

# PERSPECTIVES

GLOBAL AFFAIRS & INDIAN POLITICS

OCTOBER, 2024



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“India, Pakistan could set stage for baby steps on long road ahead

C Rajamohan

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A clinical minimalism focused on conflict management appears to define New Delhi's engagement with Islamabad.

Happymon Jacob

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*The October edition of our PSIR magazine explores pivotal developments in international relations, strategic diplomacy, and regional geopolitics, with a focus on their implications for India and the world.*

*This month's highlights include Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's visit to Pakistan, a subtle yet significant shift in the tone of Indo-Pak relations. The potential revival of dialogue amidst entrenched challenges such as cross-border terrorism and the Kashmir issue signals a critical juncture in bilateral ties. The evolving dynamics of this engagement are examined in depth, providing valuable insights for aspiring diplomats and policymakers.*

*We also delve into German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's visit to India, marking a turning point in Indo-German relations. As Germany redefines its strategic priorities, this partnership holds promise for India's manufacturing and defense sectors, as well as broader economic ties with Europe.*

*Moving westward, the Middle East emerges as a central focus, from Netanyahu's controversial push for regime change in Iran to the ongoing Iran-Israel tensions. These discussions underline the intricate balance India must strike in engaging with both Arab states and Israel, while safeguarding its own strategic interests in the region.*

*The magazine further examines critical issues such as the civil war in Sudan, the three-tier conflict in West Asia, and the U.K.'s decolonization efforts in the Indian Ocean. Each article connects these global developments with their strategic and policy implications for India, fostering a nuanced understanding of the complex interplay of international forces.*

*Through these themes, this edition aims to equip readers with the analytical tools necessary to navigate the complexities of global politics. We hope that this compilation not only informs but also inspires thought and discussion among UPSC aspirants and PSIR enthusiasts.*

*Happy reading!*

*Rahul Puri*

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# FIRST CRACK IN DEEP FREEZE?

C Raja Mohan

The recent cordiality shown during Indian External Affairs Minister S. Jaishankar's visit to Pakistan, where **both sides avoided hostile rhetoric, suggests the possibility of easing the long-standing freeze in bilateral relations.** Jaishankar's statement, indicating that India's policy towards Pakistan would be responsive to positive gestures, hints at potential movement behind the scenes, creating optimism in Islamabad. This shift in tone contrasts sharply with the tense SCO meeting last year, where sharp exchanges on terrorism and Kashmir highlighted the deep divisions.

**The challenge, however, remains in sustaining dialogue once it begins.** While there has been some optimism around informal discussions, including a potential revival of cricketing ties, the structural barriers that have hindered past attempts at engagement cannot be overlooked. Core issues like India's demand for an end to cross-border terrorism and Pakistan's insistence that Kashmir must be addressed first still dominate the conversation.

India, Pakistan could set stage for baby steps on long road ahead



Jaishankar, in his address, refrained from directly accusing Pakistan but **pointedly highlighted the damage caused by terrorism to regional connectivity and prosperity.** Meanwhile, Pakistan's political leadership, including former Prime Minister Nawaz Sharif, has expressed a desire for better ties, though the official stance on Kashmir remains unchanged.

While signs of thawing relations are evident, deep-seated opposition on both sides presents a significant hurdle. **Domestic spoilers in both India and Pakistan, who oppose any shift in the status quo, could derail efforts for rapprochement.** The ability of Delhi and Rawalpindi to manage these internal obstacles and maintain even limited engagement will be crucial in determining whether this opening leads to meaningful progress or remains a fleeting moment.

## THE NEW TEMPLATE FOR DIALOGUE WITH PAKISTAN

Happymon Jacob

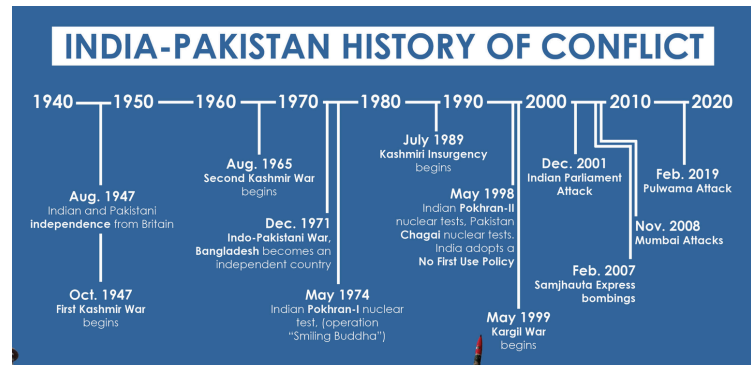
# A clinical minimalism focused on conflict management appears to define New Delhi's engagement with Islamabad.

