

PERSEPECTIVES



**WHY WILL INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY
BE A TIGHTROPE WALK IN 2025?**

**TRUMP'S RETURN AND THE
SOUTH ASIA OUTLOOK**

**ONE NATION ONE ELECTION AND
REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY**

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The December edition of our PSIR magazine captures the evolving landscape of India's foreign policy amid an increasingly volatile global order, marked by leadership transitions, strategic recalibration, and deepening geopolitical fault lines. The issue presents an analytical lens to help readers grasp the implications of India's diplomatic and strategic choices in 2025.

This edition analyses an in-depth exploration of the strategic setbacks and diplomatic challenges following a major political transition in Bangladesh. The ouster of a long-standing ally has raised critical questions about regional continuity and bilateral trust in South Asia.

At the global level, the edition evaluates India's balancing act amid competing power interests. From the fragile détente with China along the Line of Actual Control to the complexities of India-U.S. relations under a renewed Trump presidency, the magazine examines the contradictions and convergence points shaping India's great-power engagements.

The edition also turns its focus to India's nuanced stance in conflict zones, such as Gaza and Ukraine, underscoring the tension between moral posturing and strategic restraint.

Domestically, the magazine scrutinizes the calls for a reset in India-China ties through a lens of pragmatic diplomacy, civilizational cooperation, and strategic imagination. It evaluates whether 2025 can be a breakthrough year in overcoming mistrust and achieving mutually beneficial engagement.

The edition delves into the institutional transformation underway in global trade governance. It critically appraises the erosion of the WTO's legal core, and the broader shift toward power-based trade diplomacy, charting the implications of what many see as a 'GATT-ification' of the global trading order.

Through these varied themes, the June edition seeks to equip aspirants and scholars alike with the conceptual clarity and strategic insight needed to navigate the shifting currents of Political Science and International Relations in an age of disruption.



Rahul Puri

**PSIR OPTIONAL FACULTY
DIRECTOR & CHIEF MENTOR
@ ANANTAM IAS**



WHY WILL INDIA'S FOREIGN POLICY BE A TIGHTROPE WALK IN 2025?

SUHASINI HAIDER

India's foreign policy in 2025 is poised to be a complex balancing act, reflecting the growing unpredictability of global politics and regional upheavals witnessed in the previous year. Following Prime Minister Narendra Modi's third consecutive term in office, 2024 was marked by a flurry of diplomatic engagements, but also by heightened geopolitical challenges, especially in South Asia.

One of the most consequential developments was the dramatic shift in India-Bangladesh relations. **The ouster of Sheikh Hasina, long regarded as India's most dependable ally in South Asia, in August came as a strategic setback.** Her exit disrupted years of steady cooperation on connectivity, security, and trade, and raised concerns about the trajectory of bilateral ties with Dhaka.

India's engagement with major powers was equally eventful. **A landmark development was the disengagement agreement with China along the Line of Actual Control (LAC), ending a prolonged military standoff since 2020.** Though the trust deficit remains deep, the first Modi-Xi Jinping meeting in five years, held in Kazan, signaled cautious optimism. Relations with the U.S., however, turned increasingly complicated.

While ties remain strategically significant, allegations linking Indian officials to plots involving Sikh separatist leaders like Nijjar and Pannun have strained relations, bringing New Delhi under international scrutiny. **Despite these tensions, the return of Donald Trump to the White House, along with his pro-India tilt and the prioritization of key frameworks like iCET, provides an opening for recalibration.** The Quad Summit in India and other high-level bilateral exchanges are expected to shape the trajectory of Indo-U.S. ties in 2025.

Elsewhere, India pursued a delicate strategy in a conflict-ridden global environment. Modi's successive visits to Russia and Ukraine fueled speculation about a potential Indian mediating role. However, **India's approach to the Gaza conflict remained cautious and calibrated.** While condemning civilian casualties and maintaining ties with Palestinian leadership, India refrained from supporting UN resolutions targeting Israel. **Multilateral initiatives such as IMEC and I2U2, both of which faced headwinds, led India to focus on deepening bilateral relations in West Asia.** In 2025, managing relations with Iran amid escalating Israel-U.S.-Iran tensions will further test India's diplomatic dexterity.

The diplomatic calendar for 2025 is already packed. A high-profile visit from Iranian officials is expected early in the year, followed by U.S. NSA Jake Sullivan for the iCET meeting. The Republic Day guest, Indonesian President Prabowo Subianto, reflects India's continuing strategic outreach to Southeast Asia. Russian President Vladimir Putin's anticipated visit, his first since the Ukraine war began, underscores the evolving India-Russia equation. Against this backdrop, India's foreign policy must tread carefully—balancing ties with competing powers, managing regional volatility, and responding to global crises—all while securing its national interests.

