberate targeting of civilians perceived to support the other side. In 2023, members of the CJNG were documented wearing military-style uniforms, using armoured vehicles, and operating with a command structure more organised than some of the world's recognised armies.



The Mexican Drug War asks an uncomfortable question that strategic studies has been slow to answer: when does organised criminal violence become war? The body counts suggest it already has. The absence of a geopolitical adversary, a territorial claim, or an ideological manifesto should not obscure what is happening on the ground. Mexico is fighting a war. It simply refuses, for domestic political reasons, to call it one.

WHAT THE MAP TELLS US

Six conflicts, six different shapes. But look at the map and a pattern emerges that is harder to dismiss than any individual case.

The first pattern is simultaneity. These conflicts are not sequential, one ending as the next begins. They are concurrent. The world is not managing them one at a time; it is managing all of them at once, with limited attention, limited resources, and limited political will. The United Nations Security Council is simultaneously deadlocked on Ukraine, Gaza, Sudan, and the Sahel. Major powers are simultaneously supplying weapons, imposing sanctions, brokering deals, and looking the other way, depending on whose interest is at stake.

The second pattern is unevenness of attention. Ukraine and Gaza dominate global news cycles. Sudan and the Sahel are barely visible, even as they account for displacement and death tolls that rival or exceed the more prominent conflicts. Nagorno-Karabakh was resolved by force in 24 hours while the world was looking elsewhere. Mexico registers as a crime problem, not a conflict despite a body count that rivals Syria at its worst. The world does not attend to suffering proportionally. It attends to suffering strategically, or sentimentally, or when the images are impossible to ignore.

The third pattern is the transformation of what war means. Of the six conflicts mapped here, only Ukraine comes close to matching the image of war that most people carry in their heads: two armies, a front line, artillery, tanks, and flags. The others do not fit that template at all. The Sahel is a diffuse insurgency with no fixed front. Sudan is a civil war between two factions of the same military. Mexico is organizing criminal violence that the state is losing. Nagorno-Karabakh was a territorial takeover completed before most observers registered that it had begun. And the Middle East is a web of proxy conflicts held together by ideology, arms flows, and the interests of patrons who are never quite present and never quite absent.

If we continue to think of conflict as something that only happens when armies march and governments declare war, we will keep missing what is actually happening in the world. And missing it has consequences for the people living inside these conflicts, and eventually for everyone outside them.

THE WORLD IS NOT AT PEACE

There is no ceasefire covering the world. There is no global architecture capable of stopping wars that do not look like the wars that architecture was designed to prevent. What exists instead is a patchwork of attention, intervention, indifference, and exhaustion.

The six conflicts in this issue are a sample, not a summary. Behind each one are histories long enough to fill libraries, grievances real enough to sustain violence across generations, and human costs that numbers alone cannot convey. Behind all six, taken together, is a world that is not slipping toward conflict — it is already inside it, in multiple rooms at once, with most of the doors closed to cameras.

Understanding the world in conflict begins with a simple but uncomfortable act: looking at the whole map, not just the parts that are easiest to see. The pain does not stop at the borders we choose to watch. And neither, eventually, do the consequences.

STRATEGIC
ADVANTAGE

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W
E
S

COMPLEX CHALLENGES
REQUIRE CRITICAL THINKING

NATIONAL SECURITY
THROUGH
INFORMED RESEARCH

RESEARCH ESSAYS

DEFENCE | STRATEGY | SECURITY | POLICY

STRATEGIC
ASSESSMENT

KNOWLEDGE | ANALYSIS | IMPACT

DRAGON IN BLUE WATERS

CHINA'S NAVAL EXPANSION AND THE STRATEGIC IMPERATIVES FOR INDIA IN THE INDO-PACIFIC



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This article contends that India's conventional deterrence-centric posture is structurally mismatched to China's grey-zone maritime strategy in the Indian Ocean Region. Unless New Delhi reorients toward sub-threshold counter-capabilities and addresses the constraints imposed by its dependency on Russia, it risks losing the information and influence competition in the Indian Ocean before any conventional conflict occurs. China's expanding naval presence increasingly relies on maritime surveillance, dual-use infrastructure, and logistics penetration rather than direct confrontation. The article argues that India's response must evolve beyond symbolic naval signaling toward integrated maritime intelligence, autonomous systems, coalition-building, and sustained information-domain competition to preserve strategic influence in the Indo-Pacific.

RESEARCH ESSAYS

I. From Near Seas to Far Waters: The Strategic Evolution of the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN)

The year 2025 represented a significant turning point in China's naval development. According to the CSIS China Power Project, the People's Liberation Army Navy (PLAN) conducted a record 3,764 air incursions into Taiwan's Air Defense Identification Zone, representing a 22.4 percent increase over 2024.

More significantly, Chinese carrier groups operated beyond the First Island Chain for nearly twice as many days as in the previous year. For the first time, two carriers conducted simultaneous operations in the Pacific Ocean. In February 2025, a three-ship Chinese task group, consisting of a Type 055 cruiser, a frigate, and a replenishment vessel, conducted live-fire drills in the Tasman Sea with minimal advance notice, resulting in commercial flight diversions before circumnavigating Australia. These actions are not isolated incidents; rather, they reflect a deliberate doctrinal shift from 'near seas defence' to what Chinese strategists describe as 'far seas protection'.[1]

The expansion of China's submarine fleet further intensifies these concerns. Testimony before the U.S.-China Economic and Security Review Commission in March 2026 by Rear Admiral Michael Brookes of the Office of Naval Intelligence indicated that the PLAN's submarine fleet could reach approximately 70 vessels by 2027 and expand to 80 by 2035, with roughly half being nuclear-powered. The introduction of the Type 095 guided-missile nuclear submarine marks a decisive transition toward platforms designed for long-duration, forward-deployed sea-denial operations at extended ranges.[2]

II. The Indian Ocean: China's Calculated Encirclement

Although China's activities around Taiwan receive greater international attention, its strategic advances in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) present a more enduring challenge for India. Beijing's approach is portrayed not by direct military confrontation but by what analysts describe as a 'grey-zone' maritime strategy: "the systematic accumulation of intelligence, logistics, and influence through civilian and dual-use platforms that operate below the threshold of open conflict".

Since 2008, China has systematically institutionalised its presence in the Indian Ocean. The establishment of a military base in Djibouti in 2017 provided a logistical anchor for sustained PLAN operations along the Horn of Africa. Through the Belt and Road Initiative, Beijing has invested in port infrastructure at Hambantota in Sri Lanka (leased for 99 years), Gwadar in Pakistan, Chittagong in Bangladesh, and Kyaukphyu in Myanmar. Strategic analysts have described these installations as a 'String of Pearls,' referring to a network of facilities encircling India's maritime periphery. However, this characterization is contested; scholars such as C. Raja Mohan argue that many BRI port investments reflect commercial logic as much as deliberate naval planning, and the debate over Chinese strategic intent in the IOR remains unresolved in the academic literature.[3]

China's aggressive oceanographic intelligence campaign is less contested. By late 2025, vessels such as Shi Yan-6, Shen Hai Yi Hao, and Lan Hai were engaged in mapping the undersea terrain of the Indian Ocean, activities that New Delhi interprets as preparation for submarine deployment.

A NOTAM (Notice to Air Men) issued over the Bay of Bengal in August 2024, coinciding with the presence of three Chinese survey vessels, demonstrates the covert nature of this competition. Reports of potential Chinese naval infrastructure on Myanmar's Coco Islands, if verified, would position surveillance assets within operational range of India's strategic submarine base at Rambilli, Andhra Pradesh.[4]

III. India's Response: Capabilities and Coalitions

India's response to China's naval expansion must be understood within the context of a broader strategic asymmetry. Along the Line of Actual Control, sustained Chinese economic growth has enabled the PLA to achieve modernized advantages that India cannot easily match. In contrast, the maritime domain offers India structural advantages, including geographic centrality, an established naval tradition, and credible partnerships with leading maritime powers, which are not present on the continental frontier.

India's maritime modernisation has accelerated in response. The commissioning of INS Aridhaman in February 2025, India's third nuclear-powered ballistic missile submarine, strengthened its second-strike nuclear deterrence. The near-completion of Project Varsha, a strategic submarine base with underground pens near Rambilli, directly addresses the challenge of PLAN surveillance by enabling nuclear submarines to deploy without detection. INS Vikrant, India's first indigenously built aircraft carrier, and the expansion of the Karwar naval base (Project Seabird) reinforce capabilities on both the eastern and western seaboards.[5]

At the multilateral level, India's chairmanship of both the Indian Ocean Rim Association (IORA) and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) from 2025 to 2027 provides normative influence over the security architecture of the Indian Ocean. The Information Fusion Centre – Indian Ocean Region (IFC-IOR), located in Gurugram, has become a regional hub for maritime domain awareness, engaging thirty partner nations. Bilateral exercises such as Malabar with the United States and Japan, Varuna 2026 with France, and Sea Dragon 2025 demonstrate a deliberate strategy to expand interoperability across a coalition of maritime democracies.

IV. The Limits of Conventional Deterrence

Despite India's strategic momentum, a Parliamentary Standing Committee report submitted in August 2025, chaired by MP Shashi Tharoor, acknowledged significant gaps in India's Indian Ocean posture. The report recommended accelerated induction of next-generation submarines, destroyer-class warships, carrier-based fighters, and AI-driven maritime domain awareness systems. The underlying concern was explicit: India risks being outpaced by the scale and speed of China's maritime investments.[6]

The most analytically significant challenge lies in a structural mismatch. China's maritime strategy in the IOR primarily employs Military-Civil Fusion, deploying ostensibly civilian research vessels, coast guard assets, and maritime militia as instruments of intelligence gathering and strategic signaling. As Abhijit Singh and Gurpreet Khurana of the National Maritime Foundation have argued, these platforms operate below the threshold that would justify a conventional naval response, yet cumulatively generate persistent intelligence dominance and psychological leverage.[7]



https://www.eurasiantimes.com/china-threatens-to-expel-indian-navy-warships-from-the-south-china-sea/

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India's current response architecture, centered on warship deployments, bilateral exercises, and visible signaling, is not adequately configured to contest sub-threshold competition. Addressing this challenge requires investment in the software of maritime power, including AI-based pattern detection for grey-zone activities, expanded fleets of autonomous surface and underwater vehicles, and a Maritime Information Fusion Grid that integrates the IFC-IOR with the Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) and partner surveillance systems. The Naval Innovation and Indigenisation Organisation (NIIO) and the Aatmanirbhar Bharat framework should be urgently directed toward addressing these capability gaps.

V. Strategic Autonomy and Its Structural Constraints

India's Indo-Pacific strategy is based on the principle of strategic autonomy, which involves selective engagement with coalitions that serve national interests without the constraints of formal alliance membership. This posture has provided India with diplomatic flexibility, maintaining access to partners across competing blocs. However, as the maritime security environment deteriorates, strategic autonomy increasingly appears as a framework that manages competing pressures rather than resolves them. This tension is particularly evident in India's relationship with Russia.

Russia remains deeply embedded in India's defence architecture. According to SIPRI's Trends in International Arms Transfers 2024, Russia accounted for approximately 36 per cent of India's arms imports between 2020 and 2024 , a decline from earlier decades, but still substantial. More critically, over 60 per cent of India's active military inventory traces its design origins to Soviet or Russian systems, including the S-400 air defence system, the Su-30MKI fleet, Kilo-class submarines, and Krivak-class frigates.[8] This dependency has direct implications for India's maritime posture.

The INS Chakra III nuclear-powered attack submarine, expected under a ten-year lease agreement with Russia, and ongoing Russian technical support for India's indigenous ballistic missile submarine program, ensure that the most sensitive tier of India's undersea deterrent remains structurally linked to Moscow. As analysts at War on the Rocks observed in April 2025, India cannot rapidly replace Russian capabilities in nuclear propulsion and missile defense, as these are niche technologies that neither the United States nor France currently offer on comparable terms.[9]

This dependency limits the depth of India's engagement with the Quad. Washington has been reluctant to share the most advanced naval technologies, particularly nuclear propulsion under AUKUS-adjacent arrangements, with a partner that simultaneously operates Russian air defense systems and continues large-scale purchases of Russian crude oil, resulting in tariff pressure from the United States in 2025. The Quad Foreign Ministers' meeting scheduled for India in 2025 was postponed partly due to this friction.[10]

India's trajectory is depicted by managed diversification rather than a strategic rupture with Moscow. France and the United States now collectively account for approximately 46 percent of India's arms imports, and the 2025 conflict with Pakistan validated the operational effectiveness of indigenous systems, accelerating the domestic defense production agenda. The Quad's maritime surveillance initiative, France's treaty-based naval facility access across the Indian Ocean, and bilateral agreements with Singapore, Indonesia, and Oman at Duqm collectively form a forward-presence network that partially contests China's logistics architecture in the IOR.

> **"China's challenge in the Indian Ocean is not defined by sudden confrontation, but by the slow accumulation of surveillance, logistics, and influence below the threshold of war."**

The strategic challenge for New Delhi is to accelerate this transition without prematurely fracturing its relationship with Moscow, which continues to provide UN Security Council veto support, nuclear technology access, and a hedge against an exclusively US-dependent posture. Managing this balance while deepening maritime partnerships with Quad members to deter Chinese grey-zone encroachment constitutes the central tension of India's Indo-Pacific strategy. In this context, strategic autonomy is not a settled doctrine but an ongoing negotiation between structural constraints and strategic ambitions.

Conclusion: The Strategic Imperative for India

China's naval expansion represents a significant shift in the Indo-Pacific strategic environment. The PLAN has moved beyond coastal defense to project power across the Pacific and Indian Oceans with increasing confidence. For India, the implications are direct: its strategic neighborhood is being reshaped, its maritime approaches are being mapped, and the rules-based order underpinning its trade and security is under sustained pressure.

India has responded with substantive capability investments in indigenous naval construction, strategic basing, multilateral architecture, and deterrence. However, the pace of China's expansion, combined with the structural constraints of Russian dependency and the sub-threshold nature of Beijing's grey-zone competition, necessitates a more incisive strategic assessment. India cannot deter with warships what China is contesting with survey vessels, maritime militia, and dual-use port networks.

India must recognise that strategic autonomy is a means rather than an end. If it becomes a justification for deferring critical decisions, such as deepening Quad commitments, accelerating diversification away from Russia, or investing in sub-threshold counter-capabilities—it will not preserve India's freedom of action in the Indian Ocean. Instead, it will merely postpone the loss of that freedom.



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GEOPOLITICS IN MIDDLE EAST

Search for Energy Security in the post- Khamenei world



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The assasination of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei and the ongoing Iran war has created ripples in global politics particularly with regards to an emerging energy crisis concerning the strait of Hormuz. This marks a sudden restructuring of the power dynamics in the Middle East, which has rapidly escalated into a global conflict involving US and Israeli military strikes, Iranian retaliation across multiple nations and US bases, and critically the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz and consequent meltdown of global markets.

Handling nearly 20 percent of the world's petroleum trade, the Strait has become the central pressure point of this crisis. Its blockade has destabilised global markets, intensified energy insecurity, and exposed the fragility of existing deterrence structures.

This article examines the geopolitical and security implications of Operation Epic Fury (United States) and Operation Roaring Lion (Israel), focusing on how these developments are reshaping regional power dynamics and global energy security.

Keywords- Middle East, Iran War, Geopolitics, Energy Security.

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Introduction

The US and Israel launched Operation Epic Fury and Operation Roaring Lion respectively, against Iran culminating in the assassination of their supreme leader Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, in a so-called bid to restore democracy and deter the Islamic republic from developing nuclear weapons. Iran retaliated across multiple fronts which led to a steady restructuring of the power dynamics in the Middle East, and the horizontal escalation led to the immobilisation of the Strait of Hormuz which handles nearly 20% of the world's oil and natural gas supply and distribution.

The implications of the joint operations, in restructuring peace and security in the post Khamenei-Middle East, had profound geopolitical and security repercussions and there is an urgent need for de-escalation and collaborating for sustainable energy security.

The Strait of Hormuz as a Strategic Chokepoint

The history of contemporary Iran begins with the uprising of Islamic Republic. Ali Khamenei's appointment as the supreme leader in 1989 through lawful-unlawful means, and his involvement in various issues (Rasannah, 2026) further enhanced the assumptions of his plan regarding his successor (Abdi, 2004). After the death of Khamenei, his son Mojtaba Khamenei assumed power with the support of Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps. The Axis-of-Resistance led by Iran suffered a setback due to the attacks by Washington and Tel Aviv.

Iran retaliated by paralyzing the Strait of Hormuz which facilitates 20% of the world's petroleum (Pokorny, 2026). The situation over the Strait has reached a bottleneck, as both the US and Iran are playing mutatis mutandis over the Strait, treating it as a hostage alternatively between them as a term to end the war (ALJazeera, 2026).

The conflict over the Strait was fueled by the interference of Yemen's Houthis claiming it would block Bab al-Mandeb if Trump does not lift up the curfew over the Strait, while more vessels were reported to be attacked. Simultaneously, two more vessels of India were attacked, causing India to call the Iranian Ambassador (ToI, 2026). While the situation over the Strait still remains uncertain, it is necessary for the conflict to get resolved at the earliest, due to the Strait contributing about one-fifth of the global supply.

Theoretical Framework

The ongoing conflict in the Strait of Hormuz may be understood through the Regional Complex Security Theory advanced by Barrie Buzan and Ole Waver. It depicts that the war has influenced not only the three (the US, Israel and Iran) belligerents, but also affected all the countries dependent on the Strait for their energy supplies. The theory can be demonstrated by the horizontal escalation of the conflict in the neighboring countries of Iran and Israel involving Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia, Yemen, Bahrain. Furthermore, it had led to serious consequences for the "Ring of Fire", also famously known as the "Axis-of-Resistance", a loose network of military groups Hamaz, Houthis and Hezbollah, who were supported by IRGC to provide "resistance" from the attacks of Israel. The latter's multiple attacks on Iran have led to the formation of Axis-of Resistance as a counter-measure.

Beyond energy security

The Middle East conflict has led to uncertainty in the Strait of Hormuz. Due to its geopolitical strategies, Iran refuses to give up the authority on the Strait of Hormuz. It is crucial for allowing the passage of crude oil tankers, LNG and LPG carriers and several other vessels, which got paralyzed due to the blockage imposed. The attacks on Iran and its retaliatory strategies led to the blockade of the Strait.