S. Jaishankar's recent visit to Islamabad for the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) meeting was notable for its lack of tension, prompting hopes for renewed dialogue. However, **this optimism may be misplaced** as the BJP-led government shows little desire for a comprehensive peace process with Pakistan. The **golden age of Indo-Pak ties**, marked by the 2004-2008 dialogue focusing on core issues like Kashmir and terrorism, ended after the 2008 Mumbai attacks.

A new template emerged in February 2021, defined by discreet, clinical communication between India's national security adviser and the Pakistani military, bypassing Islamabad's civilian government. This **approach emphasizes conflict management over conflict resolution**, particularly after India's 2019 revocation of Article 370.

The February 2021 ceasefire agreement has successfully kept the Line of Control (LoC) calm for over three years, supported by low-profile operational exchanges between security officials without political engagement. This clinical approach is beneficial for New Delhi, as it avoids the uncertainty of comprehensive negotiations, which previously failed to yield progress on issues like Kashmir and Siachen.

**The strategy has managed to reduce violence in Jammu and Kashmir**, maintaining stability along the LoC.



Unlike past decades, **there is little public support for peace talks, and the government is preoccupied with other strategic priorities such as the Indo-Pacific**, challenges posed by China, regional stability, and maintaining relations with the West amidst the Russia-Ukraine conflict. For New Delhi, Pakistan is not a high priority, and continuous dialogue is deemed unnecessary. Jaishankar's August 2024 statement underscored this shift, emphasizing that the era of uninterrupted dialogue is over, Article 370 is non-negotiable, and India's responses will vary depending on circumstances.

**India perceives the Kashmir issue as fundamentally changed, making dialogue on the matter redundant.** The current policy focuses on conflict management, reacting decisively if Pakistan's actions disrupt peace but remaining open to positive gestures. Analysts argue that this approach allows India to pursue broader strategic objectives without being distracted by old frameworks of engagement. Returning to previous dialogue models could require India to revisit unwelcome discussions on internal matters like Article 370. Hence, maintaining the new template aligns with India's goals of balancing strategic focus and regional stability.

# IN GERMAN CHANCELLOR'S INDIA VISIT, A CHANCE FOR DEEPER TIES WITH BERLIN

C Raja Mohan

Delhi and Berlin have had a special bond before and after India's independence; they have had a formal strategic partnership in place since 2000. But it has not been easy to translate intent into outcomes. Scholz promises to break from this poor record.

German Chancellor Olaf Scholz's visit to India holds significant importance for the Indo-German strategic partnership and India's ties with Europe. While **German engagements lack the glamour of those with the US** or the historical trust with Russia, this visit could be pivotal in strengthening bilateral relations. Scholz's visit coincides with other global summits, such as the Commonwealth in Samoa and the BRICS forum in Kazan, showcasing India's expanding global role.

The timing of this visit is notable as Germany seeks to reset its relationship with India despite India's neutral stance on the Russia-Ukraine conflict, which has previously strained ties with Europe. **India's purchases of discounted Russian oil had also added to European frustrations.** However, the war's continuation has prompted Europe and Germany to rethink relations with India, acknowledging its role as a prominent and stable democracy and key player in the Global South.

**1** Germany recognizes India's growing geopolitical importance and aims to leverage its expertise.

**2** While acknowledging differences over Ukraine, Germany seeks constructive dialogue and cooperation with India to contribute to peace efforts.

**3** Berlin intends to deepen economic ties in the Indo-Pacific, marking a shift from its "China First" policy and diversifying its partnerships. Scholz's visit, accompanied by a business delegation, aims to boost German investments in India and revitalize India's manufacturing sector.