RELATIONS WITH BANGLADESH:

concerns over trajectory after Sheikh Hasina's Ouster

DISENGAGEMENT WITH CHINA:

First Modi-Xi meeting in 5 years, trust deficit remains

TIES WITH U.S. :

Strained over Sikh separatist issues, potential for recalibration

WEST ASIA ENGAGEMENT:

Managing relations with Iran, deepening bilateral ties

AN INDIA-CHINA RESET NEEDS BOLD AND NEW THINKING

SUDHEENDRA KULKARNI

SUDHEENDRA KULKARNI: FIVE STEPS TO IMPROVE BILATERAL RELATIONS:



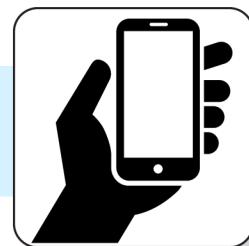
**RESUMING
DIRECT FLIGHTS**



**LIBERALISING
VISAS**



**RESTORING
JOURNALIST
EXCHANGES**



**LIFTING BANS
ON CHINESE APP**



**ENHANCING
TRADE AND
INVESTMENT**

Sudheendra Kulkarni advocates for a strategic reorientation in India-China relations, grounded in mutual respect, pragmatic idealism, and forward-looking diplomacy. He begins by acknowledging the political maturity shown by both Prime Minister Narendra Modi and President Xi Jinping in defusing the 2020 Galwan Valley crisis. Their support for military and diplomatic dialogue averted further escalation, demonstrating that even inherited disputes can be managed peacefully with political will.

Kulkarni emphasizes that the choice before the two leaders is stark: either allow mistrust and strategic rivalry to harden or boldly pursue a vision of comprehensive cooperation. He warns that unresolved border disputes could lead to further clashes, undermining regional peace and global stability. In an era marked by geopolitical turbulence, hostility between two major Asian powers would only deepen global uncertainty. Conversely, a cooperative framework could yield mutual economic gains and enable both countries to jointly address global challenges such as climate change, poverty eradication, and equitable global governance.

To move forward, both sides must address core concerns. **He outlines three key steps for China: first, to convincingly reassure India that it poses no strategic threat, particularly in connection with Pakistan; second, to support India's rightful claim to permanent membership in the United Nations Security Council; and third, to treat India as an equal pole in a multipolar world.**

For India, Kulkarni suggests that it must abandon a confrontational posture shaped by the idea of power asymmetry and U.S.-led containment strategies like the Quad. **India should also reaffirm its adherence to the 'One China' policy and resist letting Western narratives distort public and academic discourse about China.** Kulkarni notes that anti-India sentiment among Chinese citizens is far less pronounced than anti-China sentiment in India—something he attributes to the Indian media and political ecosystem.

He proposes long-term avenues of cooperation including reviving the Bangladesh-China-India-Myanmar (BCIM) Corridor, joint efforts to resolve global conflicts such as the Ukraine war or unrest in Myanmar, and leadership in Global South diplomacy. However, **Kulkarni also points out five immediate steps—low-hanging fruits—that can be taken to improve bilateral ties: resuming direct flights, liberalizing visas, restoring journalist exchanges, lifting bans on Chinese apps, and enhancing trade and investment.** Particularly, reducing India's trade deficit through increased Chinese imports and foreign direct investment could be a win-win proposition.

Kulkarni concludes by urging both countries to not let realpolitik override the civilizational wisdom of cooperation. He calls for 2025 to be a breakthrough year, possibly marked by a high-level state visit, signaling a new chapter in India-China relations. Idealism, he asserts, must not be dismissed as naïve—it can be the very foundation of sustainable diplomacy in an increasingly fractured world.

THE GATT-IFICATION OF THE WORLD TRADE ORGANIZATION



PRABHASH ANJAN

The World Trade Organization (WTO) is on track to miss its 2024 target of restoring a fully functional dispute settlement system, particularly due to the continued paralysis of its Appellate Body (AB). This dysfunction stems from the United States' long-standing obstruction of AB appointments—a bipartisan position across the Obama, Trump, and Biden administrations. While initial dispute panels still function, losing parties can appeal to the non-functional AB to indefinitely delay enforcement, rendering the system ineffective. Yet, the deeper concern is not just the AB's dysfunction but the WTO's broader existential crisis. The failure to restore the AB reflects an attempt—particularly by the U.S.—to sideline the WTO altogether.