Moreover the Iranian attack on Ras Laffan gas plant in Qatar was a deliberate demonstration of shift by the country's strategy which resulted in the increase in the price of natural gas. Thus the chaos led to the disruption of the global supply completely. Since the war, Iran has successfully blocked over 400 oil tankers. Moreover, using devices like Cobra V8, Iran also ensured the interferences in the GPS system in the area which led to the loss of proper sea-mapping by the ships with modern navigation systems. The action of interference led to the loss of the Automatic Identification System, which made navigation impossible because the Global Navigation Satellite System is weak. The Strait of Hormuz is an energy hub with the global energy security being dependent on Iran in Gulf energy transport resulting in the increase of shipping costs. The blocking of the Strait has resulted in supply delay as well as price volatility. It has resulted in the oligopolistic petrol prices. The G7 nations decided in a meeting that 400 million barrels of crude oil from its reserves will not be released anyhow, which forced Trump to remove sanctions against Russian exports. The price of Brent crude oil has risen up to 1.5 times after the war.

From Bipolarity to Multilateralism

The failure of the Abraham Accord signed between Israel and Arab countries, resulted in power imbalance in the Middle East and created a watershed rupture of the western hegemonic dominance marking the loss of bipolar world order. China's Jinping and Russia's Putin have stressed on multilateralism.

Though China has selfish reasons as it imports much of its crude oil from Iran, it has entered the US and Iran conflict as a mediator. Xi Jinping has mentioned maintaining sovereignty, co-existence with other countries, and selective adherence to international law to maintain peace in the region. India is likely to suffer from the consequence of the war as the blockage of the Strait, no matter by the US or Iran, will lead to a shortage of crude oil in our country.

Unlike China having large reserves, India only has reserves for only 30 days which makes it more vulnerable to the aftermath of the war. Through Indian naval operations "Urja Suraksha" deployed more than five warships to ensure the return of the vessels named "Pine Gas" and "Jag Vasant", but many other Indian vessels are still at risk in the Strait.

Conclusion

On 8th April 2026, Iran demanded three solutions to end the war; "legitimate rights", "payment of reparations" and "firm international guarantees against future aggression". The US's 15-point proposal was not met by Iran, particularly the development of nuclear weapons and reduction of uranium stockpiles. When the US wanted a 30 days ceasefire and opening of the Strait of Hormuz, Iran wanted an independent authority on the Strait of Hormuz due to the geopolitical importance in the Strait. On 13th April, 2026 after the failure of a 21hour long marathon of peace negotiations between Washington and Tehran, Trump threatened a blockade in the Strait and the US Central Command claimed to permit the passage of ships belonging to the US and its gulf allies. Though around hundreds of ships were allowed to reach India and China, IRGC announced that they will not honour the ceasefire if warships approach the Strait regardless of the origin. China, Russia and the European Union are finding alternatives for energy security strategies. They are also outlooking for the possible alternative transport routes, several unconventional measures to ensure continuous energy supply including the cost efficiency.

The flow of global energy is gradually giving emphasis on broad scale relations from the perspective of bloc-like stature rather than open market solutions. The solution of this crisis lies in restoration of stability in the Middle East and to move beyond negotiations which hold energy corridors as 'hostages' of the big powers.

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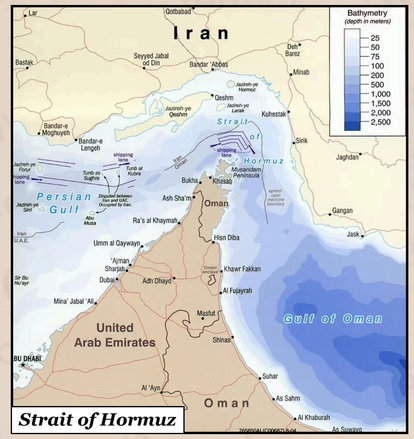
It is evident that military and hegemonic dominance is a weak strategy in modern warfare, even for superpowers like the US. Instead, multilateralism and economic integration are the need of the hour, and through uninterrupted global energy flows, a sustainable regional and global economic security can be achieved. Thus, the international community must come together to build a cooperative world order of sustainable energy alliance based on mutual trust, reciprocity and pragmatic international relations, where all nations- big or small, are guaranteed sovereignty, security and strategic autonomy over their own resources.



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DIGITAL PEACEKEEPING IN AN AGE OF ALGORITHMIC CONFLICT

Reimagining Security in South Asia



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The character of conflict in the twenty-first century has undergone a fundamental transformation. No longer confined to territorial disputes or kinetic warfare, contemporary conflicts increasingly unfold across digital infrastructures, mediated by algorithms, data flows, and cyber interactions.

In South Asia, a region historically marked by geopolitical volatility, nuclear deterrence, and unresolved territorial tensions, this shift is particularly consequential. The proliferation of artificial intelligence (AI), big data analytics, and digital communication platforms has not only altered the modalities of conflict but also reconfigured the possibilities of peacekeeping.

This article argues that conflict in South Asia is becoming progressively algorithmic, shaped by information ecosystems, cyber capabilities, and data-driven decision-making. Consequently, traditional peacekeeping frameworks rooted in physical monitoring, ceasefire enforcement, and diplomatic negotiation are increasingly inadequate. There is an urgent need to conceptualise and operationalise digital peacekeeping, an approach that integrates AI, cyber diplomacy, and big data tools to anticipate, mitigate, and prevent conflict in digitally mediated environments.

South Asia: A Region of Digital Contestation

South Asia's strategic environment is shaped by a convergence of historical rivalries, domestic political dynamics, and emerging technological capabilities. The region has witnessed a steady rise in cyber incidents, ranging from state-linked intrusions to hacktivism and data breaches.

India and Pakistan, for instance, have engaged in reciprocal cyber operations targeting government websites, critical infrastructure, and information networks. While these actions often remain below the threshold of armed conflict, they contribute to a persistent climate of hostility. At the same time, China's expanding digital footprint: through infrastructure projects, surveillance technologies, and data networks, adds further complexity to the regional balance.

Internal conflicts are also increasingly mediated through digital platforms. In India, communal tensions and regional unrest are often intensified by the rapid spread of misinformation. In Sri Lanka and Bangladesh, social media has played a significant role in shaping public discourse during periods of crisis.

These dynamics highlight the dual nature of digital technologies as tools of communication and as catalysts of conflict. The region's large, digitally connected population amplifies this effect, as the speed and scale of information flows often outpace institutional response mechanisms.

The Changing Nature of Conflict: From Kinetic to Hybrid

South Asia exemplifies the transition from conventional warfare to hybrid conflict. While interstate tensions, particularly between India and Pakistan, continue to shape the strategic landscape, the nature of engagement has diversified. Conflict now operates across multiple domains simultaneously: military, cyber, informational, and psychological.

Hybrid warfare in the region includes cyber intrusions, disinformation campaigns, and digital surveillance. The rise of "*grey-zone warfare*" has blurred the boundaries between war and peace, allowing states and non-state actors to engage in continuous low-intensity confrontation without triggering full-scale escalation.

Social media platforms have become sites of strategic contestation, where narratives are constructed, identities mobilised, and hostilities amplified. This transformation introduces what may be termed *algorithmic escalation*, a phenomenon where automated systems, data-driven responses, and rapid information dissemination intensify conflicts in real time.

Misinformation, deepfakes, and coordinated online campaigns can inflame communal tensions, influence public opinion, and constrain diplomatic manoeuvrability. In such a context, conflict is no longer episodic; it is continuous, diffuse, and embedded in everyday digital interactions.



AI and Big Data in Conflict Dynamics

Artificial intelligence and big data are central to this evolving conflict architecture. Their applications span both military and civilian domains, creating a complex interplay between security, governance, and ethics.

On one hand, AI enables predictive analytics that can identify patterns of unrest, monitor potential flashpoints, and support early warning systems. Governments and security agencies increasingly rely on data aggregation, from satellite imagery to social media analytics, to anticipate threats and manage crises. In theory, such capabilities enhance conflict prevention by enabling proactive intervention.

On the other hand, these technologies introduce significant risks. AI systems are susceptible to bias, manipulation, and opacity, raising concerns about accountability and misuse. In conflict-prone regions, surveillance infrastructures can exacerbate existing inequalities and erode civil liberties.

Moreover, the weaponisation of AI, through autonomous systems, cyber tools, or algorithmic propaganda, intensifies the scale and speed of conflict. In South Asia, where digital governance frameworks remain uneven, the deployment of AI in security contexts often outpaces regulatory oversight. This creates a paradox: technologies designed to enhance stability may inadvertently contribute to instability by amplifying mistrust, enabling coercive state practices, or facilitating cross-border cyber operations.

> **The battlefield of modern conflict extends from contested borders to algorithms, satellite networks, and cyberspace.**

Conceptualising Digital Peacekeeping

Against this backdrop, the concept of digital peacekeeping emerges as both a necessity and an innovation. Digital peacekeeping can be defined as the integration of technological tools—AI, big data analytics, cyber monitoring systems, and digital communication platforms—into peacekeeping and conflict prevention strategies.

Unlike traditional peacekeeping, which relies on physical presence and observation, digital peacekeeping operates in virtual and hybrid spaces. Its core functions include:

- *Early Warning Systems*: Utilising data analytics to detect signs of escalation, such as spikes in online hate speech or unusual cyber activity.
- *Cyber Monitoring*: Tracking cross-border cyber threats and establishing mechanisms for attribution and accountability.
- *Information Integrity*: Countering disinformation through fact-checking networks, algorithmic moderation, and public communication strategies.
- *Digital Mediation*: Facilitating dialogue through secure digital channels, especially in contexts where physical diplomacy is constrained.

However, existing international frameworks are ill-equipped to implement such approaches. Traditional peacekeeping institutions, particularly those under the United Nations, remain oriented toward physical conflict zones. Their mandates, resources, and operational models do not adequately address cyber threats or digital misinformation.

This gap is particularly pronounced in South Asia, where regional cooperation on security issues is limited. The absence of robust institutional mechanisms for digital conflict management underscores the need for localised and context-specific models of digital peacekeeping.

Conclusion

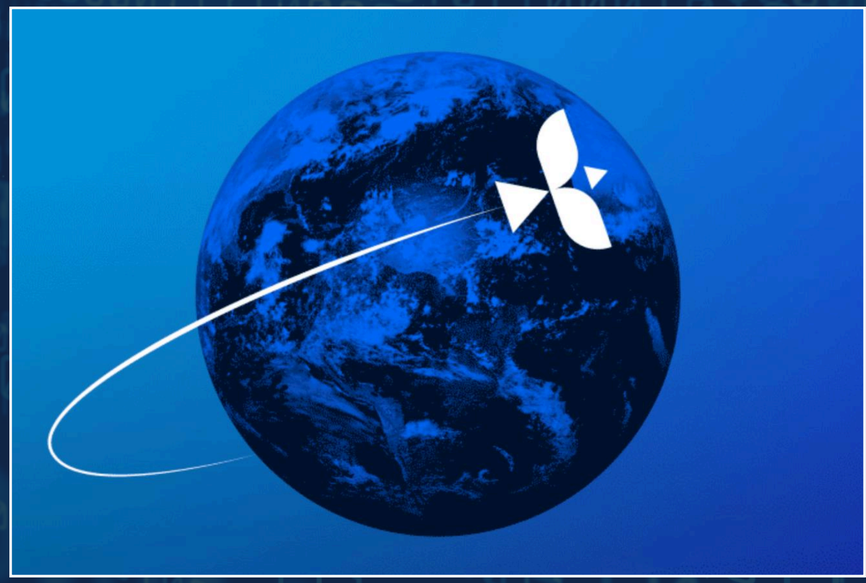
The transformation of conflict into a digitally mediated, algorithmically driven phenomenon necessitates a corresponding evolution in peacekeeping practices. In South Asia, where historical tensions intersect with rapid technological change, this imperative is particularly acute.

Digital peacekeeping offers a conceptual and practical framework for addressing the complexities of contemporary conflict. By integrating AI, big data, and cyber diplomacy into conflict prevention strategies, it is possible to move beyond reactive approaches toward more anticipatory and adaptive models of security.

However, the success of such initiatives depends on political will, institutional innovation, and normative clarity. Without these, the region risks entering a cycle of perpetual, low intensity conflict, one that is less visible but no less consequential.

In an age where wars are fought as much through code as through conventional means, the future of peace will be determined not only on the battlefield, but within the architectures of data, algorithms, and digital governance.

> **Peacekeeping in the digital age requires securing information networks as much as physical territory.**



BEYOND THE BATTLEFIELD

The Algorithmic Reconstitution of War and Power



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Advances in technology are rapidly changing the nature of modern warfare. This article examines cyber warfare, drones, and artificial intelligence to understand these changes. It reviews defence studies and real-world cases to identify key trends. It highlights how affordable drones and autonomous systems allow weaker actors to use asymmetric strategies, while cyber and information warfare blur the lines between traditional combat roles.

Low-cost drone swarms and AI-based systems can now target important assets with reduced risk, as demonstrated in conflicts such as Ukraine. Warfare is increasingly shifting toward decentralised and hybrid forms. At the same time, the growing role of AI signals a transition from manned to unmanned platforms, including Autonomous Weapon Systems and Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs).

Key Words - Modern Warfare, autonomous systems,Non State Actors, Ethical AI

In 1983, Soviet Lieutenant Colonel Stanislav Petrov faced a critical moment when an early warning system reported multiple incoming nuclear missiles from the United States. Protocol required immediate reporting, likely triggering a retaliatory strike. However, Petrov judged the alert to be a system malfunction, reasoning that a real attack would involve a full-scale strike rather than a limited launch. His decision prevented a potential nuclear catastrophe.

This incident raises a critical question:

Would an AI system have made the same judgement?

AI systems operate on pre-programmed algorithms and pattern recognition. In a similar situation, an automated system might have responded strictly according to its programming, potentially escalating the situation. While AI continues to evolve, its limitations in interpreting context and uncertainty remain significant. These limitations are further compounded by automation bias, where human operators tend to trust machine-generated outputs without sufficient scrutiny.

Future of Warfare is no longer confined to battlefields, soldiers or even physical violence. In the contemporary era, conflicts are increasingly fought through algorithms, drones and digital networks. This transformation signals not just a change in the tools of war, but a deeper shift in its nature. This shift is not merely technological;it is structural. Technology is redefining power, strategy, and the conduct of war.

Technological Transformation and Its Risks

One of such challenges in the realms AI based intelligence information is obviously it's structural limitation of accessing real-time situational factors in unpredictable warzones, which might be simply outside its programming, a real-life examples of accidents by autonomous technology dates back to 2003, when a patriot based missile system led to two fratricides in the U.S led invasion of Iraq.

In both cases, the autonomous characteristics of the system proved to be too brittle for the real time ambiguities in situation of combat and human operators trusted the sensors blindly. But along with this the chances of accidents might increase with chance of enemies finding vulnerabilities in the system with the ways and means of how to manipulate it's information, such examples can get expressed through Methods like hacking, data spoofing, automated decoys, or 'fog of war machines' which could be understood with an simple example of how a drone designed to hit a tanker, mistakenly targeting a civilian vehicle due to presence of automated decoys or data manipulation.

These risks demonstrate that technological sophistication does not eliminate uncertainty, it often redistributes it.

Drones, AI, and the Changing Balance of Power

Despite these risks, technological integration has significantly enhanced military capabilities. One of the most visible illustrations of this shift is the rise of unmanned systems, particularly drones. Compared to traditional platforms, drones are cost-effective, adaptable, and highly scalable. They have significantly lowered the barriers to entry in warfare.

Their widespread use has enabled weaker states and non-state actors to adopt asymmetric strategies, powerful adversaries through asymmetric strategies. . This reflects a broader transformation in which technological accessibility undermines traditional hierarchies of power.

Artificial intelligence further accelerates this shift by enhancing decision- making, surveillance and operational efficiency. AI-driven systems can process vast amounts of data in real time, enabling faster and more precise military responses; AI technology in Military is used for AI powered image classifiers and even faster transfer of information from a source to the authority.

Equally significance is the emergence of cyber warfare, which has expanded the battlefield beyond physical domains. Cyber operations target critical infrastructure, financial systems and communication networks, often without direct confrontation. This makes warfare less visible but more pervasive. Unlike conventional conflict, cyber-attacks can disrupt entire societies without physical destruction, blurring the distinction between war and peace.

Conclusion

The implications of this transformation are profound. First, the Democratisation of technology has enabled asymmetric warfare, allowing weaker actors to challenge stronger states effectively. It can also lead to an unfolding of a potential arms race in terms of autonomous weapon systems, traces of which are already available in the ongoing technological competition between U.S and China in increased adoption of AI in the military domain. Second, the increased role of non-state actors in weaponisation is a potential threat of the near future that could complicate the traditional state-centric model of international relations. Third, the ethical and legal challenges posed by emerging technologies, particularly autonomous weapons, remain unresolved and demand urgent attention.

> **Modern warfare is no longer fought only at the front. It is sustained through networks of logistics, information, infrastructure, and technological adaptation far beyond the battlefield itself.**

Lastly, like most of the technological advancements in terms of AI in the military is not inherently harmful. Rather its impact depends on how it is developed and deployed. Given the current global scenario, its integration with the military is inevitable.

With AI and technology making warfare faster, smarter and cheaper, it is important to build a robust governance framework to ensure that AI in warfare remains humane in practice, for which human control and oversight over these autonomous systems is non-negotiable. Along with that, a ban should be imposed on Anti-Personal autonomous weapon systems targeting people directly, so that an algorithm doesn't gain the authority over human lives.

Proclamation of global norms about better safety, testing and evaluation for autonomous systems especially in weapon systems is necessary to prevent AI generated accidents as mentioned above in the article. With AI and technology making warfare faster, smarter and cheaper, finding ways to improve reliability of such systems and establishing and maintaining aspects of moral human responsibility over warfare are crucial.



FROM 2.5 TO 4.5 FRONTS

Technology and the Changing Nature of Warfare in the 21st Century



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Traditional conflicts have largely been defined by territorial disputes and conventional military engagements, but contemporary warfare extends across multiple domains, including cyberspace, information ecosystems, and technological infrastructure. As Carl von Clausewitz observed, while the character of war remains constant, its nature evolves with changing political, social, and technological conditions.

In this evolving landscape, emerging technologies, globalisation, and transnational networks have redefined how states perceive and respond to threats. The boundaries between war and peace have increasingly blurred, giving rise to hybrid warfare, grey-zone conflicts, and multi-domain operations.

Warfare has primarily been kinetic i.e. involving direct military confrontation between state actors. However, the modern strategic environment integrates conventional and non-conventional methods. The rise of digital platforms and communication technologies has enabled actors to operate beyond traditional battlefields into cyber and cognitive domains.