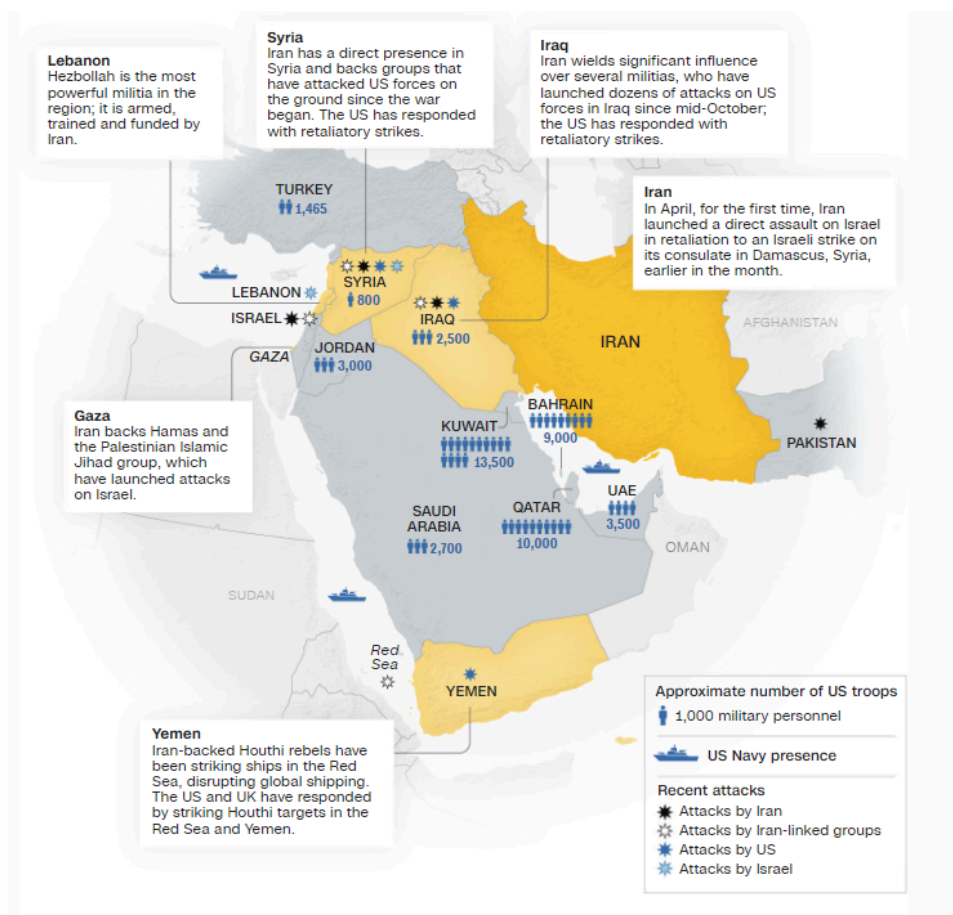
Germany also aspires to be a strong security partner for India, advocating for greater defence cooperation, military exchanges, and reciprocal access arrangements. A notable development is Germany's offer to support India's domestic arms manufacturing and streamline arms export controls, with potential submarine deals serving as a commitment to modernizing India's defence industry.

“ This strategic shift by Germany, paired with India's growing interest in balanced European partnerships amid challenges posed by China and Russia, could significantly bolster India's geopolitical standing and strengthen ties with Europe. ”

# NETANYAHU'S REGIME CHANGE FANTASY FOR IRAN

C Raja Mohan

His effort to build a new order in the Middle East is unlikely to succeed, even as the old one is breaking down. The unintended consequences of his Iran gambit are likely to roil the region



The idea that wars can create “perpetual peace” has been pursued by leaders but often with disappointing results. Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu is currently advocating for regime change in Iran, presenting it as a solution to long-standing Middle East conflicts. Despite global criticism of Israel’s forceful actions against groups like Hamas and Hezbollah, **Netanyahu links regional security to dismantling the Islamic Republic.**

Netanyahu, in a speech with Farsi subtitles, appealed directly to Iranians, urging them to reject their oppressive rulers and envision a better future, promising economic growth and peace following such a change. He contrasted Iran’s influence, seen as destabilizing through its support for militant groups, with Israel’s vision of economic cooperation spanning India, Arabia, and Europe. This echoes past aspirations, notably Shimon Peres’s 1994 “New Middle East,” which faded amid regional setbacks.

**Two significant shifts have occurred since then:** Iran’s rise post-1980s Iraq war and improved Israeli-Arab ties despite unresolved Palestinian issues.

Netanyahu’s current strategy relies on deepening these ties while pushing for change in Iran. **Although regime changes often carry negative connotations due to past U.S. interventions, they can happen through mass uprisings or internal elite fractures.** While Iran’s Supreme Leader Khamenei has managed internal tensions, his aging may affect this control.