When the WTO was created in 1995, it symbolized a shift from power-based to rules-based trade, underpinned by a robust legal system governing goods, services, and intellectual property. It was hailed as a landmark for global rule of law, with some scholars even comparing it to a constitutional framework that superseded international politics. Countries accepted binding restrictions through its two-tier dispute resolution system, embracing legality over ad hoc diplomacy.



However, this legal order began to erode with China's rise. **Admitted to the WTO in 2001 with the hope of market reforms, China retained its state-led industrial model, which the U.S. sees as exploitative of WTO rules.** Consequently, the U.S. has adopted unilateral measures—such as Trump's 2018 tariffs on Chinese goods—that openly violate WTO norms. Without a functioning AB, there's no legal check on such actions, allowing trade policy to be dictated by power politics.

This shift has led experts like **Geraldo Vidigal to argue that we're not in crisis but undergoing a regime change—a "GATTification" of the WTO.** Rather than a complete rejection of trade law, countries are reclaiming sovereignty over trade policy, reversing the legal multilateralism established in 1995. The international trade order is moving back toward a diplomacy-driven system, and no procedural fix in Geneva can conceal this fundamental transformation.

TRUMP'S RETURN AND THE SOUTH ASIA OUTLOOK

HARSH V. PANT



Donald Trump's re-election as U.S. President in 2025 has sparked global interest and anxiety, but in South Asia, it is expected to offer a degree of continuity. His foreign policy, rooted in nationalism, reciprocity, and strategic burden-sharing, is likely to enhance cooperation, collaboration, and consultation with India. **U.S.-India ties have steadily deepened since the early 2000s, especially with both countries viewing China's assertiveness as a common challenge.**

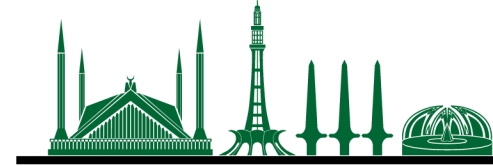
The U.S. has supported India's regional leadership through the Indo-Pacific strategy and joint efforts in countries like Nepal and Sri Lanka. **Biden's relatively passive approach to Pakistan post-Afghanistan withdrawal also helped align U.S.-India regional interests.**

However, divergences have persisted. While India pragmatically engaged with regimes in Bangladesh and Myanmar, the **Biden administration's emphasis on democracy and human rights pressured these governments and nudged them towards China.** Sanctions on Indian firms linked to Russia and scrutiny of the Adani Group also strained ties. Trump's likely downplaying of human rights and democracy in favour of strategic interests could reduce such frictions. His previous term showed support for India's regional role and focus on defence cooperation and development assistance. This approach may benefit countries like Sri Lanka and potentially Myanmar and the Taliban, though Bangladesh could face reduced U.S. support due to political transitions.

Trump's confrontational stance toward China is expected to increase U.S. pressure on South Asian nations to choose sides more clearly, reducing their room to balance great powers. His erratic leadership may also make the U.S. less tolerant of the region's strategic ambiguity. **However, if Trump succeeds in brokering peace between Russia and Ukraine or stabilizing West Asia, South Asia's struggling economies may gain relief from inflation.** While Trump's return will shape structural shifts in the region, India-U.S. ties are expected to grow, creating both opportunities and challenges as South Asia navigates evolving global dynamics.

PAKISTAN AT THE UNSC, THE POINTS OF ITS COMPASS

T.S. TIRUMURTI



On January 1, 2025, Pakistan begins its eighth term as a non-permanent member of the UN Security Council (UNSC), joining a cohort where half of the elected members belong to the Organisation of Islamic Cooperation (OIC). **Pakistan will likely focus on Afghanistan, seeking to mend ties with the Taliban, aided by China and Russia. It may also align with OIC members on Gaza and prioritize peacekeeping.**

However, its default multilateral agenda will center on anti-India rhetoric. India must be prepared for Pakistan's initiatives against it, despite past examples of bilateral cordiality failing to translate into multilateral cooperation. **Even countries close to India often support anti-India language in Pakistani drafts at the UN, though unexpected allies sometimes help counter this.**

Pakistan will continue trying to brand India as a supporter of terrorism, even as groups like LeT and JeM, based in Pakistan, are listed under UNSC sanctions. India's successful 2023 listing of Abdul Rehman Makki was a diplomatic blow to Pakistan. In retaliation, Pakistan has attempted—unsuccessfully—to list Indian Hindus as terrorists. Its main agenda, however, remains Jammu and Kashmir (J&K). Despite past efforts to internationalize the issue, most permanent UNSC members have little interest. With elections held in J&K and popular government restored, Pakistan's case weakens. Nevertheless, it will likely exploit its UNSC seat to raise the issue, supported by China.