Today's conflicts are shaped by:

- Cyber attacks targeting critical infrastructure
- Information warfare influencing public perception
- Economic coercion and sanctions
- Proxy wars involving non-state actors
- Artificial intelligence-driven surveillance and targeting

Recent global conflict dynamics demonstrate that technological capabilities can amplify asymmetry, allowing weaker actors to challenge stronger states without direct military confrontation, particularly through cyber operations and drone-based engagements.

India presents a compelling case study in understanding this transformation. The concept of a "2.5-front war," articulated by former Chief of Defence Staff Bipin Rawat, has evolved into what may now be described as a "4.5-front strategic challenge," reflecting the expansion of threats beyond traditional geographical boundaries into technological and informational domains.

India's 4.5-Front Security Paradigm

Traditionally, India's threat perception was framed within a "2.5-front" construct:

- Western front: Pakistan
- Northern front: China
- Internal front: insurgencies and extremism

However, the current strategic reality necessitates a broader framework—the 4.5-front model, which includes:

- Western front (Pakistan and proxy warfare)
- Northern front (China and strategic competition)
- Eastern front (emerging instability and security concerns in the eastern neighbourhood)
- Internal security challenges (insurgency, extremism, and polarisation)
- The "half front": digital, cyber, and informational warfare

This "half front" represents the most dynamic and rapidly evolving domain, where cyber operations, disinformation, and digital surveillance continuously mold the security landscape.

Hybrid Warfare and Grey-Zone Conflit

Hybrid warfare represents a blend of conventional force and non-conventional tools, including cyber operations, propaganda, economic coercion, and proxy actors, deployed in a coordinated manner. It operates within the "grey zone" between war and peace, enabling states to achieve strategic objectives without triggering full-scale conflict. This ambiguity complicates response mechanisms and challenges traditional military doctrines.

In the Indian context, hybrid threats manifest through:

- Cross-border terrorism supported by non-state actors
- Cyber intrusions targeting critical institutions
- Online ideological radicalization through digital platforms
- Narco-terrorism networks that finance insurgent and extremist activities

These threats highlight the deeply interconnected nature of internal and external security challenges.

Technology as a Force Multiplier in Warfare

This shift toward hybrid modes of conflict is inseparable from the rapid integration of emerging technologies, which function as force multipliers by amplifying both conventional and non-conventional capabilities.

- *Artificial Intelligence and Autonomous Systems*

Artificial intelligence (AI) is increasingly used for surveillance, intelligence gathering, and decision-making processes. Autonomous systems, including drones and unmanned vehicles, have significantly redefined battlefield dynamics, as observed in Russian-Ukraine conflict.

- *Cyber Warfare*

Cyber capabilities enable state and non-state actors to disrupt financial systems, energy grids, and communication networks without physical engagement. Cyber attacks have emerged as a preferred tool in conflicts due to their anonymity and deniability.

- *Information and Psychological Warfare*

The manipulation of information through social media platforms has become a powerful instrument of influence. Disinformation campaigns can destabilise societies, deepen divisions, and undermine institutional trust.

- *Space and Satellite Systems*

Modern warfare increasingly depends on satellite-based communication, navigation, and surveillance systems. Disruption of these systems can significantly impair military operations and strategic coordination.

These technological domains collectively contribute to what is now termed multi-domain warfare, where conflict unfolds simultaneously across interconnected operational spaces.

India's Response

Adapting to the changing nature of warfare requires comprehensive reforms in military doctrine, institutional coordination, and technological capability.

India has initiated several measures, including:

- Progress toward Integrated Theatre Commands for joint operations
- Strengthening cyber defence infrastructure
- Investment in indigenous defence technologies
- Focus on AI, robotics, and advanced surveillance systems
- Enhanced coordination between military and intelligence agencies

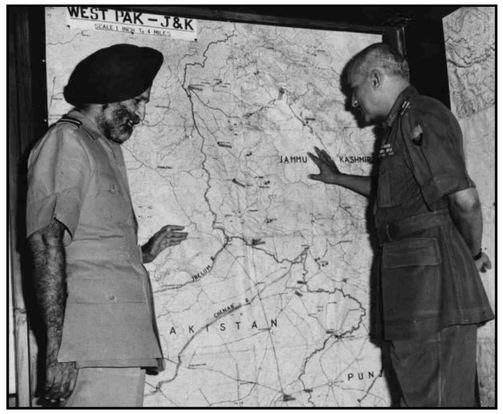
These initiatives aim to transition from a reactive to a proactive security posture capable of addressing multi-domain threats effectively.

Conclusion

The transformation of warfare in the 21st century reflects the convergence of technology, geopolitics, and non-state actors. Traditional notions of conflict are increasingly inadequate in capturing the complexity of modern security challenges.

India's evolution from a 2.5-front to a 4.5-front strategic framework underscores the expanding scope of threats in a technologically driven world. The inclusion of cyber and informational domains highlights the urgent need for adaptive and forward-looking security strategies.

As global power competition intensifies and technological innovation accelerates, the future of warfare will be defined by multi-domain operations, hybrid strategies, and information dominance. For India, the ability to integrate technological capabilities with strategic foresight will be crucial in ensuring resilience, security, and strategic autonomy in an increasingly complex global order.





ANTICIPATE.

DECIDE.

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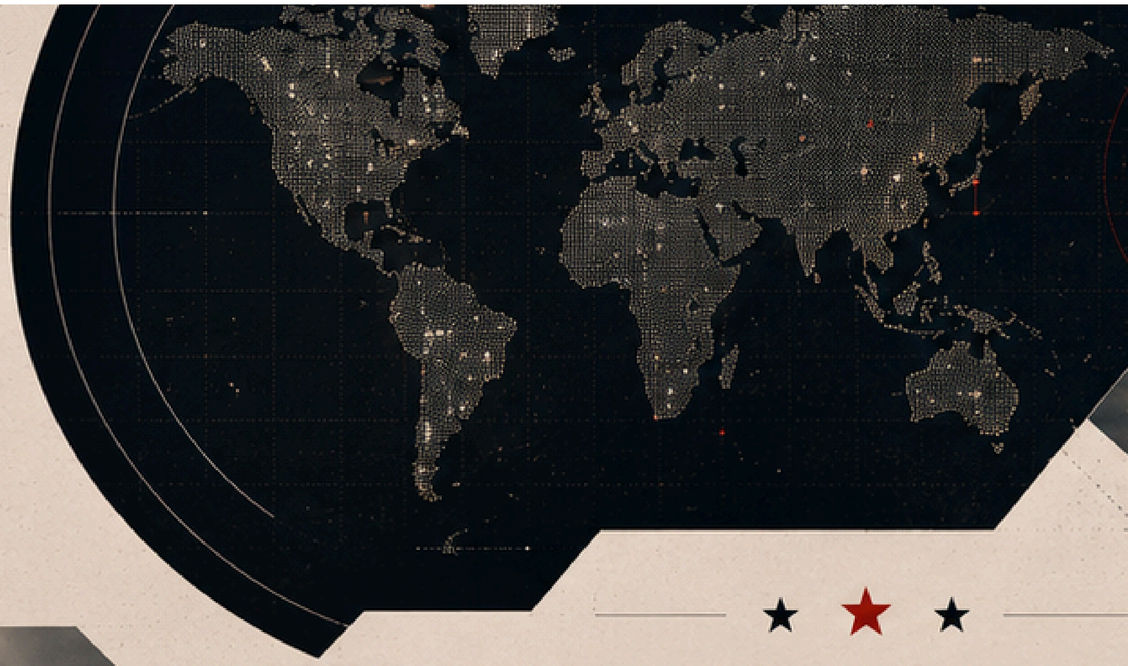



STRATEGIC ANALYSIS
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- FUTURE FORECASTING
- STRATEGIC RECOMMENDATIONS



"IN A WORLD OF COMPLEX CHALLENGES, STRATEGIC THINKING SHAPES DECISIVE OUTCOMES.



THE FRAGMENTED LEDGER

Economic Sanctions and Strategic Competition are Rewiring the Global Economy



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For decades, the prevailing orthodoxy in international relations suggested that the "golden arches" of commerce would eventually outshine the iron sights of the rifle. The neoliberal promise, rooted in the theories of Robert Keohane and Joseph Nye, posited that "complex interdependence"—the web of trade, finance, and digital connectivity—would make conflict prohibitively costly. We believed that a world tethered by supply chains was a world tethered to peace.

However, as we survey the geopolitical debris of the mid-2020s, that optimism has been replaced by a harsher reality. We are witnessing the "weaponisation of interdependence." The very channels of cooperation that were meant to prevent war have become the primary conduits through which state power is projected. In this "World in Conflict," the ledger has become as decisive as the bayonet, and economic sanctions have evolved from a diplomatic alternative to war into a sophisticated form of strategic attrition.

The End of Financial Neutrality: The Russian Precedent

The seismic shift occurred in February 2022. The G7's decision to freeze roughly $300 billion of the Russian Central Bank's sovereign assets and the subsequent decoupling of major Russian banks from the SWIFT messaging system marked a Rubicon moment in political economy.

For seventy years, the infrastructure of global finance—the dollar and the clearing houses of the West—was a neutral global common, akin to the high seas. By severing Russia from this architecture, the West did more than punish an aggressor; it signalled the end of financial sanctuary. This was the nuclear option of geoeconomics.

The manoeuvre has inadvertently accelerated a defensive autarky among non-Western powers. When the sanctity of sovereign reserves is contingent upon political alignment, the incentive for de-dollarisation shifts from a theoretical preference to a national security imperative.

The Elasticity of Pain: Lessons from Tehran

The efficacy of sanctions is often measured by their ability to induce either a regime or a behavioural change. Yet in Iran, America's unilateral withdrawal from the JCPOA (Joint Comprehensive Plan of Action) and ensuing sanctions failed to bankrupt the Mullah regime into submission.

Iran's use of ghost fleets to trade oil and its deepening technological ties with Beijing demonstrate the limits of economic isolation in a multipolar world. It is a study in the law of diminishing returns for sanctions. When a state is permanently cast out of the international fold, it loses the incentive to return to the negotiating table, often doubling down on the very behaviours—such as uranium enrichment—that the sanctions were meant to curb.

One must ask: if sanctions fail to change the regime but succeed in impoverishing the populace and driving the state into the arms of an adversary, who has truly won the strategic competition?

Asymmetric Vulnerability: The US-China Tug-of-War

If Russia and Iran represent the hard edge of sanctions, the rivalry between the United States and China represents a structural form of economic warfare. Here, the theory of Complex Interdependence is being tested to its breaking point. Unlike the Cold War, where the US and USSR occupied separate economic orbits, Washington and Beijing are conjoined twins in a state of mutual vulnerability. The current strategy is no longer about total embargoes but about de-risking and chokepoint diplomacy.

The battle for technological supremacy extends to advanced semiconductors, given their applications in AI and military hardware. The implementation of the CHIPS and Science Act and export controls were essentially "pre-emptive sanctions." The most advanced manufacturing and critical bottlenecks (such as ASML's extreme ultraviolet lithography machines) remain tightly controlled. The West aims to freeze China's technological development at a specific epoch.

This represents a dangerous transition from absolute gains (where everyone grows) to relative gains (where I must ensure you grow slower than I do). When interdependence is weaponised, the just-in-time supply chains become liabilities. China's retaliatory moves regarding critical minerals like gallium and germanium show that they, too, understand how to squeeze the valves of global production. We are entering an era of Gated Globalisation, where trade is filtered through the lens of friend-shoring and ideological alignment.

> **Modern warfare is no longer fought only at the front. It is sustained through networks of logistics, information, infrastructure, and technological adaptation far beyond the battlefield itself.**

The Paradox of the Sanctioned Majority

We must address the unintended consequence of this strategic competition: the alienation of the Global South. When the "liberal" West uses its control over the global financial plumbing to enforce its political will, it creates sovereignty anxiety.

Independent powers such as India, France, and Brazil are increasingly unwilling to participate in secondary sanctions, which they view as extraterritorial overreach. They are opting for strategic autonomy, trading with all sides and utilising local currency settlements to bypass the dollar-centric system.

BRICS+, mBridge, and the Future of Sovereign Money

The macroeconomic weight of BRICS+ is undeniable. In 2025, it accounted for 54% of the global population and 28.9% of global GDP at market exchange rates. In PPP terms, the BRICS+ share of global GDP reached 42.5%, while the G7's share declined rapidly. This economic mass provides the gravity required to sustain an independent financial architecture. The weaponisation of the dollar has forced the BRICS+ coalition to accelerate the development of alternative payment structures.

The most potent threat to the current financial order is Project mBridge, a Currency Bank Digital Currency (CBDC) platform, developed by the Bank for International Settlements (BIS) alongside the central banks of mainland China, Hong Kong, Thailand, the UAE, and Saudi Arabia. mBridge facilitates real-time, peer-to-peer cross-border foreign exchange and transactions. By April 2026, it had processed over $55 billion in cumulative cross-border transactions, an astonishing 2,500-fold increase from its 2022 pilot. The platform utilises Distributed Ledger Technology to execute payments via smart contracts, completely circumventing traditional correspondent banking networks and, by extension, the reach of U.S. economic sanctions. The geopolitical sensitivity of this success led the BIS to quietly exit the project in late 2024 to focus on a Western-centric rival initiative, Project Agorá, leaving mBridge firmly under Beijing's influence and that of its regional partners.

The BRICS Pay Initiative and Commodity Exchanges

In tandem with CBDC developments, BRICS is aggressively pursuing BRICS Pay, a decentralised international payments system. The envisioned system comprises an interoperable retail QR code network, a B2B payment protocol, and a loyalty system designed to boost regional tourism.

While a single BRICS currency remains a distant prospect due to vastly differing inflation rates and living standards across member states, the mechanical integration of existing regional networks is progressing rapidly. In 2026, efforts are underway to establish standardised protocols linking Russia's System for Transfer of Financial Messages (SPFS), China's CIPS, and India's UPI, allowing for seamless cross-border trade in local currencies.

This financial infrastructure is being developed to support physical commodity flows. The initiative to establish a BRICS Grain Exchange is a prime example, designed to consolidate 30%-40% of the global supply of key grain crops and trade them in local currencies. Over time, this exchange is expected to evolve into a full-fledged commodities market where vital energy resources and strategic metals will be traded, completely bypassing Western financial institutions and, consequently, Western sanctions. This development may eventually erode the structural power the West currently wields.

The Humanitarian and Ethical Calculus

Finally, one cannot ignore the human cost. Sanctions are often marketed as a bloodless alternative to military intervention. However, the reality on the ground in sanctioned geographies is anything but bloodless. The degradation of healthcare systems, the collapse of currency value, and the resulting migration crises are the kinetic results of economic warfare.

In the strategic competition of the 21st century, soft power is won or lost based on perceived fairness. When sanctions are seen as blunt instruments that punish the vulnerable while the elites remain insulated through black markets, the moral authority of the sanctioning power is eroded.

Conclusion: Toward a New Geoeconomic Realism

The "World in Conflict" today is defined by a fundamental tension: we are too integrated to decouple entirely, yet too distrustful to cooperate fully. Economic sanctions, once a scalpel in the toolkit of statecraft, have become a sledgehammer. The challenge of the next decade is not simply how to impose pain on adversaries, but how to manage the blowback of a fragmented global economy. We must move beyond the binary of trade/war and recognise that we are in a permanent state of grey-zone economic competition. If we continue to treat the global financial system as a weapon, we must be prepared for the day it ceases to be a system at all.

The goal of strategic competition should not be the total destruction of an opponent's economy, a form of self-harm in a globalised world, but the creation of a resilient, rules-based order that acknowledges the reality of power politics without sacrificing the benefits of global exchange.

The era of the Golden Arches peace may be over, but the era of the Sanctioned Abyss is one we cannot afford to enter. Statecraft in 2026 requires a return to a more nuanced realism. One that understands that in the theatre of economic warfare, the most powerful weapon is not the one that destroys the enemy, but the one that preserves the integrity of the world in which we all must trade.

> **"Fragmented ledgers and competing payment systems reflect a deeper reality: economic interdependence is increasingly being reorganised along geopolitical lines."**



FROM GLOBALISATION TO FRAGMENTATION

The Geopolitics of Semiconductor Decoupling and the Changing World Order



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In the recent years of the 21st century, semiconductors have become one of the greatest backbones of the global economy and technology, powering everything from emerging electronic devices to advanced military systems. Often described as the "new oil," these microchips are central not only to technological leadership but also to national security.

For the last 2 decades, semiconductor production and distribution have reflected the logic of globalisation deep interdependence, complex supply chains, and cross-border cooperation. However, rapid geopolitical shifts have placed this interconnected system under increasing strain. Rising tensions among major powers have transformed semiconductors into instruments of strategic competition, accelerating the fragmentation of the global economic order.

Globalisation and the Rise of Interdependent Supply Chains

Globalisation reached its peak during the late 20th century and the early 21st century through market integration and the establishment of international production networks. The semiconductor industry became one of the most prominent examples of this phenomenon.

Production processes distributed themselves across different countries: design in one region, fabrication in another, and assembly elsewhere. This specialised multinational system connects multiple locations to achieve optimal efficiency and cost savings. Global network required maintenance from TSMC(Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company), Intel, and other major industry companies.

Underlying this model was a key assumption, that economic interdependence would promote geopolitical stability and reduce the likelihood of conflict. While globalisation delivered economic benefits, it also introduced new vulnerabilities. Dependence on external suppliers for critical technologies exposed states to risks during periods of political tension or conflict.

Semiconductor Decoupling and the Breakdown of Globalisation

The ongoing process of semiconductor decoupling reflects a visible shift toward fragmentation. States are increasingly seeking to reduce dependence on foreign technology amid escalating geopolitical competition.

This has led to policies such as export controls, restrictions on technology transfer, and incentives for domestic manufacturing. These measures mark a departure from the principles of globalisation, as states prioritise security, resilience, and strategic autonomy over efficiency and openness.

The semiconductor sector has become the focal point of this shift. The global system, once defined by interdependence, is increasingly shaped by political considerations. Access to advanced chips is no longer determined solely by market dynamics, but by strategic decisions and geopolitical alignments.

Geopolitics of Semiconductors: Power, Conflict and Strategic Control

Semiconductors have become central to the projection of state power. Countries that dominate their production gain significant leverage in global markets and influence over technological standards.