**Netanyahu believes Iran’s weakened position, compounded by Israel’s intelligence penetration,** could spur regime change. Despite U.S. caution, Netanyahu is confident of bipartisan U.S. support, particularly among Republicans. His vision capitalizes on shared interests between Israel and moderate Arab states but neglects concessions on Palestinian statehood, as shown in his recent UN presentation that excluded Gaza and the West Bank.

**Netanyahu’s pursuit of regime change might not succeed,** yet it underscores a shifting regional landscape and may trigger unforeseen consequences, reshaping the Middle East’s political dynamics.

# A THREE-TIER WAR IN WEST ASIA WITH NO ENDGAME

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**Stanly Johny**

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**The October 2023 Hamas attack on Israel shattered perceived regional stability, escalating into a multi-front conflict involving Hezbollah and Iran, highlighting the unresolved Palestine issue as key to lasting peace. Israel’s military actions have struggled to meet objectives, risking indefinite escalation without addressing underlying grievances.**

In an October 2023 essay for Foreign Affairs, U.S. National Security Adviser Jake Sullivan suggested that West Asia was relatively calm, referencing developments such as the Abraham Accords and Saudi Arabia's progress toward normalizing ties with Israel. However, soon after, on October 7, 2023, Hamas launched a significant attack on Israel, which killed over 1,200 people and took 250 hostages. **This act shattered the perceived stability and highlighted the unresolved Palestine question as a catalyst for wider conflict.**

Israel had assumed a new status quo of occupation without significant consequences, while Arab nations believed they could pursue relationships with Israel without addressing Palestinian grievances. The U.S. aimed to foster unity between Sunni Arab states and Israel to isolate Iran. However, Hamas's attack led to a broad conflict that underscored **the necessity of addressing the Palestine issue for lasting peace.**

Israel's narrative, which typically separates Palestinian violence from its occupation policies, shifted after the attack. The conflict was reframed as an existential war against terrorism. Israel's response involved an extensive offensive in Gaza, displacing nearly all 2.3 million residents. Over 12 months, Israeli Defense Forces have killed over 41,000 Palestinians and injured nearly 100,000.

Hezbollah, backed by Iran, opened a new front in the north, prompting Israel to retaliate against both Hezbollah and Iran, leading to a three-tier war. Israel's strategy in Gaza aimed to destroy Hamas and rescue hostages.

In Lebanon, the goal was to push Hezbollah from the border and stop rocket attacks, while its overarching objective was to weaken Iran, perceived as the central power behind its regional adversaries. Israel likened this approach to an "octopus doctrine," targeting Iran as the head and its allied militias as tentacles.

Despite Israel's attempts, objectives in Gaza remain unmet. Hostages remain captive, and Hezbollah continues its assaults, defying Israel's goals. The killing of Hezbollah leader Hassan Nasrallah, though a strategic gain, did not halt the conflict, as Hezbollah launched hundreds of rockets following his death. Historically, targeting militia leadership has not been effective; Hezbollah became more formidable after past Israeli strikes, and Hamas maintained power despite Israeli attempts to dismantle it.

Confronting Iran presents another challenge. While Israel possesses significant military capabilities and deep intelligence penetration, past actions indicate that targeted strikes are unlikely to deter Iran's support for its allies or alter its strategy. **There is concern that continued conflict could push Iran to shift its nuclear policy, raising the stakes even further.**

Israel lacks a clear endgame, risking an indefinite cycle of escalation. Without steps to de-escalate, starting with a ceasefire in Gaza, and without addressing the underlying Palestine issue, efforts to reshape the region seem poised to repeat past failures, as exemplified by the U.S.'s unsuccessful attempts.

# CHINA, INDIA AND NEW DELHI'S QUAD DILEMMA

MK NARAYANAN

It would be prudent for India to proceed with care in its dealings with China on the one hand and with its Quad partners on the other.

In September, Prime Minister Narendra Modi attended a significant Quad meeting in the U.S. that reinforced the bloc's implicit aim of containing China in the Indo-Pacific. Although the Wilmington Declaration did not name China explicitly, it made clear that the Quad's agenda was centered on countering China.

This reinforced India's dilemma as it navigates deteriorating ties with China, which have been marked by ongoing border tensions, particularly in the Galwan region, and new friction points in Ladakh. **India has increased its border vigilance, including the induction of artillery and missile systems,** as China confidently maintains its position with its superior defense budget.