Pakistan also uses Islamophobia as a tool to divert attention from terrorism. While India previously managed to exclude Islamophobia from UN documents, recent trends—like the appointment of a UN Special Envoy on Islamophobia supported by the U.S., China, and Russia—indicate that the issue may persist in Council discussions. **Pakistan misuses UNSC mechanisms, such as raising the bilateral Indus Waters Treaty, and will likely continue doing so.** In contrast, India has shown restraint, focusing on constructive priorities during its 2021–22 term.

Pakistan ignores areas of possible multilateral cooperation with India, such as UN peacekeeping, climate change, SDGs, debt relief for the Global South, and financial reforms. Political instability and economic decline prevent Pakistan from contributing meaningfully to multilateralism. Its UNSC tenure is expected to focus more on rhetoric than results, and India must remain alert to counter its initiatives.

UNDER TRUMP 2.0, THE WORLD AND THE INDIA OUTLOOK

M.K. NARAYANAN

Donald Trump's resounding 2024 electoral victory has radically shifted global perceptions, with some dubbing him the most consequential American President since FDR. Yet, Trump remains an enigma – known to challenge sacred institutions – and with both Houses under his control, his power appears unchecked. Speculation is rife about dramatic foreign policy moves, including potential deals with Putin over Ukraine, harsher actions against Iran, and efforts to curb Israeli assertiveness.

Trump's foreign policy is expected to focus on Europe, West Asia, and China. Despite his criticisms of NATO and Europe's defence inertia, he is unlikely to abandon Ukraine, though he will push Europe to contribute more to its security. In West Asia, Trump is likely to adopt a pragmatic stance, unimpressed by overtures from leaders such as Zelenskyy and Netanyahu, and unwilling to prolong conflicts solely on Israel's terms.

His China policy is expected to be more aggressive—economically and strategically—yet tempered by awareness of China's military capabilities, especially its hypersonic arsenal. While Taiwan may remain a flashpoint, any escalation would likely be preceded by calculated brinkmanship. Trump would strengthen U.S. alliances in Asia, but resist becoming the region's peace guarantor at America's expense.

Trump is expected to view India more favourably than most nations, given the personal chemistry between him and Prime Minister Modi. **Both leaders share a 'no-nonsense' approach and a strong anti-China stance. Trump's previous support to India during the Galwan clash and his enthusiastic reception during the 2020 'Namaste Trump' event reinforced this bond.** Defence and strategic cooperation have since grown, with new arms deals and India's closer alignment with the Quad. Trump's support for India's position on issues like the persecution of Hindus in Bangladesh has further cemented bilateral warmth.

On the economic front, while India holds a slight trade advantage, technology is poised to be the key driver of U.S.-India ties. **With a strong Indian presence in Silicon Valley and the tech-centric agenda of the new Trump administration, innovation is likely to propel bilateral relations forward.** All indications suggest that Trump would continue to treat India as a preferred partner on the global stage.

IS ISRAEL'S WAR IN GAZA PUTTING THE GLOBAL ORDER AT PERIL?

Nearly 400 days after the October 7, 2023, Hamas attacks, Israel's military operations in Gaza, the West Bank, and southern Lebanon have caused catastrophic civilian casualties — over 43,000 according to hospital data, and potentially up to 1,86,000 per estimates by *The Lancet*. Despite international outcry, UN resolutions, and legal actions from the ICC and ICJ, the bombardment continues unabated, exposing deep fractures in the global order and the limitations of multilateral institutions.

One of the starkest manifestations of this crisis is the United States' unwavering support for Israel, even at the cost of undermining international law. As Trita Parsi notes, Washington has effectively suspended its own arms transfer laws to allow Israel to proceed with a campaign many label as genocidal. **The U.S.'s rhetorical shift from a "rules-based order" to a selective, interest-driven coalition undermines the very principles it once championed.** This dual standard is at odds with how the international community has responded to similar crises — particularly Russia's invasion of Ukraine — fuelling accusations of hypocrisy and weakening the moral legitimacy of the West.

Navtej Sarna contextualizes the U.S.-Israel alliance as a blend of strategic necessity and moral obligation, rooted in the legacy of the Holocaust and Israel's role as a perceived democratic outpost in a volatile region. However, this relationship has allowed the Israeli government to violate international humanitarian law with impunity, eroding the credibility of global institutions like the ICC and the UN Security Council.

Indeed, the impotence of the UNSC — where the U.S. has repeatedly used its veto to shield Israel, just as Russia does for its interests — underscores the council's paralysis. This gridlock has led to the flouting of UNSC resolutions by regimes in Afghanistan, Myanmar, and elsewhere, signalling a broader collapse of international norms and enforcement mechanisms.