In the military domain, semiconductors are indispensable. They underpin precision-guided weapons, surveillance systems, communication networks, and cyber capabilities. Access to advanced chips now directly affects defence readiness and operational effectiveness. As a result, semiconductors are no longer just economic assets, they are critical components of national security.

Taiwan illustrates this dynamic clearly. As the home of TSMC, it occupies a pivotal position in the global semiconductor ecosystem. Its centrality makes it both indispensable and vulnerable. Any disruption in Taiwan's production would have far-reaching consequences across industries and national economies.

This vulnerability has intensified strategic competition among major powers, each seeking to develop independent semiconductor capabilities. The result is rising geopolitical tension and a growing emphasis on technological sovereignty.

A Fragmented Future and India's Strategic Opportunity

Current world order system experiences its transformation because countries choose to separate their semiconductor industries from each other so they can compete with one another. The world now exists in a new period which emerges through international competition and nations choosing specific partnerships to build opposing power groups. Security risks now dictate economic activities which create new links that connect business operations with international political relationships.

For India, this transition presents both challenges and opportunities. As global supply chains reorganise, there is space for new entrants. India has demonstrated its intent to build a domestic semiconductor ecosystem through policy initiatives and investment incentives.

However, significant hurdles remain. Bridging technological gaps, developing manufacturing capacity, and attracting investment require sustained effort. At the same time, India must balance its reliance on foreign expertise with the need to maintain strategic autonomy.

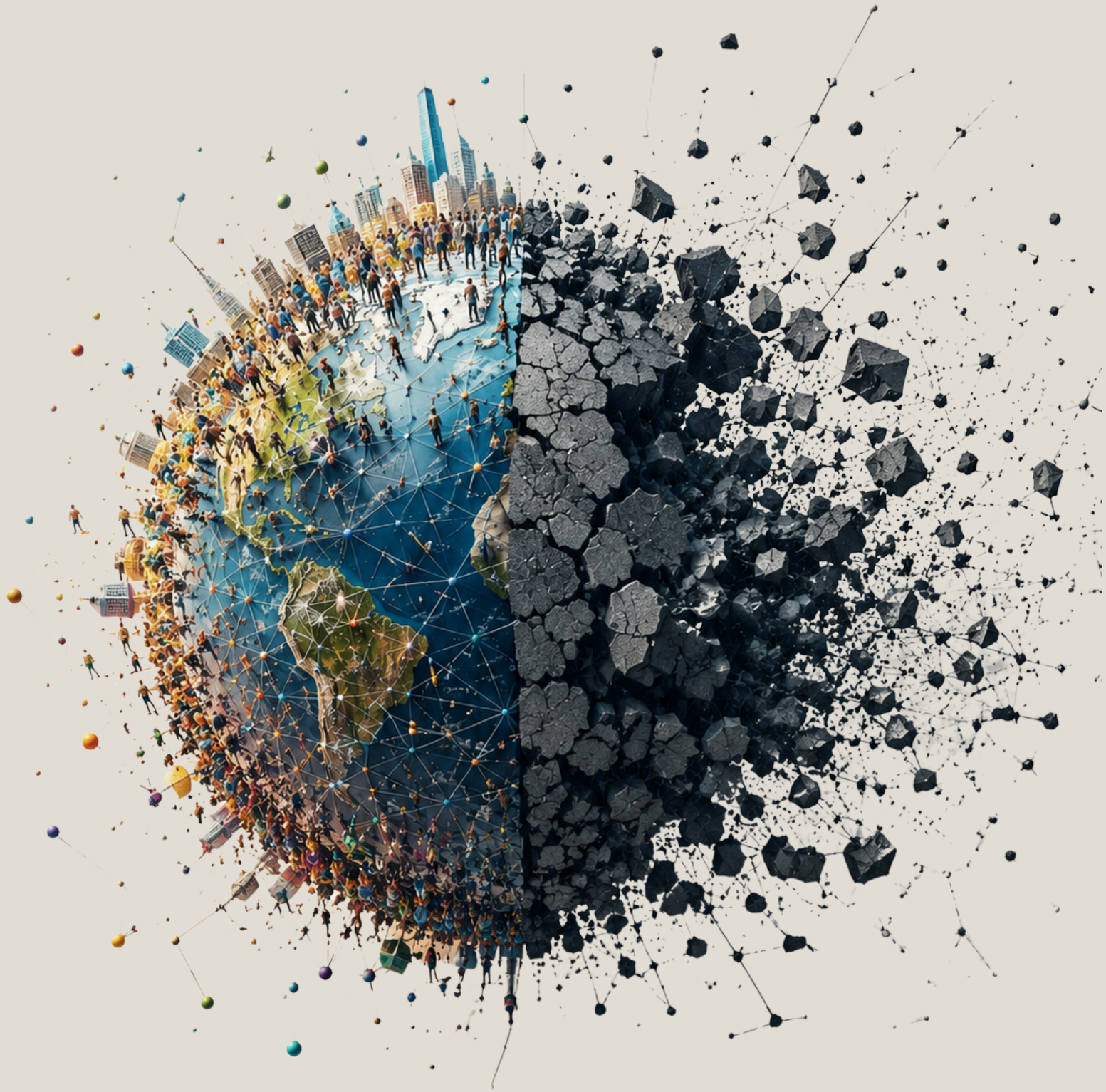
Successfully navigating this transition will require a long-term approach focused on capability-building, institutional coordination, and integration into global value chains without overdependence.

Conclusion

The shift from globalisation to fragmentation represents a defining moment in contemporary international relations. Semiconductor decoupling lies at the centre of this transformation, shaping the future of power, security, and economic governance.

In the emerging world order, influence will increasingly be determined not only by military strength or economic size, but by control over the technologies that sustain modern life.

Semiconductors are no longer just components. They are instruments of strategy, leverage, and power.



STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

THE GEOECONOMICS OF ENERGY TRANSITION

Politics of Energy Security in the 21st Century



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In the 21st century, the accelerating global transition from fossil fuels to renewable energy has played a crucial role in reconfiguring the geopolitical significance of natural resources, reflecting the strategic competition in critical minerals such as lithium and cobalt. The energy transition itself reflects a material transition. " Batteries, wind turbines, solar panels, and electric vehicles (EVs) rely on lithium, cobalt, nickel, and rare earth elements – making clean technologies far more mineral-intensive than fossil fuel systems."(Kuo, 2025). As states work on both decarbonization and technological progress at the same time, controlling the supply chains of important minerals has become a key factor in national security and economic power. As a result, the modern international system is seeing the rise of what can be called "critical minerals wars," in which access to, extraction of, processing of, and distribution of these resources are all deeply tied to geopolitical rivalries and geoeconomic strategies.

In this realm of conflict and competition, it is important to understand that critical minerals are concentrated in certain geographical regions, leading to the development of fragmented supply chains. This has led to a great rivalry in keeping up with the prospects of demand and production needs, where the rise of critical minerals has led to the development of new forms of resource nationalism, particularly among the countries of the global south. Indonesia provides a classic case in point when it imposed restrictions on exporting unprocessed nickel to promote refining and battery manufacturing activities within its boundaries. Through such measures, Indonesia has managed to establish itself as an important part of the international electric vehicles' value chain, thus gaining bargaining power in international affairs.

Here, resource nationalism can be said to have gone beyond issues related to sovereignty to focus on strategic integration in the international value chains. According to the European Centre for Development Policy Management, the policy choice represents an emerging pattern among nations in the Global South that seek to benefit from export controls and industrialisation.

"This shift often involves seeking to maximise the potential domestic economic benefits from foreign actors operating locally or utilising supply dominance for geopolitical influence. Resource nationalism is not new to Asia, but it has been transformed in recent years by global competition for critical minerals essential to renewable energy technologies, electric vehicles, semiconductors, aerospace, and defence manufacturing." (Welcome to Zscaler Directory Authentication, 2026). This can be highlighted as several interventions by governments based on their economic goals, country relations, and the greater strategic demand of the resource. These interventions are geopolitical too, where there has been an intersection of the resource endowment and policy assertiveness, providing a larger bargaining power to the mineral-rich states of Asia, Africa, and Latin America.

The most frequently cited example of a situation in International Political Economy is that of China imposing a ban on the export of rare earths to Japan in 2010 during a diplomatic conflict. At the time, China was producing more than 90% of the world's supply of rare earths, which were important ingredients used in electronics, defence equipment, and renewables. In terms of resource nationalism, the leverage seemed to exist since China seemed to hold structural power due to its production capabilities of the resource. Indeed, however, the initial structural leverage through coercion proved to be limited by several factors.

1.1) China's Strategic Dominance and Supply Chain Dependence

The process of extraction is geographically concentrated; the larger processing and refining stages remain controlled by several technologically advanced economies, most notably China in contemporary times, creating dual dependency where industrialised economies depend on steady access to raw materials for manufacturing and technological innovation, and resource-rich nations rely on foreign capital and technology for extraction. It is important to note that "Energy security is no longer just about oil and gas. It's about who controls the materials that power the clean energy economy." (Kuo, 2025). As the rivalry between the United States and China has intensified over a period of time, China has also signalled that it is willing to impose restrictions "on mineral exports as leverage, including through new export license regulations on technologies related to rare earth magnet manufacturing. Such actions underscore the political dimension of China's mineral strategy: Critical minerals are not merely economic assets; they are also instruments of state power." (Savic, 2026).

In October 2025, the Chinese Ministry of Commerce announced that it would significantly increase the export of its rare earth and critical minerals, where the new list included five new rare earth minerals to the previous seven rare earth-controlled export, bringing 12 out of 17 rare earth minerals under severe restrictions. "More controversially, the restrictions extended beyond raw ores to include specialist technological equipment, processing machinery, refined materials, and even products manufactured overseas that incorporate Chinese-origin REEs or rely on Chinese technologies. The announcement sent immediate shockwaves through global supply chains, raising fears of severe disruptions in sectors dependent on REEs." (Savic, 2026). This strategic deployment by China highlights how critical mineral supply chains are being increasingly securitised, showcasing the ability of a country not only in controlling extraction but also in downstreaming the technological and processing ecosystem associated with strategic resources.

1.2) Strategic Response of Diversification and Friend Shoring

In reaction, the United States and their crucial allies, particularly the European Union, Japan, and Australia, have redoubled their efforts to diversify global supply chains in response. This includes establishing alternate supplies of essential minerals like lithium and cobalt in mineral-rich areas such as Africa, Australia, and Canada. The combined efforts illustrate a larger policy effort that is designed to address geopolitical threats by minimising reliance on a single source of supply for critical minerals. This competition often reinforces the idea of friend-shoring, in which states anchor supply chains within their politically aligned networks.

"Friendshoring- a term popularised by Bonnie Glick during the course of the COVID pandemic- represents a strategic pivot in global supply chain management where countries and corporations prioritise political alignment over pure economic efficiency when selecting manufacturing and sourcing locations."(Khalid, 2026). Such a move is also indicative of a paradigm shift in international economic interdependencies, where resilience and security take precedence over cost-effectiveness, leading to new structures in trade dependencies and an increasing division along geopolitical lines.

1.3) The Environmental Dimension of Extraction

The geopolitical competition over strategic resources often ignores the environmental and the larger socio-political challenges.

"The Democratic Republic of Congo (DRC) is home to over 60% of the world's cobalt reserves and is projected to supply 225,000 metric tons of this vital mineral in 2024. Cobalt is essential for lithium-ion batteries used in electric vehicles, smartphones, and numerous other electronic devices. However, the DRC's resource wealth contrasts sharply with the pervasive poverty and suffering of its population, as the country's reliance on cobalt remains linked to severe human rights abuses, including child labour, hazardous working conditions, and environmental degradation. Corporations such as Apple, Tesla, and UK-based Glencore continue to exploit Congolese miners, disregarding human rights violations tied to their supply chains. This systemic exploitation leaves workers with lifelong scars—severe injuries from unsafe working conditions, psychological trauma from sexual violence and rape, and intimidation by armed groups—while contributing to the social and economic destabilisation of the country." (Nkufo, 2025). The ongoing human rights violations in the cobalt sector of Congo not only reflect the historical injustices, but also highlight how communities are marginalised based on external interests whose sole motive focuses on profit maximisation.

"Forbes reports that children as young as six years old are engaged in mining activities, enduring gruelling labour for minimal pay—averaging $0.81 per day for children, $1.02 for adult women, and $2.04 for adult men. Many work in unregulated pits prone to collapses, resulting in injuries and fatalities. The lack of medical facilities and emergency services in these remote areas exacerbates the situation, as injured workers often struggle to access necessary treatment." (Nkufo, 2025). This reflects the systemic challenges between economic interests and human rights violations. The lithium extraction linking the mining process in the lithium triangle regions of Argentina, Chile, and Bolivia has raised significant questions over a period of time. "Private and state-owned companies, including transnational companies from countries outside the triangle, have set shop in a region holding 50% of the world's identified lithium deposits, where a water-intensive extraction process has compromised vital resources in an extremely arid zone that is especially exposed to climate change. Lithium-rich water is pumped into large evaporation ponds and left to dry under the sun and wind. This has caused the gradual disappearance of wetlands and is depleting water that communities desperately need for agriculture and sustenance. States and companies are also failing to take the necessary measures to guarantee communities' rights to participate and be consulted. Indigenous Peoples have historically inhabited the salt flats. The pressure put on them for lithium extraction has had an adverse impact not only on their land rights, but also on rights recognised to Indigenous Peoples in the context of extractive activities on their lands and territories."(In South America's Lithium Triangle, the Scramble for Transition Minerals Endangers Human Rights and the Environment, 2025).

Conclusion: The Indian Take on Geoeconomics and Critical Minerals

From India's viewpoint, the geopolitics surrounding energy transition and critical minerals reveal both challenges and opportunities in a world that's becoming more fragmented. As India pushes towards its ambitious climate goals, like expanding electric mobility and renewable energy, it becomes increasingly reliant on imported critical minerals such as lithium, cobalt, and rare earth elements. This reliance creates a significant strategic hurdle since India doesn't have enough domestic reserves or processing capabilities, unlike major players like China. But India's approach has turned more pragmatic. It's looking to address these dependencies by diversifying sources, forming strategic partnerships, and engaging in resource diplomacy. For instance, agreements on critical minerals with Australia and deeper ties with mineral-rich countries in Africa show how India is trying to secure more stable, resilient supply chains. Plus, policies like the National Critical Mineral Mission highlight a growing recognition that India needs to develop its own exploration, recycling capabilities, and upgrade its mineral processing technologies.



FROM STATE ARSENAL TO NETWORKED WARFARE

Understanding Iran's Military-Industrial Model



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Iran's military-industrial system didn't develop in a comfortable environment. It came up under pressure, sanctions, isolation, and constant external threat. Unlike countries that had access to global defence markets and advanced technologies, Iran had to work with limited options. With a defence budget somewhere around $10–12 billion, it couldn't afford to compete in the usual way. So instead of trying to match others, it adjusted its thinking. Over time, it built a system that focuses less on looking powerful and more on staying operational, even when things go wrong.

How the Structure Really Functions

On the surface, Iran's defence setup looks fairly typical. There's the Ministry of Defence, along with organisations like the Aerospace Industries Organization and the Defence Industries Organization handling production. Companies such as HESA and Qods Aviation are involved in aircraft and drone manufacturing, while groups like Shahid Hemmat and Shahid Bagheri work on missile systems.

But the reality is more interconnected. The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps plays a much bigger role than just being a military force. This factor affects both how the product is made and how it is used. There's no clear separation between industry and operations. The system feels more integrated, almost like everything is built with a specific purpose in mind rather than for general capability.

Avoiding the Usual Weaknesses

Most countries rely on centralised systems, big bases, major factories, and clear command structures. That works well in peacetime, but it also creates obvious targets.

Iran seems to have learned from that. Instead of concentrating everything in one place, it has spread its capabilities out. Facilities, units, and even decision-making are more distributed. The logic is straightforward: if one part is hit, the rest should still be able to function. It doesn't stop damage, but it reduces the impact of it. And based on recent events, this approach has helped Iran stay operational even after facing strikes on key sites.

Weapons That Make Sense for the Situation

Iran's choice of weapons reflects its constraints. It hasn't invested heavily in modern air power because that's an area where it would struggle to keep up. Instead, it has focused on missiles and drones.

Missile systems such as the Shahab, Sejjil, and Khorramshahr provide a range of approximately 2,000–2,500 kilometres, sufficient for regional deterrence.

Drones form a central component of this approach. Platforms such as the Shahed-136 and Mohajer-6 are relatively low-cost often estimated between $20,000 and $50,000 and can be produced in large numbers. That changes how they're used. Losing one isn't a major issue if more are available.

Cost as Strategy

One thing Iran has clearly understood is the cost side of modern warfare. Advanced defence systems are expensive. Interceptor missiles can cost over $1 million each, which creates an imbalance.

Iran exploits this imbalance. By deploying low-cost drones and missile systems, it forces adversaries to expend significantly higher resources on defence. Over time, this imposes financial strain and reduces the sustainability of defensive operations.

The objective is not immediate dominance, but gradual pressure: making prolonged engagement increasingly costly for the opponent.

Operating Beyond Its Own Territory

Another noticeable aspect of Iran's approach is that it doesn't keep everything within its borders. Through networks connected to the IRGC(Islamic Revolutionary Guard Cops), it supports groups in different regions. These groups use Iranian equipment and follow similar methods.

This approach enables Iran to extend its influence without direct, large-scale deployment. It also complicates adversary responses, as threats emerge from multiple, geographically dispersed actors rather than a single centre.

Adapting as Warfare Changes

Iran has also been adjusting to changes in how wars are fought. There's more focus now on cyber activity, electronic warfare, and information campaigns.

Conflicts today aren't limited to physical combat, and Iran appears to recognise that.

Its approach here is similar to everything else it does practical and focused on what works, rather than trying to match others exactly.

Where It Still Falls short

At the same time, there are clear limits. Iran's air force is still outdated, which restricts its options in certain situations. Working through external groups can also make coordination more complicated. And some facilities remain vulnerable to precise attacks.

Even so, because the system isn't built around a single centre, these weaknesses don't completely shut it down.

Conclusion: A Different Way of Building Capability

In the end, Iran's military-industrial model shows that there isn't just one way to build military strength. It hasn't tried to become the most advanced or the most heavily equipped. Instead, it has built something that can keep going under pressure.

It's a system that relies on being spread out, relatively low-cost, and adaptable. That may not look impressive in the traditional sense, but it works for the conditions Iran operates in. And as warfare continues to change, this kind of approach may become more relevant for others as well.