China's assertiveness under President Xi Jinping poses a challenge to India, which must balance engaging with Quad partners while avoiding direct provocation. **Xi's leadership has brought a more aggressive Chinese nationalism, signaling a departure from the relatively cautious policies of previous decades.** This shift was made explicit in Xi's declarations during the 20th National Congress of the Communist Party of China, where he expressed defiance toward external pressures and threats.

China's strategic approach differs based on perceived threats; border issues with India are seen as peripheral compared to its eastern seaboard and Pacific claims, which it considers vital for its security.

India's recent alignment with the U.S. and the Quad, perceived by Beijing as part of a U.S.-led effort to contain China, has heightened China's concerns. This perception is particularly significant after the Wilmington Declaration, which could be viewed as an emerging defense alliance aimed at encircling China. **While China has shown some willingness for dialogue, such as military disengagement talks regarding eastern Ladakh, India has remained cautious and unresponsive.**

India must carefully manage its positioning. Signaling alignment with the West could provoke adverse reactions from China and strain regional stability. **Although India need not embrace Xi's vision of global unity, it should avoid reinforcing the U.S. narrative that China's rise is a global threat.** It is in India's strategic interest to maintain an independent stance that balances its security ties with the West while mitigating Chinese anxieties, avoiding entanglement in confrontational politics, and ensuring clarity in its strategic objectives.

# WHY ITALY MATTERS TO INDIA

## ANTONIO BARTOLI- AMBASSADOR OF ITALY TO INDIA

Italy and India share significant common interests and challenges in the Indo-Mediterranean region, which is crucial for global trade and digital connectivity. Italy, ranking as the sixth-largest global exporter, faces issues such as piracy, regional conflicts, and the impact of the Russia-Ukraine war on trade, necessitating joint efforts with India to maintain stability and prosperity.

Italy has enhanced its role in security and defence in the Indian Ocean Region and West Asia by joining the **Group of Friends of UNCLOS** and contributing significantly to EU naval operations like EU NAVFOR Atalanta and EMASoH. **Italy's commitment continued with EUNAVFOR ASPIDES**, initiated in February 2024 to protect navigation across vital waterways.

**Italy's naval presence in India has increased, marked by participation in joint maritime initiatives** and visits by ships such as ITS Francesco Morosini and ITS Cavour, and the upcoming arrival of ITS Amerigo Vespucci, which will host cultural and educational events. ITS Cavour, capable of both military and humanitarian missions, is conducting PASSEX exercises and hosting a defence industry workshop. Moreover, in collaboration with Indian and Italian doctors, it is undertaking **'Operation Smile'** to perform surgeries for children with facial malformations.