India's position, too, reflects the complexities of aligning with global legal regimes. **Despite being involved in the early stages of the ICC's creation, India never ratified the Rome Statute, citing concerns over jurisdiction, nuclear weapons, and the court's failure to classify terrorism as a crime against humanity.** Like Israel and the U.S., India views the ICC warily, opting to rely on national institutions for justice.

Yet, both Parsi and Sarna agree: the global order is faltering. The post-WWII multilateral framework – especially the UN – is no longer equipped to manage 21st-century crises. **The collapse of consensus and the rise of transactional geopolitics have made international law seem optional.** However, they also hold out hope that the scale of current violations may eventually provoke a systemic correction – a tipping point where a coalition of states recognizes the urgent need for a robust and enforceable global governance system.

Looking ahead, a ceasefire in Gaza may become more likely under Donald Trump’s presidency. While Trump holds little regard for multilateral institutions, his instinct for avoiding costly foreign entanglements could push him to broker an end to the war. However, any ceasefire under his leadership is likely to be transactional – a political trophy – rather than a step toward lasting peace. Without addressing the fundamental issue – the creation of a viable Palestinian state – the global order will remain not only fragile but deeply unjust.

In sum, Israel’s war in Gaza is more than a humanitarian crisis – it is a litmus test for the relevance and resilience of the international order itself. So far, the world is failing that test.

“ *Navtej Sarna contextualizes the U.S.-Israel alliance as a blend of strategic necessity and moral obligation, rooted in the legacy of the Holocaust and Israel’s role as a perceived democratic outpost in a volatile region.* ”



INDIA'S STRATEGIC FOCUS ON WEST AFRICA

HARSH V PANT

Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Nigeria, his first African stop in his third term and the first Indian PM visit to Nigeria in 17 years, highlights India's renewed strategic focus on West Africa. **Nigeria, the continent's largest economy and democracy, conferred Modi with its second-highest national honour – a recognition of India's rising stature and commitment to the Global South.**

Nigeria plays a central role in African regional politics and is a democratic role model. Strengthening ties with it can influence the broader region. Modi emphasised deeper cooperation in defence, energy, technology, trade, health, and education, particularly amid Nigeria's security challenges like terrorism and piracy. **India, emerging as a defence supplier in Africa, is supporting Nigeria's counterterrorism efforts and is building ties through development aid and capacity-building, reflecting the 'India Way' of engagement.**

India also faces competition from China, which has invested heavily in Nigeria's infrastructure, technology, and mining sectors. **Chinese companies have funded over \$47 billion in projects and built critical infrastructure like the Lekki Deep Sea Port and the Abuja Light Rail.** Huawei, with its vast digital footprint, has trained thousands of Nigerians and is developing cybersecurity infrastructure. China is also spearheading Nigeria's lithium processing for electric vehicles and investing in cement production.

Despite reduced bilateral trade – from \$14.95 billion to \$7.89 billion – due to India's increased oil imports from Russia, India remains a key Nigerian partner. As major voices of the Global South, a stronger India-Nigeria relationship can support a more balanced multipolar world. However, translating goodwill into impactful outcomes will require persistent diplomatic and economic engagement.



IF TRUMP-LED US BREAKS THE RUSSIA-CHINA ALLIANCE, WHO WILL FALL FIRST?

Both Putin and Xi will prioritise their bilateral interests with the US over the building of a unified front against Washington

C RAJA MOHAN

The “**alliance without limits**” announced by **Moscow and Beijing** in February 2022 signalled unprecedented anti-American cooperation in security, economic, and political spheres. This partnership, rooted in a shared belief in the decline of the US-led world order since the 2008 financial crisis, gained symbolic strength from Xi Jinping’s claim of driving century-defining change with Putin.

While interest in BRICS and the Global South seemed to support their view, recent developments challenge the narrative of American decline. The US economy has outpaced both the EU and China in growth and innovation, maintaining strong investment and business momentum. In contrast, Europe faces demographic and structural issues, and China is slowing due to debt, trade tensions, and an ageing population.

Projections show the **US continuing to lead in GDP, casting doubt on China’s ability to overtake it soon**. Meanwhile, coordinated Sino-Russian efforts to reshape global order have largely fallen short. Russia’s war in Ukraine has dragged on with heavy costs, weakening its position in Europe. Iran, another key partner, is on the backfoot, with setbacks to its regional proxies and internal instability.