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THE MIRAGE OF RETRENCHMENT

HOW THE WEST ASIA CONFLICT SHATTERED THE QUEST FOR REGIONAL AUTONOMY



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West Asia has long been a stage for geopolitical competition, shaped historically by great-power rivalry spanning from Cold War superpower proxy contests — including Soviet arms support to Gulf nations against Israel — to contemporary US-China competition. Here, regional actors have sought strategic independence while dealing with great-power rivalry. However, the recent escalation of conflicts, particularly the Israel-Gaza war, the growing confrontation between Israel and Iran, and the breakdown of traditional alliances, has revealed the weakness of these aspirations. This article argues that the idea of regional retreat, where outside powers withdraw to allow local security structures to form, is mostly a false hope. Instead, the ongoing conflict has led to more outside involvement, divided regional groups, and increased dependence on global powers. The article draws on a descriptive analytical approach using open access data.

Introduction

A few years back, West Asia was witnessing its historic regional rapprochement. As the world traversed Covid-19 pandemics, a surprising wave of diplomacy washed over a region which is historically defined by ideological and religious leadership competition — most visibly the Shia-Sunni sectarian divide, the Saudi-Turkish rivalry for leadership of the Muslim ummah, and the ideological fault lines exposed during the Arab Spring between the Saudi-led quartet and Turkey-backed Muslim Brotherhood movements. The most glaring symbol of this wave was end of Qatar Blockade Abraham Accord, rapprochement of Saudi

Türkiye Relations, China brokered normalisation off Saudi- Iran relations (2023) and Türkiye Egypt Rapprochement (2026). In recent years, scholars and policymakers have thought more about a "post-American Middle East." This idea involves less Western military involvement and the rise of regional powers like Iran, Saudi Arabia, and Türkiye. It suggests a move toward regional autonomy, where local actors would independently shape security arrangements.

The recent eruption of the Iran-Israel-USA war has not just brought devastation back but also completely shattered the fragile emerging alliances that defined the post-COVID reset. To understand this diplomatic house of cards collapsed so quickly, we have to look beyond the battlefield. The war exposed the fundamental flaw in the region's emerging regional security architecture that was built on the perceived US disengagement in the region and regional powers like Saudi Arabia and Türkiye were ready to fill the vacuum on their own.

The Post-COVID Reset and the Drive for Autonomy

COVID-19 Pandemic disrupted the global economy and supply chains. Crude oil prices went down due to historic lockdowns complemented with decline in the tourism sector hitting the Gulf nations economy.

For decades the security of gulf nations was assured by the US. However, three consecutive US presidents' policy of pivot to Asia to counter China in the Indo-Pacific led to the burden on gulf power to ensure security and stability.

This perceived US strategic retrenchment in the region coupled with US sanctions on Türkiye and deterioration of US Saudi relations during Biden's tenure over Jamal Khashoggi killing served as an alarming bell for regional powers. This marked a remarkable shift in foreign policy across the region. Countries began to prioritise economic growth over ideological competition.

This was not just a simple sudden desire for peace but also a calculated quest for strategic Autonomy. As the regional powers prepare for a post oil economy this required regional cooperation and stability. Young leaders like Mohammad-bin-Salman,Tamim bin-Hammad-Al-Thani in the region wanted to manage their own security, dictate alliances and preserve their economies from the unpredictable swings of geopolitical dynamics.

The Pragmatists Saudi Arabia and Türkiye

At the forefront of this regional leadership were Saudi Arabia and Türkiye. Post Arab Spring both chose divergent paths rooted in ideological competition for influence in Muslim World



However, the post-COVID economic shocks coupled with their deteriorating relation with the US made both nations realise that prolonged rivalry was too expensive. Both states with mutual interests rooted in economic aid for Türkiye and Defence equipment co-production and cooperation shifted towards pragmatism.

Saudi Arabia, through its Vision 2030 reforms, geoeconomic influence, infrastructure, and expanding global partnerships like BRICS and Türkiye, has positioned itself as an essential diplomatic and security mediator in the region. These two nations are working together to create a multipolar West Asia and North Africa (WANA) while managing their relationships with major global powers. The goal is straightforward: to have local powers maintain security and stability instead of depending on the US or any other external power.

The Catalyst: When Illusions shatter

Diplomacy has limits when it is not backed by any unified security framework. However, there were talks about Saudi Arabia-Türkiye-Pakistan NATO alike alliance in Jan 2026.When major conflict erupted – igniting historical grievances and drawing in a complex web of state and non-state actors –the new regional security architecture was immediately put to test and it broke.

The recent Israel-Iran-USA war forced a rapid polarisation that the years of rapprochement were entirely designed to prevent. Iran retaliatory attack to gulf nation providing bases for US attack and major regional powers like Saudi Arabia and Türkiye failure to take any key role to resolve or mediate the conflict or any military action against Iran proved that the region's emerging powers despite their diplomatic clout and economic wealth, lacked the hard-power mechanism to unilaterally contain a massive multi-front war.

The crisis proved too vast and too deeply rooted for Riyadh and Ankara to mediate unilaterally. Ankara faced a refugee surge as over 90,000 people fled legally into Turkey, while Iran's rejection of Gulf mediation and Saudi Arabia's exposure of Vision 2030 vulnerabilities left Pakistan — as a neutral, non-Gulf actor with ties to all sides — as the more viable mediating ground. The very idea that West Asia could independently manage its own security without external support or interference was exposed as a Mirage. When the conflict engulfs the region, the local powers simply failed to manage and made any remarkable move.

US Gambit, Overreach and the Return of Hegemony

Perhaps the most significant loss in the recent conflict is the dream of strategic autonomy itself, mainly because of the strong reaction from the United States. When faced with a spiralling war that threatened global energy markets and important maritime chokepoints, the U.S. did not retreat. Instead, it responded with immense force. On the surface, this move by the U.S. seemed aimed at providing stability. However, this heavy military presence weakened the diplomatic power of regional states.

The large U.S. footprint forced West Asian countries into a difficult position, where they had to choose between supporting or opposing U.S. actions. By stepping back in to enforce a top down security order, the U.S. effectively stripped away the independence regional states had
worked hard to achieve. Washington's overreach showed that in tough situations, the old dynamics of great power still shape reality in West Asia.

The Emerging World Order

The tragedy of the current geopolitical landscape in West Asia is that the region was genuinely trying to evolve. The post-COVID era offered a brief glimpse of a self-reliant, pragmatic Middle East. Today, that dream has been paused and replaced by the familiar shadows of foreign security involvement and fractured alliances.

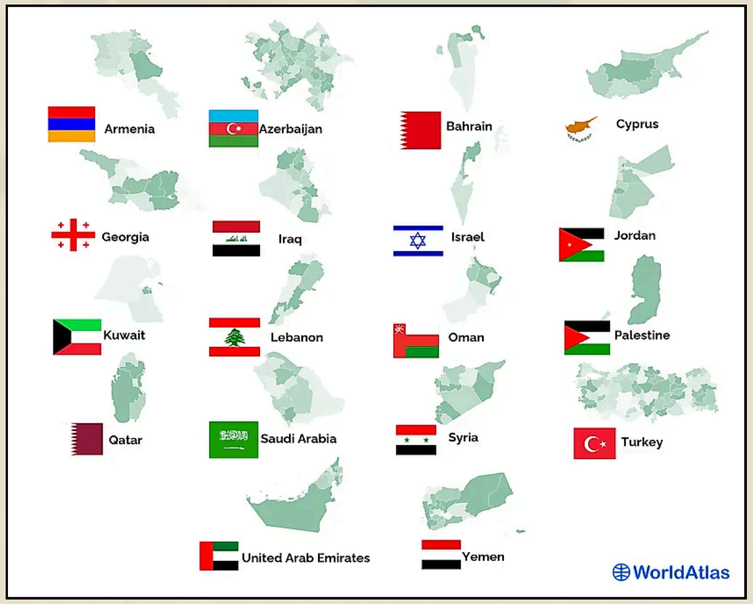
As we consider the emerging world order, the events of the past year raise a critical question. When the current guns eventually fall silent, can powers like Saudi Arabia and Türkiye bring back their diplomacy ? Or has this conflict permanently locked West Asia back into a cycle of dependency, proving that in an era of power dynamics , true strategic autonomy is still a luxury the Middle East cannot afford?

Iran has proved the man behind the machine is more important. The way it had withstood against overwhelming US forces and shot down F-15E Strike Eagle fighter jet, A-10 attack aircraft, AN/TPY-2 and AN/FPS132 radar system, MC-130S, F35 etc. and several air bases with comparably cheaper drones and missiles is remarkable. Iran with its proxies after this asymmetric victory will be a major player to dictate emerging West Asian geopolitics.

Conclusion

In the end, the dream of regional security architecture in West Asia hasn't just been deferred; it's been hit with a harsh dose of reality. For a brief moment after the pandemic, there was a genuine sense of hope—a feeling that the region's "Pragmatist" leaders like MBS, MBZ, Erdogan etc. were finally ready to trade old grievances for shared prosperity. But as we've seen in the chaos of 2026, economic visions like Saudi's 2030 or Türkiye's industrial expansion are incredibly vulnerable when the "hard power" of global giants like the US and the asymmetric defiance of Iran collide.

The "mirage" was believing that diplomacy could survive without a unified security backbone. Today, the smoke from downed jets and the blockade of trade routes serve as a reminder that autonomy is a luxury and requires sustained capacity building and niche diplomacy to navigate great power game. Whether the region can ever pick up the pieces of its 2023–2025 reset remains to be seen, but for now, the cycle of dependency has returned with a vengeance, proving that in this part of the world, peace is often just a fragile pause between the storms of history.



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THE FRACTURING ORDER

Great Power Rivalry and What It Means for a World in Transition



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For most of the three decades following the Cold War, the world operated under a comfortable — if contested — assumption: that American primacy was permanent, that liberal internationalism was the destination, and that the arc of history bent, however slowly, toward convergence. That assumption is now broken. What has replaced it is not a new order, but the messy, dangerous interval between orders — a period strategists call an "interregnum," and historians will likely call something far more dramatic.

We are living through the most consequential restructuring of global power since 1945. Understanding it is not merely an academic exercise. For a country like India — and for the emerging generation of strategic thinkers and practitioners building within it — the choices made in this decade will define the next fifty years.

The Architecture of Rivalry

At the centre of today's geopolitical churn is the US-China competition. It is tempting to frame this as simply an economic rivalry, a trade war dressed up in strategic language. That framing is dangerously insufficient. What is unfolding between Washington and Beijing is a systemic contest — over technology standards, supply chains, military reach, narrative dominance, and ultimately, over which model of governance gets exported to the rest of the world.

China's Belt and Road Initiative, its militarisation of the South China Sea, its rapid modernisation of the People's Liberation Army, and its stated goal of achieving reunification with Taiwan by 2049 are not isolated provocations. They form a coherent strategic project aimed at displacing the United States as the dominant power in the Indo-Pacific — and eventually, in the global system. The United States, for its part, has responded with AUKUS, the CHIPS Act, export controls on advanced semiconductors, and a fundamental reimagining of its alliance architecture in Asia.

Russia's invasion of Ukraine in 2022 added a second axis of instability. What began as a regional conflict has expanded into a stress test for the post-Cold War European security order, NATO's cohesion, and the global rules-based system itself. It has also served as a live laboratory for modern warfare—drone swarms, electronic warfare, satellite-enabled targeting, and the arithmetic of attrition have all been on display in ways that are now studied across defence establishments worldwide.

These two fault lines—the Pacific and the European—are not isolated. They are increasingly interconnected. Beijing observes Western responses to Moscow with close attention, calibrating what deterrence actually costs. Moscow, cut off from Western technology, deepens its dependence on Beijing. The two major revisionist powers are not formal allies, but their shared interest in weakening the Western-led order has produced a de facto alignment that strategists are only beginning to fully assess.

The Multipolar Illusion

Into this rivalry, a chorus of voices — particularly from the Global South — has called for multipolarity: a world of several great powers rather than one or two dominant ones. The argument is intuitive. Concentration of power produces coercion; distribution of power produces autonomy.

However, multipolarity is not inherently stable, and history offers sobering lessons. The multipolar Europe of 1914 did not produce balanced peace—it produced the First World War. The critical question is not whether multiple power centres exist, but whether they are governed by sufficient rules, institutions, and mutual restraint to prevent miscalculation.

Today's emerging multipolarity lacks precisely those guardrails. The multilateral institutions built after 1945 — the UN, WTO, IMF — are either gridlocked or being bypassed. New formations like the BRICS+ grouping, the Shanghai Cooperation Organisation, and various bilateral frameworks are emerging, but they are too fragmented and interest-driven.

We are, in effect, witnessing the centrifugal forces of multipolarity without the centripetal institutions required to stabilise them.



Technology as the New Terrain

Perhaps the most important — and least understood — dimension of great power rivalry is its technological character. Competition is no longer primarily for territory or traditional resources. It is for dominance in the technologies that will define military and economic power in the coming decades: artificial intelligence, quantum computing, hypersonic systems, autonomous platforms, space capabilities, and semiconductors.

This shift has profound implications. Warfare is changing faster than doctrine can adapt. The conflict in Ukraine has demonstrated that relatively low-cost autonomous systems — commercial drones modified for military use — can shape operational outcomes in ways that expensive legacy platforms cannot.

The lesson for defence planners globally is uncomfortable: the advantage no longer belongs automatically to the side with the largest defence budget, but to the side that can most rapidly innovate, iterate, and integrate emerging technologies into operational concepts.

From a practitioner's perspective within India's defence deep-tech ecosystem, the gap between what private innovation can deliver and what procurement systems are designed to absorb remains significant. Globally, countries that are closing this gap fastest: Israel, the United States through models such as DIU, and increasingly Ukraine, are doing so by creating new pathways that allow startups and non-traditional defence firms to contribute at speed.

India's iDEX framework and the ADITI programme represent important steps in this direction. However, the broader structural challenge remains: in a world where technology cycles outpace procurement cycles, agility becomes decisive, and large defence establishments are not naturally structured for agility.

India's Strategic Moment

India occupies an unusual and genuinely consequential position in this emerging order. It is the world's most populous country, a growing economic power, a nuclear-armed state with active territorial disputes on two fronts, and a democracy with civilisational weight in the Global South.

It is also, perhaps uniquely, a country with deep ties to all sides of the current rivalry — with the United States through the Quad and defence partnerships, with Russia through decades of military supply relationships and energy trade, and with China through the compulsions of geography and commerce.

India's strategic doctrine variously described as strategic autonomy or multi-alignment—is often criticised as indecisive. Such criticism overlooks its underlying logic. That criticism misreads the logic. In a world where great power blocs are hardening, India's refusal to fully join any camp is not weakness but a deliberate preservation of strategic choice.

The challenge, however, is to convert that flexibility into leverage.

This requires three elements. First, genuine indigenous defence capability — not just import substitution, but frontier innovation in the systems that will matter most in future conflict. Second, deeper integration of India's economic weight into its foreign policy toolkit, using market access, supply chain positioning, and technology partnerships as instruments of statecraft. Third, the intellectual confidence to articulate an Indian vision of world order — not simply as a reaction to Western or Chinese frameworks, but as an affirmative proposition rooted in India's own strategic tradition and contemporary interests.

What the Interregnum Demands

Great power rivalry produces anxiety. It also produces opportunity. Every major restructuring of the global order has created spaces for previously marginal actors to assert themselves, build new partnerships, and shape the rules of the emerging system. India has done this before — in the Non Aligned Movement of the 1950s and 60s, and more quietly in the managed balancing of the post Cold War decades.

The difference today is that the window for strategic positioning may be shorter than it appears. The technological transitions particularly in artificial intelligence, autonomous systems, and space—are likely to entrench advantages for early movers in ways that are difficult to reverse.

Countries, institutions, and organisations that treat this decade as a period of watching and waiting will find themselves navigating an order they had no hand in shaping.

For a generation of Indian strategic thinkers entering this field now — whether in government, academia, or the private sector — that is both the weight of the moment and the scale of the opportunity.

The world is being remade. The question is whether India, and Indians, will be among its architects.

> **The world is not transitioning toward a new order. It is operating within the unstable space between competing visions of power.**

> **Great power rivalry today is not merely territorial or military; it is technological, economic, and institutional at the same time.**



CHINA AND INDIA'S DEFENCE ELECTRONICS SUPPLY CHAINS

Structural Dependence and the Limits of Military Modernisation



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Modern warfare is no longer defined only by platforms and personnel, but by the invisible architecture of electronics supply chains that sustain them. A missile that cannot be guided, a radar that cannot be maintained, a drone that cannot be produced at scale — these are not failures of strategy or will. They are failures of supply.

This is the logic that has quietly reshaped how serious defence establishments think about military power. It is also a logic that confronts India with an uncomfortable structural reality: the country's defence modernisation ambitions are increasingly dependent on global electronics supply chains that pass, at multiple points, through Chinese manufacturing ecosystems.

STRATEGIC ANALYSIS

The Electronics Imperative in Modern Warfare

Over the past two decades, the transformation of warfare has been driven largely by advancements in electronics. Radar modules, navigation sensors, communication networks, and electronic warfare platforms depend on semiconductor components and specialised microelectronics. As military platforms have grown more sophisticated, the share of their cost and complexity attributable to electronics has risen steadily. For India, this shift has coincided with its most ambitious phase of defence modernisation in decades.

Investment has expanded significantly in electronic intelligence systems, integrated battlefield networks, unmanned platforms, and precision-guided weapons. Bharat Electronics Limited produces radar and communication systems deployed across the armed forces, while the Defence Research and Development Organisation has developed a range of electronic warfare and surveillance technologies. These are substantial achievements.

However, they share a structural vulnerability. Many of the upstream components integrated into these domestically assembled systems originate from global supply chains, often routed through China.

India's defence modernisation achievements therefore remain linked to supply chains that, at critical junctures, pass through Chinese manufacturing ecosystems.

How Global Electronics Production Is Structured

To understand India's vulnerability, it is essential to examine how global semiconductor and electronics production actually functions. Chip design, semiconductor fabrication, advanced packaging and final assembly are routinely located in entirely different countries, linked by supply relationships optimised for efficiency over decades.

This distributed structure enables extraordinary scale and cost performance, but it also creates systemic interdependencies that are difficult to unwind in a crisis. Taiwan and South Korea together account for roughly 50–60 percent of global semiconductor fabrication capacity, with TSMC (Taiwan Semiconductor Manufacturing Company) producing a majority of the world's most advanced chips. The United States dominates chip design and high-end manufacturing equipment. Japan occupies a critical position in specialised materials and precision tools.