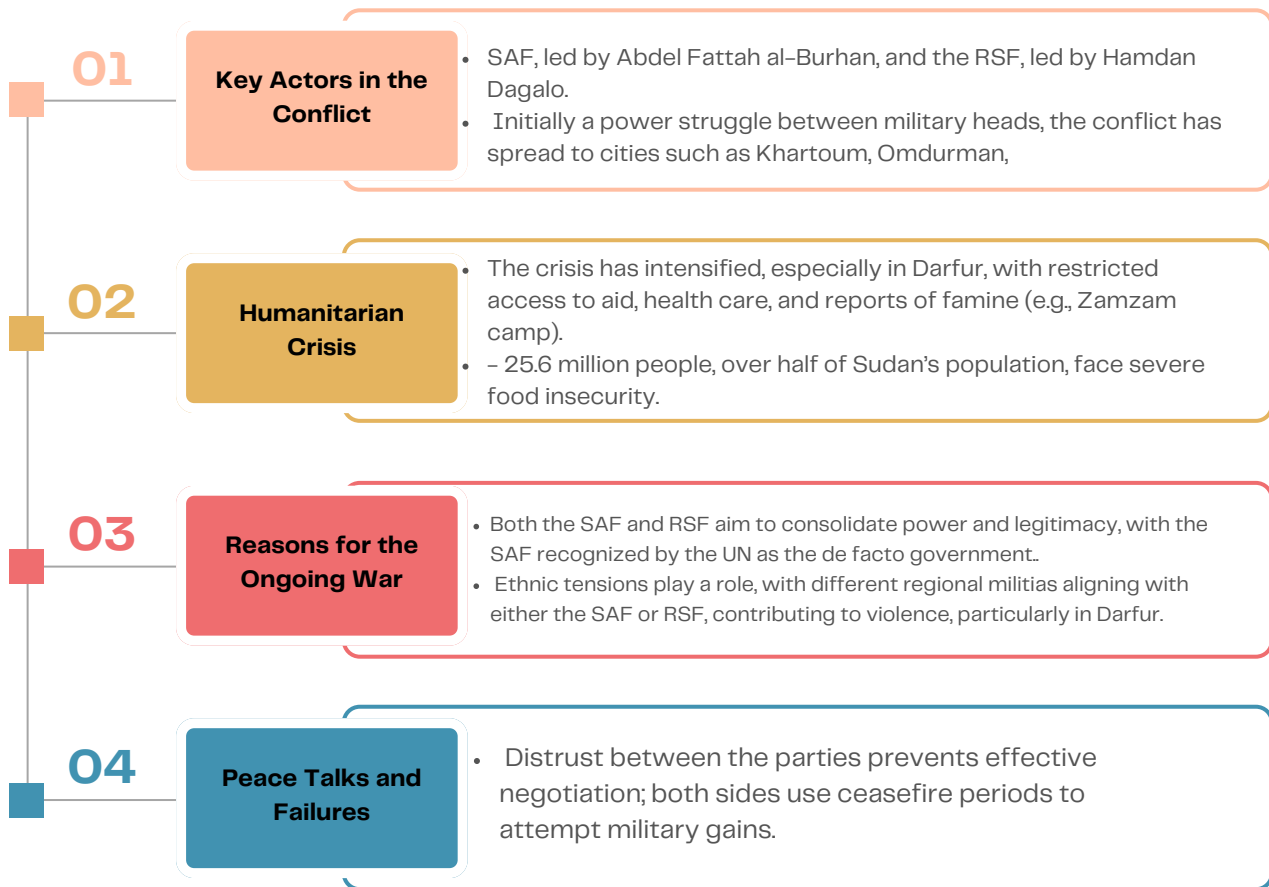
The Italy-India defence partnership is supported by a comprehensive defence agreement signed in October 2023, aimed at expanding cooperation in research, industrial collaboration, information sharing, and military education. Regular bilateral talks, such as the Italy-India Military Cooperation Group meeting, solidify this cooperation. Italy's prominent defence companies, like Leonardo and Fincantieri, align with India's 'Make in India' initiative through joint ventures and co-production agreements, such as Fincantieri's work with Cochin Shipyard and Elettronica's MoU with Bharat Electronics Limited.

Italy and India also collaborate in regional development, exemplified by Italy's Mattei Plan, which supports projects in Africa with €5.5 billion in public investments. This initiative, aimed at sustainable development, aligns with both countries' support for Africa in global platforms like the G20. Italy backs India's role in the India-Middle East-Europe Economic Corridor (IMEC), viewing it as a long-term project promoting peace and shared prosperity amid ongoing regional tensions.

Italy's partnership extends beyond economics and security; people-to-people ties play a pivotal role. Italy hosts the second-largest Indian diaspora in the EU, fostering cultural and economic exchanges rooted in a shared history of contact and mutual integration, showcasing Italy's reliability as a friend and strategic partner to India.

# THE STATUS OF THE CIVIL WAR IN SUDAN

ANU MARIA JOSEPH



***The war's complexity, with numerous actors and expanded geography, poses challenges for effective international mediation.***

***Given the repeated failure of ceasefire attempts, a SAF-RSF compromise appears unlikely.***

***There are fears that Sudan may face a fate similar to Libya's prolonged division, as international focus shifts to other global conflicts like those in Gaza and Ukraine.***

# RAHUL PURI SIR

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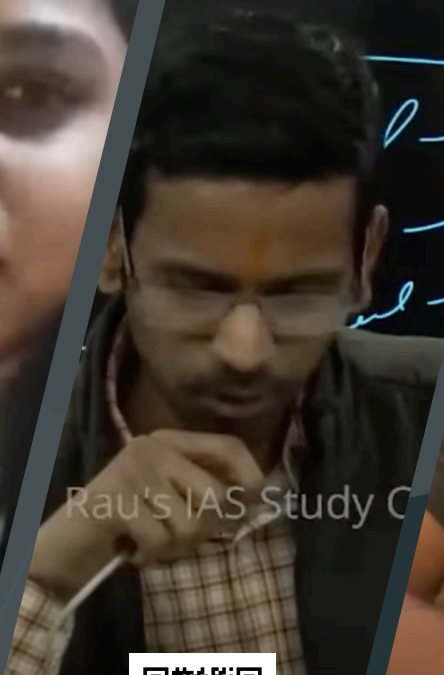
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