In Asia, the US has revitalised alliances and created new frameworks like the Quad and AUKUS, while China’s assertiveness is being met with economic and strategic resistance. With Trump’s potential return, a reinvigorated Washington may intensify pressure on both Moscow and Beijing. Republican strategists argue for shifting focus from Ukraine to Asia and exploiting the contradictions in the Sino-Russian relationship. Trump has spoken of “un-uniting” the duo and aims to tempt each into bilateral deals with the US.

Though sceptics question whether Trump can split the alliance, history shows that betrayal has long defined the China-Russia relationship. Self-interest may yet outweigh shared anti-Western sentiment. The Panchatantra’s *Mitrabhedam* offers a fitting metaphor for the fragility of such alliances. **For India, a US-Russia reconciliation would ease the creation of a “multipolar Asia,” whereas a US-China deal could foster a destabilising “bipolar Asia.”** While Delhi lacks the leverage to influence these dynamics, its strategic preferences remain clear.

WHY THE SOUTH ASIAN NEIGHBOURHOOD IS ON EDGE

PRATAP BHANU
MEHTA



“
In a deep ideological sense, India, Pakistan, Bangladesh are joined at the hip. India uses the fires in Pakistan and Bangladesh to shore up the claims of a Hindu state, and the 'India' card is still a potent defining feature of their identity. But they must remember: State sponsored religious nationalism will always turn authoritarian
”

South Asia is on edge as India, Pakistan, and Bangladesh increasingly fall prey to the destructive grip of state-sponsored religious nationalism. Though it may seem uncomfortable for Indian audiences, all three nations now reflect varying intensities of the same political affliction: escalating religious polarisation that threatens democracy and decency. Each is showing signs of reviving the logic of partition through conflict rather than reconciliation.

Their ideological paths are intertwined, despite India's assertions of regional transcendence. **The collapse of Sheikh Hasina's legitimacy in Bangladesh has created a vacuum where cycles of political recrimination and rising Islamist visibility endanger minority rights—especially Hindus.** Yet, Bangladesh's elites largely deny these risks, deflecting through denial, whataboutery, or superficial secular statements—part of a broader South Asian pattern of communal evasion.

India, meanwhile, is acting short-sightedly by weaponising Bangladesh's instability to stoke domestic sectarianism. Rather than seeking a constructive solution, it fuels the fires of division under the guise of concern for minorities, which is more ideological than humanitarian. India's internal playbook of lynchings, hate speech, mosque disputes, and the disempowerment of minorities is well established. The triumph at Ayodhya has emboldened Hindu nationalism, not satiated it, intensifying the legitimisation of violence. If India acknowledged its own rising communalism, its regional concerns would appear more genuine.

Pakistan remains a cautionary tale, showing how a state defined by religion inevitably turns on its own minorities—Ahmadis, Shias, and others. Its crisis is sustained by the disconnect between popular discontent and military authority, deepened by sectarian schisms like the Kurram massacre.

Its state ideology teeters between failure and inertia, yet its dark satire about its dystopian trajectory shows a self-awareness missing from India's elite. **Ironically, these three nations are ideologically "joined at the hip," feeding off each other's internal fires to shape exclusive national identities.** South Asian history offers a clear lesson: religious nationalism invariably leads to authoritarianism and erodes democracy and humanity.

ON INDIA'S OBLIGATIONS TOWARDS THE ROHINGYA

A recent joint report by The Azadi Project and Refugees International highlights severe violations of constitutional and human rights in the treatment of Rohingya refugees detained in India. Based on interviews with detainees, families, and legal representatives, the report reveals that many Rohingya remain incarcerated even after completing their sentences.

The Rohingya, estimated at 2.8 million globally, constitute the world's largest stateless population and have fled Myanmar due to systemic persecution and genocidal violence. Around 22,500 reside in India according to UNHCR. While international law, particularly the **1951 Refugee Convention and its 1967 Protocol, protects refugees through the principle of non-refoulement, which prohibits returning individuals to places where they risk persecution, India is not a signatory to these instruments and does not formally recognise this obligation.** Nonetheless, the principle is part of customary international law and thus binding on all states.

India continues to treat Rohingyas as “*illegal migrants*” under domestic laws such as the **Foreigners Act, 1946 and the Passport Act, 1967, which give sweeping powers to the executive.** In response to a PIL seeking the release of detained Rohingyas, the government asserted that while they are entitled to the right to life under Article 21 of the Constitution, they do not possess the right to settle or reside in India.

The Supreme Court, in ***Mohammad Salimullah vs Union of India*** (2021), **upheld the government's decision to deport 170 detained Rohingyas in Jammu on national security grounds.** Similarly, in 2024, the Delhi High Court dismissed a plea to admit Rohingya children to schools, stating that such decisions involve international implications and fall under government policy.