China, however, occupies a central role in the mid-tier of the supply chain. It hosts extensive industrial clusters for electronics assembly, printed circuit boards, and intermediate components, particularly in regions such as Shenzhen and Kunshan.

China produces approximately half of the world's printed circuit boards, processes between 60 and 70 percent of global rare earth elements, and accounts for a significant share of intermediate electronics manufacturing. These are not peripheral roles in the supply chain. They are structurally critical.

Printed circuit boards, for instance, form the foundational layer of all electronic systems, connecting and enabling communication between components. Without reliable access to them, even advanced systems cannot function.

Rare earth elements further underscore this dependency. They are essential to radar systems, guidance mechanisms, and advanced electronics. China's dominance in their processing is not merely a market advantage but a strategic leverage point. This was demonstrated in April 2025, when export restrictions on selected rare earth elements disrupted global defence and technology supply chains. India, despite holding substantial reserves, felt the impact due to its limited processing capacity.

The Scale of India's Import Dependence

India's electronic goods import bill for FY 2024–25 is estimated at approximately USD 95–105 billion. Within this, integrated circuits account for roughly USD 17–19 billion, semiconductor devices for USD 15–18 billion, and printed circuit boards and assemblies for USD 7–9 billion.

These figures are not abstract trade statistics. They represent the material foundation of India's defence electronics ecosystem.

This dependence is not uniform, nor is it exclusively China-centric. Advanced chips are sourced from Taiwan, memory from South Korea, and specialised equipment from Japan and Europe. However, China's role in mid-tier manufacturing i.e components, sub-assemblies, and processed materials, means that even systems designed and assembled in India often rely on inputs that have passed through Chinese production networks.

Even when a defence system is designed and integrated domestically, its components frequently originate from supply chains that intersect with Chinese manufacturing.

Why This Cannot Be Fixed Quickly

The instinctive response to this challenge is indigenisation: build domestically, reduce imports, and pursue self-sufficiency. While directionally sound, this approach underestimates the structural difficulty involved.

Semiconductor fabrication is among the most capital-intensive industries in the world. Establishing a competitive advanced-node facility requires investments exceeding USD 10 billion, alongside access to specialised lithography systems produced by a limited number of global suppliers. It also demands a dense ecosystem of talent, suppliers, and research institutions.

Countries such as Taiwan and South Korea built these capabilities over decades, not within short policy cycles.

India has made meaningful progress in design and assembly. However, upstream capabilities, including fabrication, advanced packaging, and materials processing, remain underdeveloped.

Initiatives such as the India Semiconductor Mission and investments in rare earth processing are important steps, but they remain early-stage interventions.

The gap between ambition and operational capability remains substantial and will take sustained effort to close.

The geopolitical dimension further intensifies this challenge. Supply disruptions arising from export controls, political coercion, or conflict could cascade through defence production, maintenance cycles, and operational readiness. Given the limited substitutability of specialised components, even short disruptions could have disproportionate effects. This risk is immediate, not theoretical.

The Policy Direction: Selective Depth, Not Autarky

The appropriate response is not complete self-sufficiency. Rather, it lies in what may be termed selective depth, prioritising domestic capability in strategically critical segments of the supply chain while remaining integrated with global systems elsewhere.

Major economies are already adopting this approach. The United States, the European Union, Japan, and South Korea are investing in specific nodes of semiconductor ecosystems without attempting full-spectrum independence.

For India, this means a set of mutually reinforcing priorities. Accelerating early-stage incentives under the India Semiconductor Mission for compound semiconductor and mature-node fabrication would establish a credible domestic baseline even before frontier capability is achieved. Negotiating long-term critical mineral supply agreements with Australia, Canada and the broader Quad framework would reduce rare earth exposure without requiring India to solve the entire processing challenge alone.

Leveraging iCET and analogous bilateral frameworks to facilitate co-development and licensed production of defence-grade electronic subsystems would compress the timeline between policy intent and operational capability.

And investing seriously in semiconductor engineering talent — the human capital constraint is as binding as the capital one — would begin to address ecosystem depth over a realistic horizon.

None of these steps eliminates dependence. They manage it. And managing it, rather than pretending it can be eliminated, is the honest policy objective.

The Strategic Imperative Is Clear

Electronics technologies now constitute a central, non-substitutable component of modern military capability. India's defence electronics ecosystem reflects a genuine transformation in domestic technological ambition — but that ambition rests on upstream supply chains that remain exposed to geopolitical disruption, particularly at points where Chinese manufacturing capacity is concentrated and difficult to bypass.

This is a defined, tractable policy challenge. It is not intractable. But it requires honest accounting of the gap between the indigenisation narrative and the component-level reality, sustained multi-year investment in the right segments of the electronics industrial base, and the institutional resolve to pursue selective depth even when broader self-sufficiency is the more politically appealing frame.

The strategic imperative is clear. The policy instruments are available. What is required is the discipline to use them in the right order, at the right scale, and over the right time horizon — before a supply disruption forces the question.

> **Supply chains are no longer neutral economic systems. They have become strategic infrastructure in an era of geopolitical competition.**

> **The contest between India and China increasingly extends beyond borders and markets into technology ecosystems, manufacturing networks, and industrial resilience.**



ENERGY AS A WEAPON

How Resource Geopolitics is Redrawing the World Order



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In February 2022, when Russian forces crossed into Ukraine, Western capitals scrambled for a response. The answer, almost universally, was sanctions — swift, sweeping, and severe. Yet within weeks, Europe found itself trapped in a paradox of its own making: it was financing the very war it sought to end.

In 2022 alone, European nations paid Russia an estimated €100 billion for energy imports even as they pledged military aid to Kyiv. This was not merely an irony of geopolitics. It was a stark demonstration of a truth that has been reshaping the international order for decades: energy is no longer just a commodity. It is a weapon, a bargaining chip, and increasingly, the most decisive instrument of statecraft in the twenty-first century.

From Pipelines to Power: The Architecture of Energy Dependence

The weaponisation of energy is not a post-2022 phenomenon. It has deep historical roots. The 1973 OPEC oil embargo demonstrated for the first time that energy supply could be calibrated as a geopolitical lever, sending Western economies into tailspin and reordering global alliances almost overnight. What has changed since then is the sophistication, scale, and strategic intent behind energy coercion.

Russia's Nord Stream pipelines were not merely infrastructure projects. They were instruments of strategic leverage. By routing natural gas pipelines directly to Germany and bypassing Ukraine, Russia simultaneously deepened European dependency and undermined Ukraine's economic and geopolitical significance as a transit state. This was pipeline politics at its most deliberate — energy infrastructure as a tool of statecraft masquerading as commercial interest.

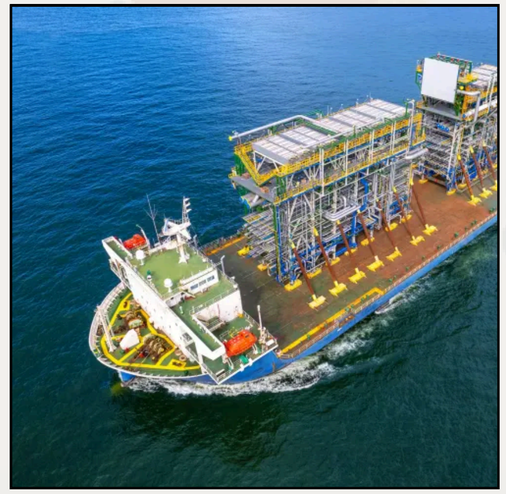
China has adopted a parallel but distinct model. Through its Belt and Road Initiative (BRI), Beijing has financed and constructed energy infrastructure — ports, power plants, pipelines, and refineries — across Asia, Africa, and Latin America. Critics describe this as "debt-trap diplomacy," though the reality is more nuanced. The strategic logic is clear: nations that depend on Chinese-built and Chinese-operated energy infrastructure find their foreign policy options progressively constrained. Sri Lanka's Hambantota Port, ceded on a 99-year lease to a Chinese state firm after Colombo defaulted on BRI loans, is only the most visible example of how energy and infrastructure dependence translates into geopolitical subordination.

Sanctions, Counter-Sanctions, and the New Economic Warfare

The United States has long leveraged its dominance over the dollar-based financial system to impose energy sanctions. Iran, Venezuela, and Russia have all experienced the impact of being cut off from SWIFT and dollar-clearing mechanisms that underpin global energy trade. In this context, financial infrastructure functions as a strategic instrument comparable to military power.

However, the response of sanctioned states reveals a deeper structural shift in the world order. Russia and China have accelerated development of alternative payment mechanisms, including the Cross-Border Interbank Payment System (CIPS) and bilateral currency swap arrangements. India's decision to pay for Russian oil in rupees and dirhams, bypassing the dollar entirely, reflects a broader realignment — not merely of commerce, but of the underlying architecture of global economic power. The petrodollar system, which has anchored American hegemony since the 1970s, faces its most serious structural challenge in decades.

The G7's price cap on Russian oil, implemented in December 2022, attempted to square an impossible circle: punishing Russia financially while keeping global oil markets stable. The results were mixed. Russia redirected its oil exports eastward, to India and China, at discounted prices that still generated substantial revenue. The price cap revealed the limits of Western economic coercion in a multipolar world where alternative buyers, shippers, and financial channels exist outside the Western-dominated order.



The Green Transition as Strategic Competition

If the twentieth century was defined by competition over oil and gas, the twenty-first is increasingly being shaped by competition over the minerals and technologies that will power the clean energy transition. Lithium, cobalt and nickel are the new oil — and their geographic concentration creates new dependencies and new vulnerabilities.

China currently controls approximately 60 per cent of global rare earth processing capacity and dominates the supply chains for electric vehicle batteries, solar panels, and wind turbines. In 2023, Beijing imposed export controls on gallium and germanium — two minerals critical to semiconductor manufacturing — as a direct response to American chip export restrictions. The message was unmistakable: in a world of technological competition, mineral supply chains are weapons.

The United States has responded with the Inflation Reduction Act and the CHIPS Act, deploying industrial policy at scale to onshore critical supply chains. Europe has unveiled its Critical Raw Materials Act. The race is not merely commercial — it is strategic. Nations that control the infrastructure of the green transition will exercise leverage over the economies of the future in ways that rival OPEC's grip on the industrial economies of the twentieth century

India's Strategic Positioning in the Energy Order

For India, the new energy geopolitics presents both profound challenges and rare opportunities. As the world's third-largest energy consumer, India's import dependency — over 85 per cent of its crude oil requirements — makes it acutely vulnerable to supply disruptions and price volatility. Yet India has navigated the post-2022 energy landscape with considerable strategic dexterity.

New Delhi's decision to continue purchasing Russian oil at discounted rates, despite Western pressure, was characterised domestically as a matter of energy security and economic prudence. It was also, unmistakably, a statement of strategic autonomy — the refusal to subordinate national interest to alliance pressure. India's position was neither pro-Russia nor anti-West; it was, in the tradition of Nehruvian non-alignment updated for the twenty-first century, resolutely pro-India.

Looking ahead, India's ambitions in renewable energy — targeting 500 GW of non-fossil fuel capacity by 2030 — represent not only a climate commitment but a strategic imperative to reduce import dependency. A domestically powered clean energy economy is, ultimately, the most durable form of energy security. India's International Solar Alliance, headquartered in Gurugram, positions New Delhi as a potential leader of a solar-powered Global South — a role that could redefine its standing in the emerging world order.

Conclusion: The Geopolitics of Energy in a World in Conflict

The world is witnessing a fundamental reconfiguration of power, and energy lies at its heart. The conflicts of today — in Ukraine, in the Taiwan Strait, in the Sahel, and in the South China Sea — cannot be fully understood without grasping the energy interests that animate them.

Competition over pipelines, minerals, maritime routes, and clean energy supply chains is no longer peripheral to great power rivalry. It is central to it.

For policymakers and strategic thinkers, the challenge is clear: how can states secure energy access without sacrificing sovereignty, and how can they cooperate without becoming dependent?

The answers will define the architecture of the emerging world order. They will also determine whether the twenty-first century resolves its conflicts through commerce and cooperation, or through the slow, grinding logic of resource competition and great power war.

The world is watching. The pipelines are politics. And the stakes, as always, are everything.



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COMMENTARIES

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IDEAS THAT INFORM

ANALYSIS THAT MATTERS

PERSPECTIVES THAT SHAPE

COMMENTARIES THAT LEAD





WEAPONISING CHOKEPOINTS

THE STRAIT OF HORMUZ AND THE GEOPOLITICS OF ENERGY SECURITY



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It has not even been more than a year when the global geopolitical scenario was filled with debates and discussions around issues of supply chain vulnerabilities, increasing insurance premiums, high freight costs and transit delays due to the attacks by Houthis' in the Red Sea. It is here again, in April 2026, we are talking about the militarisation of maritime chokepoints and their ripple effects across the global energy and economic domains. The six-week US-Israel coalition and Iran war has once again brought into light the critical role played by political geography and primarily the Middle Eastern chokepoints, in the security and stability of the international political system. It has also highlighted the vulnerability of the global energy network to geopolitical tensions and asymmetric military-diplomatic tactics.

Middle Eastern chokepoints like the Strait of Hormuz, Bab-el-Mandeb, and the Suez Canal form the vital arteries of international maritime trade. Around 20%-30% of global seaborne oil trade passes through the Strait of Hormuz (see Figure 1) while the Bab-el-Mandeb handles over 12% of international trade and 5% of the world's petroleum consumption.[1] The data is sufficient to highlight the criticality of these trade routes for global economic stability and energy security. And perhaps this can also be regarded as a reason that prompts nation-states and non-state actors in its vicinity to use them as a geopolitical weapon and exert pressure on their rivals. Be it the Houthis in the Red Sea or the Iranian regime in the Strait of Hormuz, the complex interdependence that defines the 21st century global economic order has been exploited by them to gain geopolitical leverage in the theatre of conflict.

With this context, this article aims to explain the ripple effects of the recent US-Israel-Iran war on global energy security.

The Strait of Hormuz Crisis and Global Energy Security

Although the Strait of Hormuz has been a focal point in the regional and global conflicts since the Iran-Iraq War of 1980-88, the recent par between the US, Israel and Iran has proved to be devastating for the global energy system. Fatih Birol, the head of the International Energy Agency, has called the Hormuz crisis "the largest supply disruption in the history of the global oil market".[2] A report released by the UN Trade and Development (UNCTAD) highlights that ship transits through the Strait of Hormuz came down to 4 vessels per day on March 7, 2026, from an average of 129 vessels per day throughout February 2026,[3] resulting in an almost 20% cut in global oil and natural gas supplies.[4]

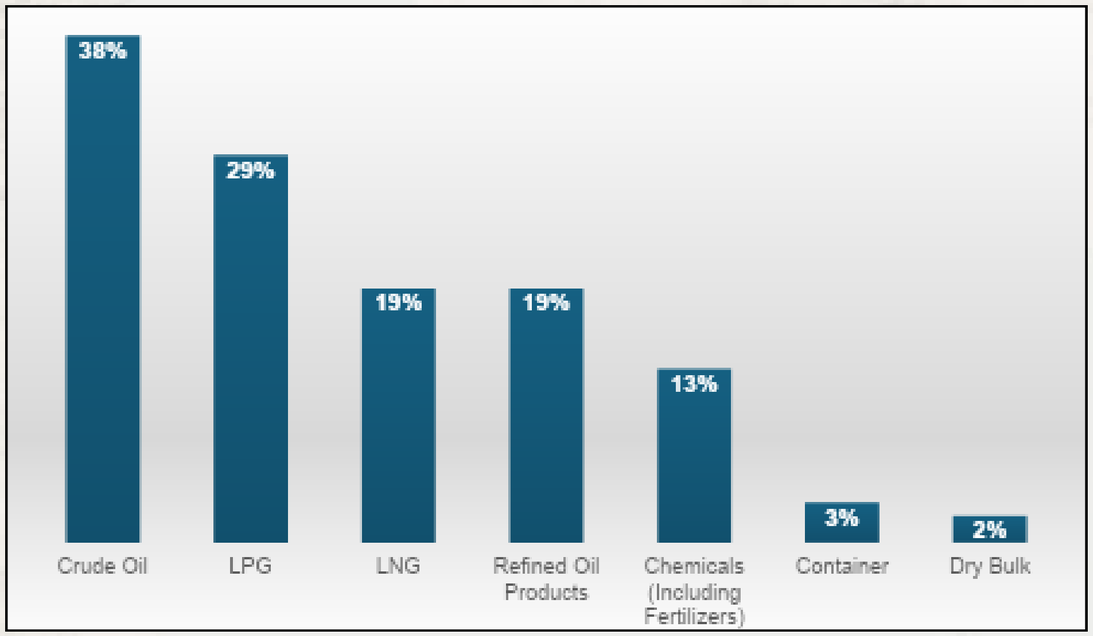

Figure 1: Share of the Strait of Hormuz in Global Seaborne Trade (January 2026)
Source: https://unctad.org/system/files/official-document/osgttinf2026d1_en.pdf

This is reflected clearly in the soaring oil prices, which, as of April 10, 2026, still remain more than US$100 per barrel for many oil baskets around the world.[5]

The cascading effects of this shock have been felt across the continents, sectors, and societies. Nations had to resort to systemic measures like the closure of public institutions, fuel rationing, imposing limits on daily fuel sales, etc. to avoid another economic calamity as was seen during the COVID-19 pandemic. For instance, Sri Lanka, which relies heavily on the Middle Eastern states for its energy imports, is dealing with an almost 8% rise in the retail fuel prices and has relaunched its National Fuel Authorisation System, which is a QR code-based system to ensure uninterrupted fuel distribution and curb its improper consumption in the country.[6] Bangladesh also has a somewhat similar story, which heavily depends on Qatar and Saudi Arabia for crude oil and Liquified Natural Gas supplies. Following the drone attacks on its LNG-producing facilities in Ras Laffan and Mesaieed, Qatar halted its energy supplies to Bangladesh, compelling the country to shut educational institutions and impose restrictions on daily fuel sales.[7]

Europe is also not spared by the Hormuz crisis and has felt the ripple effects in terms of energy price spikes, industrial disruption, and inflation. Although the continent is not heavily dependent on the Middle East for crude oil imports, countries like Saudi Arabia and Qatar are a major source for jet fuel and diesel imports.[8]

The supply crunch has put pressure on the small airports across Europe as jet fuel prices have almost doubled from around US$700 per ton in November 2025 to over US$1600 per ton in March 2026.[9]

The imbalance in demand and supply of oil and gas has also reached the Southeast Asian nations. Countries like the Philippines, which depend almost entirely on energy imports from the Middle East, had even declared a state of national emergency due to oil supply disruptions[10] before securing permits from Iran to pass its crude oil tankers via the Strait.

Conclusion

As the above section highlights the asymmetric deterrence, which is a form of low-cost warfare employed by weaker states to deter a superior adversary by threatening disproportionately high costs, as deployed by Iran, has severely crippled the global energy security and put a question mark on the 'rules-based international order'. Under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS), no individual nation, even a coastal state, is permitted to hinder 'transit passage' and freedom of navigation. Yet Iran's actions have effectively done precisely that. The emerging scenario can be aptly described by Thucydides' statement that "the strong do what they can, and the weak suffer what they must." Here, 'strong' refers to both Iran and the United States, the dominant actors capable of shaping passage through the Straits, while 'weak' denotes to the other states in the international system that lack the capacity to ensure the safe passage of their vessels. The weaponisation of this critical maritime chokepoint has exposed nation-states to the notion that the exploitation of political geography in one part of the globe can cause systemic pressures on the international energy order and has the potential to bring the whole world to a standstill.

COMMENTARIES

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CBRN TECHNOLOGIES (AGENTS)

Silent Enablers of an Asymmetric Dimension of New-Age Warfare



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In warfare, asymmetry refers to a situation where opposing forces differ significantly in capabilities, strategy, resources and yet the weaker side exploit those differences to offset the stronger side's advantage. Use of guerrilla warfare, cyber and information warfare and insurgency are all examples of means to achieve asymmetry. The most recent US-Iran conflict demonstrated two such asymmetries- technological and financial. With the use of low-cost drone technologies Iran was able to successfully challenge the adversarial and technological might of high-cost US air defence systems and create financial setbacks for the US, posing a question on its military supremacy. The variable that introduced this symmetry was Unmanned Aerial Vehicles (UAVs) that have been under development for almost a decade. While their use during a conventional war has also been highlighted for a long time, even then a military might such as US was not fully prepared to counter the use of drones in battle against Iran, thus providing an avenue to achieve an asymmetric advantage.

Similarly, the threat of Chemical Biological Radiation and Nuclear (CBRN) agents have been studied and established as means to achieve successful asymmetry. This can be both in the case of deliberate use during the times of the Second World War and malicious use by non-state agents. While the surreptitious use of CBRN agents has been acknowledged, the preparedness to counter such events and strategies to approach established events has been reactionary in nature. Apart from the public havoc and operational panic they cause, the use of CBRN agents causes long term effects on the flora and fauna as well as the population of the geographical area. Certain chemical and biological agents that may not fall traditionally under the definition of chemical or biological weapons have not yet been classified as highly risky or illegal by various bodies, both nationally and globally.

The Geneva Convention in 1952 banned the use of such agents. Further, the Biological Weapons convention of 1972 and the Chemical Weapons Convention of 1993 prohibit their development, production, stockpiling and transfer to ensure complete element of these asymmetrical tools due to their inherent nature as 'Weapons of Mass Destruction'. Agents that have been classified to have historically been used for weaponization on the other hand, have restrictions on their synthesis and use even for research and are tightly regulated with the help of various policies including in India, the Environmental Protection Act, 1986, the Weapons Of Mass Destruction Act, 2005 and the Geneva Convention. This creates deterrence in the use of established agents from being weaponized and their overt use by various groups. These established biological and chemical agents with a documented history of weaponization are, hence, subject to a robust multi-layered regulatory framework. This oversight successfully creates significant deterrence by increasing the legal and logistical cost of acquisition, effectively preventing overt use due to the 'denial of access' strategy.

Conversely, unclassified and emerging dual-use technologies present a critical security risk that is not addressed and sometimes, even accounted for. Unlike established pathogens and chemical agents that are prohibited, owing to a lack of regulatory listing, these remain in a legal grey zone. The use of dirty bombs that deliver radiation, chemical or biological contaminants is always a possibility. The use of these unconventional agents causes area denial zones, essentially using the scorched earth policy, leading to no-go areas during active conflict that may house either technology or manpower capabilities. Similarly, the use of such agents in the civilian population creates panic and havoc in the masses, creating a domino effect of burdening the healthcare structures, increasing the baseline threat level and challenges with respect to the deployment of security measures.

On the 3rd of February 2026, at approximately 5.00 PM, a tanker transporting highly flammable propylene gas overturned near the Adoshi Tunnel in the Khandala Ghat section of the Mumbai- Pune Expressway. While this was attributed to high speed on a downhill gradient, a sustained leak of both liquid and vapour-phase propylene was reported. A 32-hour gridlock was caused due to total traffic suspension implemented by the Maharashtra State Road Development Corporation and Highway police, causing a 25-kilometre congestion. This was a close call due to both the flammability of the gas and the proximity of the potential agent to human life. This was an incident of accidental exposure at one of the busiest highways where containment was a primary concern. Deliberate exposure events in this case present a very different challenge. On the 8th of November 2025, the Gujrat Anti-Terrorism Squad neutralized a high priority bioterrorism conspiracy involving the attempted weaponization of ricin. This potent ribosome-inactivating protein on ingestion causes severe gastro-intestinal distress within 4-10 hours and may also present with severe vomiting, diarrhoea and abdominal pain.

This subsequently leads to potential dehydration and potential hypotension, and severe poisoning causes multi-organ failure. The National Investigation Agency (NIA) took over the probe in early 2026 and established that the cell responsible behind this malicious plot was operating under the guidance of an Afghan-based Islamic State- Khorasan Province handler and had conduct reconnaissance of high-density targets in Delhi, Lucknow and Ahmedabad. This was a first documented instance of a directed ricin- based plot in India, highlighting a critical shift toward the use of dual-use biological agents, even though the investigation agencies intervened during the chemical processing stage, preventing successful synthesis or aerosolization of the toxin. These are a few of many lacunae that come to the fore in recent times, highlighting the variables that remain unaccounted for.

In an agriculture-centric economy such as India, fertilizers and the raw materials required for their production are less regulated and abundantly available. While these do not conventionally fall under the restricted chemical and biological agents, there is always a scope for their malicious use in the form of non-traditional weaponization. Such incidents emphasize the need for threat stratification and evaluation of current capabilities to tackle similar threat scenarios.

Conventional solutions do not fix unconventional problems. While the Indian healthcare surveillance systems functioning under the Integrated Disease Surveillance Program (IDSP) and the National Disaster Management Authority (NDMA) keep a check on such events. There is a need for an integrated crisis management system. Such systems would assist existing institutions on training both first responders and Rapid Action Teams to tackle search challenges locally. The learnings from the COVID-19 pandemic- with respect to healthcare management, regulating citizens, first responders and central response to tackling the situation can be superimposed in case of large-scale use of chemical or biological agents, but it is worth introspecting if we are prepared for any such potential events.

This will need to involve not just the detection of such incidence but also deterrence of such potential threats as well as the ability to predict similar acts. It is essential that we not only have the capability to distinguish accidents from maliciously intended use, but also the capacity to roll out count measures effectively and efficiently. While such events are rare, a lack of preparedness on our behalf presents an asymmetric advantage to the adversary. There is a necessity for a centralized response from and cross-talk between multiple agencies along with the development of tools that should have detection capabilities that are rapidly deployable. This needs to be backed by strong leadership at the centre with the decision makers at the helm of the command who can account for multiple variables by engaging with security apparatus and scientific experts alike.

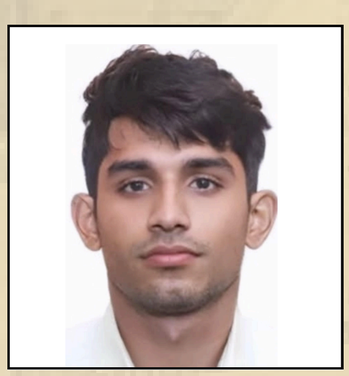
The magnitude of asymmetry that can be brought to the table with the help of CBRN agents especially by fringe groups and non-state actors currently outweighs our current capabilities of being able to predict and appropriately respond to them. There is a need for revaluation of our existing preparedness and address the gaps in the framework that are not yet accounted for. Afterall, threat evaluation is all about accounting for every physical and technical gap while attempting to pinpoint every variable involved.

To bridge this gap, we must move beyond reactive measures towards a framework of perpetual readiness to ensure that our capabilities of response are as agile and adaptive as the threats that they would neutralize. Hence, there is a need to integrate new-age technology frameworks including advanced technological surveillance to account for such ‘silent’ asymmetric threats into manageable risks. This will ensure that the element of surprise no longer rests solely with the adversary. This can be done by harnessing diagnostic precision with strategic foresight to close the gap between the evolving nature of conflicts and warfare and our expertise in responding with decisive impact.



THE JERUSALEM PARADOX

From Ancient Empires to the Nuclear Age



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The ongoing tensions between the United States and the Islamic Republic of Iran triggered by the past rivalries of Iran with Europe are often described as a contemporary dispute over nuclear ambitions and regional influence. However, a deeper historical perspective suggests that these tensions reflect a much older pattern of rivalry between Eastern and Western powers. To understand why the conflict appears persistent, one must consider the long historical arc stretching from the Roman–Persian wars to the Crusades and the enduring theological significance of Jerusalem within the Abrahamic faiths.

The persistence of these tensions also reflects the unresolved intersection of geopolitics, religion, and historical memory in the Middle East. Competing narratives of legitimacy, sovereignty, and sacred space continue to shape strategic behaviour, making the conflict far more complex than a conventional dispute over territory, security, or nuclear capability alone.

Historical Foundations: The Legacy of Empire

In antiquity, the Roman and Persian Empires were engaged in centuries of competition for dominance in the Middle East. This struggle was not merely territorial but symbolic of broader civilisational differences. When Rome adopted Christianity and Persia later became a central force in Islamic civilisation, political rivalry increasingly merged with religious identity.

The Crusades deepened these divisions, embedding memories of religious warfare into collective consciousness. In contemporary rhetoric, when Iranian leaders describe Western actions as reminiscent of crusading intervention, they draw upon these historical memories of resistance against foreign influence in sacred lands.

The Abrahamic Convergence: One Origin, Divergent Paths

Judaism, Christianity, and Islam all trace their spiritual lineage to Abraham, yet their theological trajectories converge dramatically in Jerusalem. For the United States, support for Israel reflects strategic calculations as well as the influence of religious constituencies, including segments of Evangelical Christianity who view developments in Jerusalem through a prophetic lens. Iran, in contrast, frames its regional posture as part of a broader resistance narrative centered on the protection of Islamic holy sites, including Al-Aqsa Mosque. Thus, Jerusalem functions not merely as a political capital but as a sacred focal point where competing historical memories and religious expectations intersect.



The Eschatological Dimension

Religious expectations concerning the end of history add another layer of intensity. Certain strands of Judaism anticipate the rebuilding of the Third Temple. Many Evangelical Christians await the Second Coming of Christ. In Shia Islamic theology, the awaited Imam Mahdi symbolises the restoration of justice. For believers within these traditions, Jerusalem holds profound eschatological significance.

Because sacred geography cannot easily accommodate mutually exclusive religious aspirations, disputes over the Temple Mount carry symbolic weight far beyond ordinary political disagreements. When theological conviction shapes political identity, compromise can become especially difficult.

Conclusion: Beyond Conventional Diplomacy

The confrontation between the United States and Iran cannot be understood solely through the lens of contemporary policy disputes. It is embedded within centuries of historical memory, imperial rivalry, and religious symbolism. While modern tools of conflict have evolved from ancient swords to cyber capabilities and advanced weapons, but still the symbolic importance of Jerusalem remains constant.

A durable resolution will likely require not only diplomatic negotiation but also a deeper engagement with the historical narratives and religious meanings that continue to shape perceptions on all sides.

THE PUNISHMENT THAT RARELY FITS

ECONOMIC SANCTIONS AND THE LIMITS OF STRATEGIC PRESSURE



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When powerful nations turn to sanctions as a tool of strategic competition, they often discover that the pain lands on the wrong people while the intended target barely flinches.

There is something inherently appealing about economic sanctions. When a state behaves in ways the international community finds unacceptable, like pursuing nuclear weapons, annexing territory, or suppressing its population. Cutting it off economically appears to offer a proportionate and civilised response. There are no need for using bombs, or neither soldiers, just pressure applied through trade and finance until the offending government changes course. It is a neat theory. In practice, history has been far messier.

The twentieth and twenty-first centuries provide a long record of what sanctions actually achieve. Three cases in particular South Africa, Iraq, and North Korea, offer a more complex picture than either supporters or critics of sanctions tend to acknowledge. Together, they reveal the limits of economic coercion and its uneven consequences.

Sanctions regimes are built on a central assumption, that governments, when subjected to sufficient economic pain, will alter their behaviour. This assumption rests on a particular understanding of power; one that authoritarian regimes have repeatedly shown to be flawed.

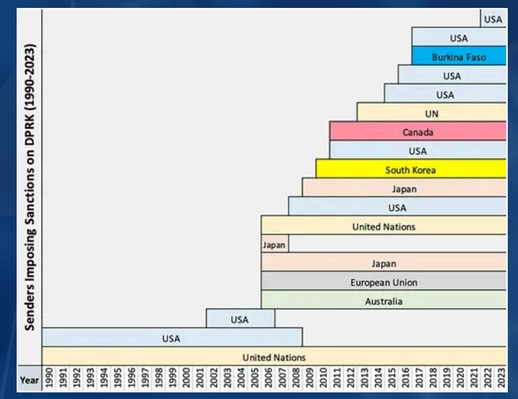
South Africa is often cited as proof that sanctions work. During the 1970s and 1980s, international pressure (arms embargoes, financial restrictions, and trade boycotts) intensified against the apartheid regime. By the late 1980s, the economy was under strain, foreign investment had declined, and the South African rand had weakened significantly. Sanctions did contribute to the eventual end of apartheid, but they were only one factor among many. Internal resistance led by the African National Congress, shifting calculations within the business community, and a growing recognition among political elites that apartheid was unsustainable all played decisive roles. South Africa represents a partial success achieved under specific conditions that have rarely been replicated.

Iraq presents a starkly different outcome. After the 1991 Gulf War, the United Nations imposed one of the most comprehensive sanctions regimes in history, aimed at compelling Saddam Hussein to dismantle his ambitious weapons programmes and comply with the international laws. The sanctions lasted over a decade and devastated Iraq's economy. Infrastructure collapsed, medical supplies became scarce, and humanitarian agencies estimated that hundreds of thousands of civilians died as a result. Yet Saddam Hussein remained firmly in power, maintaining control over the military and security apparatus while continuing to obstruct international inspectors.

The sanctions inflicted immense suffering, but largely on the civilian population rather than the regime itself. Ultimately, it took a full-scale military invasion in 2003 to remove him, not economic pressure alone.

North Korea offers perhaps the clearest example of sanctions' limitations. Over decades, sanctions have been steadily intensified by the United Nations, the United States, and other actors in response to nuclear and missile development. Despite chronic economic hardship and widespread poverty, North Korea has advanced from nuclear ambition to a functioning arsenal of intercontinental ballistic missiles. Sanctions have not halted its weapons programmes. The leadership remains insulated, while the population bears the burden.

If sanctions so often fail to change their behaviour, why do states continue to rely on them? The answer lies in their broader utility. Sanctions signal political disapproval, satisfy domestic audiences, and impose costs on adversaries even when they do not produce compliance. In an era of great power competition, where the United States, China, and Russia vie for influence, sanctions have become instruments of strategic signalling as much as tools of coercion.



The sanctions imposed on Russia after 2022 illustrate this dynamism. Regardless of their impact on the battlefield in Ukraine, they have accelerated Russia's economic pivot toward China, contributing to the fragmentation of global trade networks and compelling middle powers to navigate through the increasingly polarized choices.

India's response highlights a different strategic approach. New Delhi has consistently refrained from joining Western-led sanctions against Russia, continuing to purchase energy and maintain strategic ties. While this has drawn criticism, it reflects a long-standing commitment to strategic autonomy. India's position is not one of indifference but of calculation, recognising that sanctions are often instruments of power politics and that participation should align with national interest rather than external pressure.

None of this suggests that sanctions are always ineffective or unjustified. When carefully designed, supported multilaterally, and embedded within a broader diplomatic framework, they can contribute to political change. However, such conditions are rare.

What history demonstrates most clearly is that sanctions reliably inflict economic damage but do not reliably achieve strategic objectives. The burden of that damage is most often borne by ordinary citizens rather than decision-makers.

In an era of intensifying geopolitical competition, this is a lesson worth revisiting. The instinct to punish is understandable, but for it to be effective, it must reach the intended target. When it does not, sanctions risk entrenching regimes, deepening grievances, and pushing adversaries closer to rival powers.

The history of sanctions is, in many ways, a history of unintended consequences and the global appetite for repeating those consequences shows little sign of diminishing.



SHIELDING SKIES TO STRENGTHENING BILATERAL DEFENCE TIES

India's acquisition of the Russian Tunguska Air Defence Systems



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On this 27th March 2026, India's Ministry of Defence has inked two new contracts worth a total of INR 858 crores for the establishment of an Inspection (Depot Level) facility for the Boeing P-8I Poseidon Long Range Maritime Reconnaissance aircraft and the Tunguska Air Defence Systems. The agreement also reflects India's broader efforts to strengthen its layered air defence architecture amidst the growing prevalence of drones, precision-guided munitions, and low-altitude aerial threats that increasingly define contemporary battlefield environments and demand faster, integrated, and mobile defensive responses.