Despite its non-ratification of the Refugee Convention, India is bound by other international instruments it has signed and ratified, such as the International Covenant on Civil and Political Rights (ICCPR), the Convention on the Rights of the Child (CRC), and the International Convention on the Elimination of All Forms of Racial Discrimination (CERD), all of which uphold the principle of non-refoulement. Although India has signed but not ratified the Convention Against Torture (CAT), deviation from its principles undermines India's international commitments.

Moreover, the Indian judiciary has repeatedly upheld that international obligations should guide domestic courts in the absence of legislation, as seen in landmark cases like *Vishaka vs State of Rajasthan (1997)* and *NALSA vs Union of India (2014)*. Several High Courts have interpreted non-refoulement as intrinsic to **Article 21**, notably in the *Ktaer Abbas Habib Al Qutaifi* (Gujarat HC, 1998) and *Dongh Lian Kham* (Delhi HC, 2015) cases.

India's lack of a coherent refugee policy has resulted in discriminatory treatment of refugee groups based on geopolitical considerations. While Tibetan, Sri Lankan, and Afghan refugees receive documentation or long-term visas, Rohingyas – even those registered with UNHCR – face arbitrary detention.

ONE NATION ONE ELECTION AND REPRESENTATIVE DEMOCRACY



The *One Nation, One Election* (ONOE) proposal—formalised through the Constitution (One Hundred and Twenty-Ninth Amendment) Bill, 2024—aims to synchronise Lok Sabha and State Assembly elections, standardising tenure and mandating mid-term elections only for the remainder of an original term. Slated to come into force post-2029, this reform is framed as a push for administrative efficiency and reduced electoral fatigue. Yet, beneath the surface lies a fundamental concern: does ONOE genuinely uphold the spirit of representative democracy?

ONE NATION ONE ELECTION: STRUCTURAL CONCERNS.



Centralising power: aligning state and national election cycles, thereby marginalising state-specific issues in favour of national agendas.



Weakens accountability: frequent elections may be disruptive, but they allow voters to regularly scrutinise governments



Sidelines inclusivity: democracy is not just about efficient administration, but about enabling diverse voices to shape policy through meaningful participation.

At the heart of representative democracy lies the idea of governance *by and for the people*, through periodic, participatory elections that balance majority will with minority rights. In a diverse and complex society like India, this system ensures plural voices, institutional checks, and political accountability. However, across the globe—and increasingly in India—this model is under strain. **A 2024 Pew study notes rising disillusionment with representative democracy across multiple democracies, with alarming support for strongman rule or even military regimes.** This reflects broader frustrations with inefficiency, elite capture, and a perceived gap between people's needs and political delivery

These concerns echo the long-standing critique of Jayaprakash Narayan. **Writing in 1959, JP argued that parliamentary democracy risks atomising society, fuelling demagoguery, centralising power, and turning elections into high-cost spectacles dominated by money.** His vision was not to abandon democracy, but to renew and reform it from within—a spirit sorely lacking in how ONOE has been pursued.

Instead of building consensus, the ONOE process has been top-down and opaque. The High-Level Committee gave citizens just 10 days for feedback—violating the 2014 Pre-Legislative Consultation Policy's minimum 30-day window—and failed to provide explanatory documents. Worse, it sought 'yes/no' responses, treating public consultation as formality rather than engagement. In a representative democracy, such procedural failures erode legitimacy and trust.

ONOE also raises structural concerns. First, it risks centralising power by aligning state and national election cycles, thereby marginalising state-specific issues in favour of national agendas. Second, it weakens democratic *accountability*—frequent elections may be disruptive, but they allow voters to regularly scrutinise governments. Lastly, it sidelines inclusivity—democracy is not just about efficient administration, but about enabling diverse voices to shape policy through meaningful participation.

Efficiency cannot come at the cost of representation. India's democratic vitality lies in its pluralism, its messiness, and its citizen-led accountability. **If ONOE is to be truly transformative, it must be grounded in consultation, transparency, and democratic consensus.** Otherwise, it risks becoming a reform that weakens, rather than deepens, Indian democracy.

HOW THE RIGHT OVERTOOK THE LEFT IN INDIA

TIKENDER SINGH PANWAR

The Right's ascendancy over the Left in India is rooted in a long-term divergence in strategy, organisation, and engagement with socio-political realities. **While the Left played a central role in India's freedom struggle and was once the principal opposition party, today it holds just eight Lok Sabha seats, compared to the BJP's 240.** Organisationally too, the Left, with only 2 million members and around 30 million in mass organisations, pales in comparison to the BJP-RSS network, which together commands over 100 million and 7 million members respectively.

The Left's decline can be traced to the shift in India's economic structure since the mid-1980s. **As industrial production fragmented and the organised working class shrank, the Left lost its urban and labour base.** Meanwhile, the Right embedded itself in the cultural fabric, engaging informal sector workers through caste and religious identity politics—an area the Left largely ignored. Even in rural India, where the Left once mobilised through land reform movements, newer peasant classes have drifted towards the Right, finding little resonance in the Left's outdated revolutionary rhetoric.

Unlike the Right, which has effectively used nationalism to unite its base around a Hindu identity, **the Left's idea of nationalism rooted in anti-imperialism has lost its relevance post-independence.** Similarly, while the Constitution reflects modernist values of equity and secularism, India's social fabric remains steeped in feudal and casteist structures. This mismatch has enabled the Right to exploit religious identity and post-truth narratives to its advantage.

Leadership styles also mark a stark contrast. **The older generation of Left leaders had mass movement experience and grassroots engagement, while today's leaders often emerge from academic backgrounds, lacking political grounding.** Conversely, the Right has built a robust cadre system where leaders like Narendra Modi spent years working closely with party workers. The Left's hesitation in fully engaging with electoral politics, highlighted by its 1996 refusal to let Jyoti Basu become Prime Minister, continues to haunt it. The Right, in contrast, capitalises on every electoral opportunity.

Ultimately, the Left's fixation on revolution and reluctance to adapt to electoral and cultural realities has allowed the Right to dominate the political landscape. The larger question remains: when and how will the pendulum swing back?

THE CHALLENGE OF HOLDING JUDGES ACCOUNTABLE

The Indian judiciary, as the guardian of the Constitution and final arbiter of rights, is expected to uphold the highest standards of integrity. However, the mechanism to ensure judicial accountability, especially in the higher judiciary, remains complex and largely ineffective.

Constitutional and Legal Framework- Judicial accountability is governed by Articles 124(4) and (5), 217, and 218 of the Constitution and the Judges (Inquiry) Act, 1968.

UNDER THIS FRAMEWORK:

A judge can be removed only for “proved misbehaviour or incapacity”.



The process begins with a motion in either House of Parliament, requiring the approval of the presiding officer.



Upon admission, a three-member inquiry committee (comprising a Supreme Court judge, a High Court Chief Justice, and an eminent jurist) is constituted.



If found guilty, a two-thirds majority in both Houses is required to impeach the judge.

Despite this elaborate mechanism, only a few cases have reached the inquiry stage, and none have led to successful impeachment.

NOTABLE PRECEDENTS

- Justice V. Ramaswami (1993):** Found guilty by the inquiry committee for financial improprieties, but the impeachment motion failed due to abstention by the ruling party. He remained in office and retired with full benefits.
- Justice Soumitra Sen (2011):** Found guilty of misappropriation of funds. Although the Rajya Sabha passed the impeachment motion, he resigned before the Lok Sabha could act, thereby evading accountability.
- Justice P.D. Dinakaran:** Faced serious charges, including land grabbing. He resigned on the day of the committee’s first sitting, preempting the inquiry process.

STRUCTURAL WEAKNESSES IN THE ACCOUNTABILITY MECHANISM

- High Threshold for Action:** The requirement of a two-thirds parliamentary majority makes removal virtually impossible in politically sensitive contexts.
- Resignation Loophole:** Judges facing serious charges can resign, thereby terminating the inquiry process. As jurist Mohan Gopal noted, this gives the accused judge undue control over the process.

- **Lack of Consequences Post-Inquiry:** Even after being found guilty by the committee (as in Ramaswami's case), a judge may remain in office and retire with honours if impeachment fails.
- **Inadequate Deterrence:** The rarity of disciplinary action sends a weak signal regarding judicial accountability.
- **Institutional Immunity:** The judiciary enjoys greater protection compared to elected officials. This asymmetry erodes public trust in the justice system.

NORMATIVE AND INSTITUTIONAL RESPONSES

The Supreme Court adopted the *Restatement of Values of Judicial Life (1997)* to establish a non-binding code of conduct. However, the absence of an enforceable accountability framework renders such efforts largely symbolic. **Civil society actors like the Forum for Judicial Accountability (FJA) have called for continued investigations post-resignation, arguing that impeachment is not merely about removal, but also about restoring public confidence in the judiciary.** RTI disclosures and internal committee correspondence (as revealed by V. Venkatesan) underscore the institutional consensus on the need to complete inquiries even after resignation.

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