About the Deal for the Tunguska Air Defence System

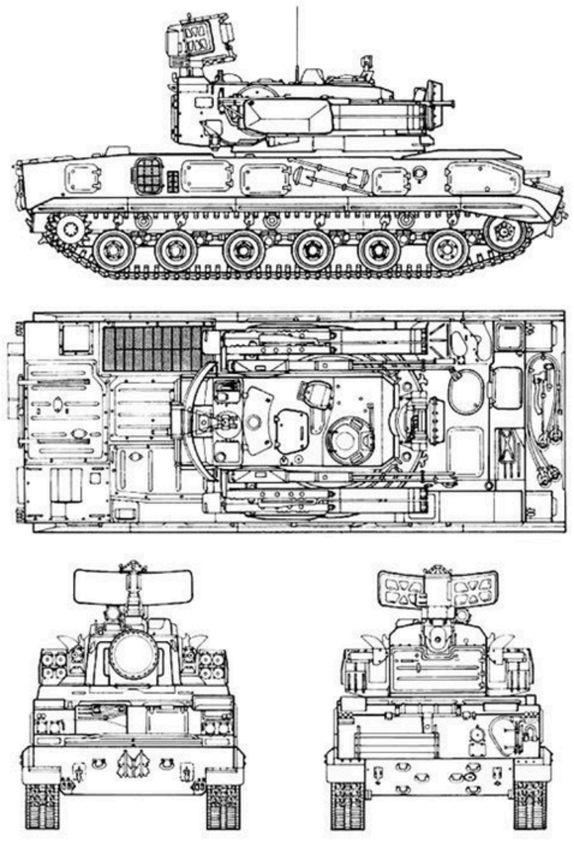
A contract of worth INR 445 crores has been signed with the Russian defence firm JSC Rosoboronexport for acquiring the Tunguska Air Defence system for the Indian Army. It is being sought that the induction of these systems will help to enhance India's multilayered air defence capabilities against any form of aerial threats that includes aircrafts, drones and even cruise missiles. This agreement is being sought after to strengthen the Indo-Russian defence and strategic partnerships, which will also significantly help to enhance India's multi-layered air defence capabilities to counter emerging aerial threats at low ranges. The signing of this agreement also comes at a time when India is moving forward to accelerate the modernisation of its inventory and the capability of its armed forces, amidst growing threats and possibilities of conflicts with Pakistan and ongoing tensions along the borders with China.

About the Tunguska Air Defence System in brief

The Tunguska (NATO reporting name: SA-19 Grison) is a missile defence system which was developed by the Soviet Union in 1976. It is a unique and hybrid platform that combines the capabilities of both surface-to-air missiles and high-speed anti-aircraft guns under a single chassis to provide comprehensive protection to the ground forces. It was originally developed by the KBP Instrument Design Bureau and manufactured by the Ulyanovsk Mechanical Factory of the Soviet Union (present-day Russia). However, this system is currently maintained and exported by the JSC Rosoboronexport of Russia. This system has been deployed in action by Russia in several of its military engagements, notably in the Russia-Georgian Conflict of 2008 and the ongoing Russia-Ukraine War.

This system was originally designed to provide low-altitude air defence for infantry and armoured regiments, solely to provide fire-cover to ground troops and slow-moving or heavy ground assets like tanks from low-flying objects, such as:

- Attack helicopters and close-support aircrafts that perform reconnaissance roles.
- Cruise missiles and precision-guided munitions like UAVs and modern tactical, or Kamikaze drones.



A Diagrammatic Representation of the Tunguska 2S6 Air Defence Systems (Source/Photo Credits- Vector Drawings/Global Defence News- Army Recognition Group).

This system has some key features which can be understood, such as:

- Dual-Armament Hybrid Systems that integrate 9M311 missiles for long-range engagement upto 8-10 kms and a twin 30 mm autocannons for close-in firing up to 5,000 rounds per minute.
- Target Acquisition and Tracking is equipped with a 360-degree radar that is capable of detecting threats upto 18 kms, along with a digital fire control system.
- The system also provides an all-terrain mobility whereby it is mounted on a tracked armoured chassis that can move through diverse weather conditions and varied terrains.

Also, at the same time, this system has an optical backup with optical tracking capabilities to engage targets, especially when its radar gets jammed under circumstances of electronic warfare. At the same time, the missiles being used here can help to strike targets at different altitudes to fill the gap between man-portable systems and long-range altitude batteries.

India's attempt to modernise the Soviet-era Equipment

As per the SIPRI (Stockholm Institute of Peace Research Initiative) Report of 2020, it has been found that India has at least 66 2S6 Tunguska Air Defence Systems that were received between 1997 and 2009. As of 2024, there are upto 80 2S6 units in service with the Indian Army. Also, India is the fifth-largest military spender and the second-largest arms importer in the world after Ukraine, as per the latest data from SIPRI. For decades, India has been attempting to modernize its Soviet-era military hardware, which is fit for serving on the frontline duty. At the same time, India is also looking forward to new partners like France, Israel, Germany and the US for joint manufacturing with technology transfer or direct off-the-shelf procurement.

As per the changes in the patterns of warfare, which are shifting towards heavy-drone tactics, the rapid-fire guns of the Tunguska can provide a highly efficient firepower solution against swarm threats. This system can also help to strengthen the multi-layered air defence network of India, besides acting as a vital shield for the mobile columns of the Indian Army, which are vulnerable to air attacks.



The Tunguska Air Defence System 2S6, belonging to the Indian Army's Corps of Air Defence

This defence deal is one such indicator that India has been carrying out to upgrade and acquire modern air defence systems. Already, India is awaiting delivery of some S-400 units and has also placed additional orders along with some units of the Pantsir S1 systems from Russia.

The relevance of Operation Sindoor and the need for modern air defence architecture in the changing pattern of warfare

The Operation Sindoor of May 2025 stands as a critical validation of India's air defence architecture that demonstrates the effectiveness of the indigenous systems. Besides highlighting the need for a fully integrated and layered air defence systems being developed by India under the Aatmanirbhar Bharat initiative. Operation Sindoor also underscored several critical lessons to strengthen the air defence architecture of India. This also validated the effectiveness of the need for having a layered air defence system that combines legacy platforms like Pechora, S-400 and OSA-AK and modern indigenously developed systems like Akash, MR-SAM to provide active resilience against a diverse range of aerial threats. It also reinforced the importance of indigenous technological capability with advanced technologies. Further, this highlights the success of network-centric warfare through the help of integrated systems like the IACCS and the Akashteer, highlighting the need for seamless, real-time coordination.

However, the growing threat of drone warfare also emphasized the urgency of investing in the development of counter-UAS and electronic warfare capabilities. Operation Sindoor also demonstrated the fact that legacy systems can remain relevant through targeted upgrades, besides highlighting the need for emergency procurement as a necessary and short-term measure to address critical gaps in munitions and advanced technologies.

Finally, to conclude, it can be noted that the acquisition of the Tunguska air defence systems is a reflection of a pragmatic blend of modernisation of the air-defence architecture, besides strategic partnerships to reinforce the evolving, multi-layered air defence architecture. However, coupling the lessons of Operation Sindoor underscores a decisive shift towards integrating indigenous and future-ready capabilities to counter emerging aerial threats.



An Image of the Pantsir S1 Air Defence System (NATO Reporting Name: SA 22 Greyhound)

HUMAN–MACHINE TEAMING AND THE FUTURE INFANTRY SYSTEM

Exoskeletons, Robotics, and the Evolution of Modern Warfare



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Modern warfare is increasingly shaped by the integration of technology with battlefield operations. Advances in robotics, artificial intelligence, and wearable systems are gradually transforming how militaries think about mobility, survivability, and combat effectiveness. Among these developments, exoskeleton systems and robotic support platforms are emerging as important components of future infantry modernization.

As someone working in the field of exoskeleton suits and robotics, I have had the opportunity to observe both the practical possibilities and operational limitations of these systems. While public discussions often portray military robotics in futuristic or fully autonomous terms, the more realistic trend is toward human–machine teaming, where technology supports and enhances the soldier rather than replacing them entirely.

Exoskeleton systems are increasingly being explored as force multipliers for infantry operations. By reducing physical strain and improving endurance, such systems can assist soldiers operating in demanding environments such as high-altitude terrain, urban combat zones, and prolonged counterinsurgency missions. Reduced fatigue can improve alertness, reaction time, and operational effectiveness, particularly during extended deployments where physical exhaustion directly affects battlefield performance.

However, even enhanced soldiers face operational environments where the risks remain extremely high. This is where robotic support systems may become operationally useful. Semi-autonomous ground systems and robotic platforms can assist in tasks such as reconnaissance, operating in contaminated zones, handling hazardous materials, or entering hostile environments before troops are deployed. Their primary value lies not in replacing soldiers, but in reducing unnecessary exposure during high-risk missions.

This points toward a more practical battlefield model based on layered operational systems rather than fully autonomous warfare. In such a framework, robotic systems could perform high-risk and forward-operating tasks, while exoskeleton-equipped soldiers retain responsibility for tactical execution, situational judgement, and command decisions.

There are several operational scenarios where human involvement remains essential. Missions such as hostage rescue operations, close-quarter battle, and dense urban warfare require adaptability, ethical judgement, and rapid decision-making under uncertainty. These are areas where autonomous systems continue to face serious limitations. In such environments, wearable enhancement systems may improve soldier effectiveness without removing the human element from combat operations.

Recent conflicts have also demonstrated the growing importance of AI-enabled battlefield networks and digital coordination systems. The conflict in Ukraine, for instance, highlighted how commercial technology firms, data networks, and AI-supported systems increasingly contribute to intelligence processing, surveillance, and operational coordination. These developments reflect the growing shift toward network-centric warfare, where information processing and battlefield awareness are becoming as important as conventional firepower.

At the same time, technology alone does not determine battlefield outcomes. Human operators remain central to execution, interpretation, and decision-making. This reinforces an important reality: advanced systems enhance military capability, but they do not eliminate the need for human control.



It stands as a realistic model for future infantry operations, which may therefore involve three interconnected layers:

- Robotic systems for high-risk and repetitive operational tasks
- Exoskeleton-equipped soldiers for tactical execution and battlefield control
- AI-enabled systems for intelligence, coordination, and situational awareness

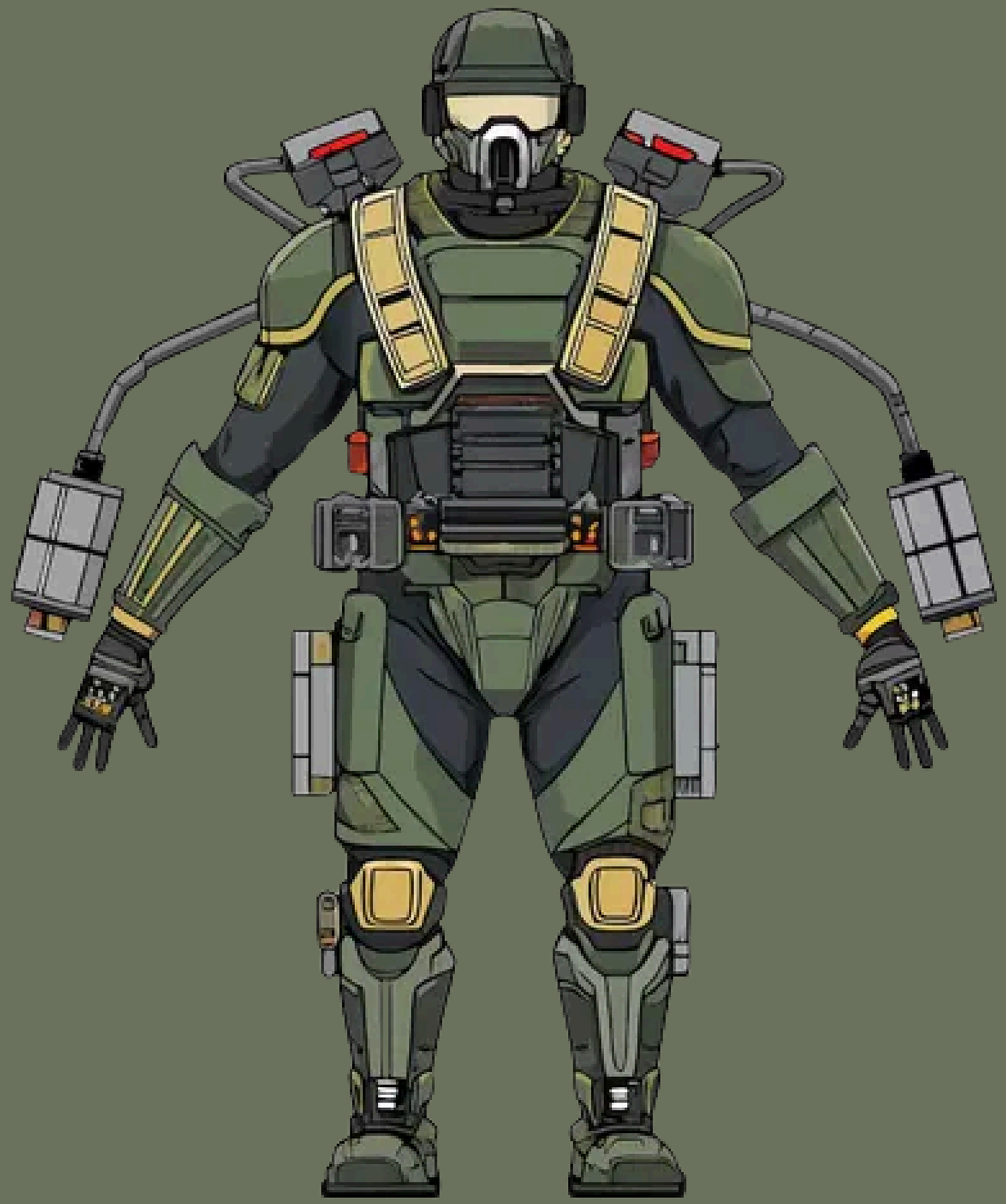
Such an integrated structure could improve operational efficiency while reducing battlefield exposure for personnel. More importantly, it reflects a broader shift in military thinking—from manpower-intensive approaches toward capability-driven operations supported by technology.

Despite their potential, these systems continue to face important limitations. Exoskeletons require reliable power systems, lightweight materials, and long operational endurance to function effectively in combat environments. Robotic systems must also overcome challenges related to terrain adaptability, communications reliability, maintenance, and battlefield survivability. Cost, logistics, and interoperability will ultimately determine how widely such technologies are adopted by armed forces.

The evolution of warfare is therefore unlikely to be defined by a replacement of humans with machines. Instead, it will depend on how effectively militaries integrate technological systems with human judgment and operational doctrine.

Exoskeletons can help improve soldier endurance and combat effectiveness, while robotic systems can extend operational reach into high-risk environments. Together, these technologies represent a gradual evolution in infantry capability rather than a complete transformation of warfare itself.

Ultimately, modern conflicts are unlikely to be won by standalone technologies alone. They will depend on integrated operational ecosystems where human judgement, battlefield experience, and technological capability function together in coordination.



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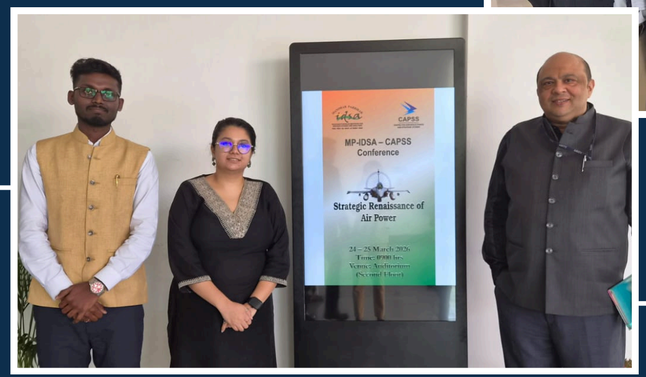

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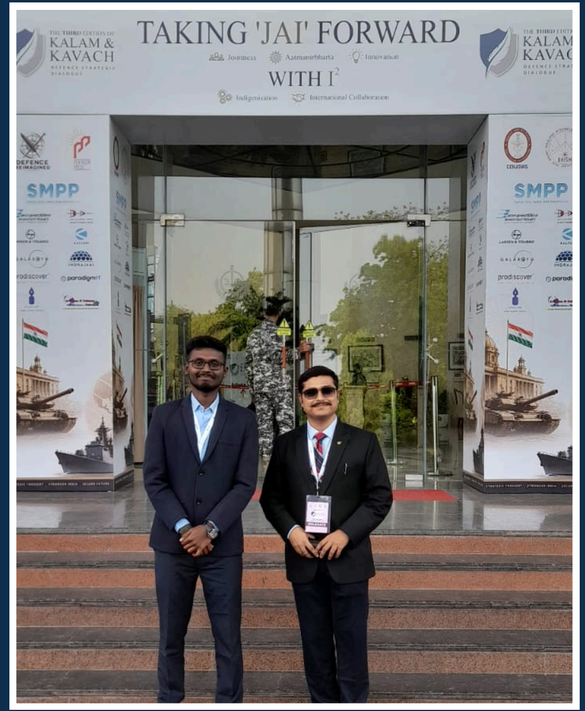

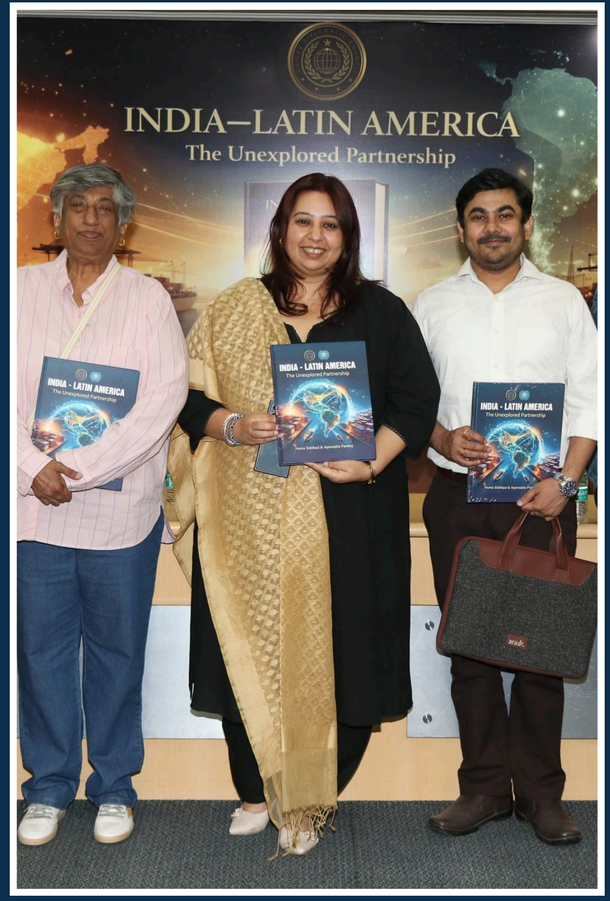















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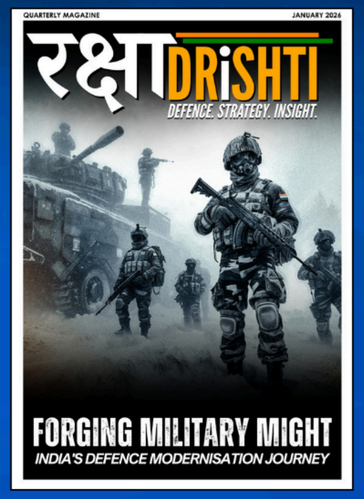

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