

# PERSPECTIVES

Monthly Current Affairs for PSIR Optional – International Relations & Indian Politics  
by ANANTAM IAS

## Nuclear Restraint: The 1998 Half-Life



Modern strategic environments are cracking the post-Cold War nuclear order's voluntary moratoriums.

## The Taliban Dilemma: Engagement vs. Recognition



India shifts toward toward calibrated engagement to protect investments while withholding formal political legitimacy.



## Africa 2025: Connecting a Shared Future

Moving from basic trade to high-value collaboration in digital infrastructure and green energy.



## The Busan Interval:

**NOVEMBER 26**

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November edition of our PSIR magazine Across these articles, a common theme emerges of a world in transition where old assumptions no longer hold and strategic restraint, alignment, and engagement must be constantly re evaluated. Global norms, whether on nuclear testing, climate action, or great power behaviour, are weakening under pressure from shifting power balances, technological change, and geopolitical competition. Countries are increasingly acting out of interest rather than consensus, making credibility and preparedness more important than symbolism.

India's strategic environment is marked by uncertainty on multiple fronts. The erosion of arms control regimes, changing US China dynamics, and evolving US Russia relations underline the limits of relying on external powers for balance. India is repeatedly urged to build its own leverage through economic strength, technological capacity, credible deterrence, and diversified partnerships. Strategic autonomy is presented not as distance from others but as the ability to engage all sides from a position of confidence.

Regional engagement remains central. With Afghanistan, cautious engagement without recognition protects interests while preserving leverage. In Africa, long term partnership based on capacity building, digital cooperation, and people to people ties offers shared growth. In West Asia, renewed US Saudi ties reshape energy, security, and economic equations with implications for India's markets and connectivity ambitions.

Domestic institutions and values also matter. Constitutional offices, restraint in governance, and judicial balance are portrayed as essential to democratic resilience. Moral authority, trust, and accountability underpin both internal stability and external credibility.



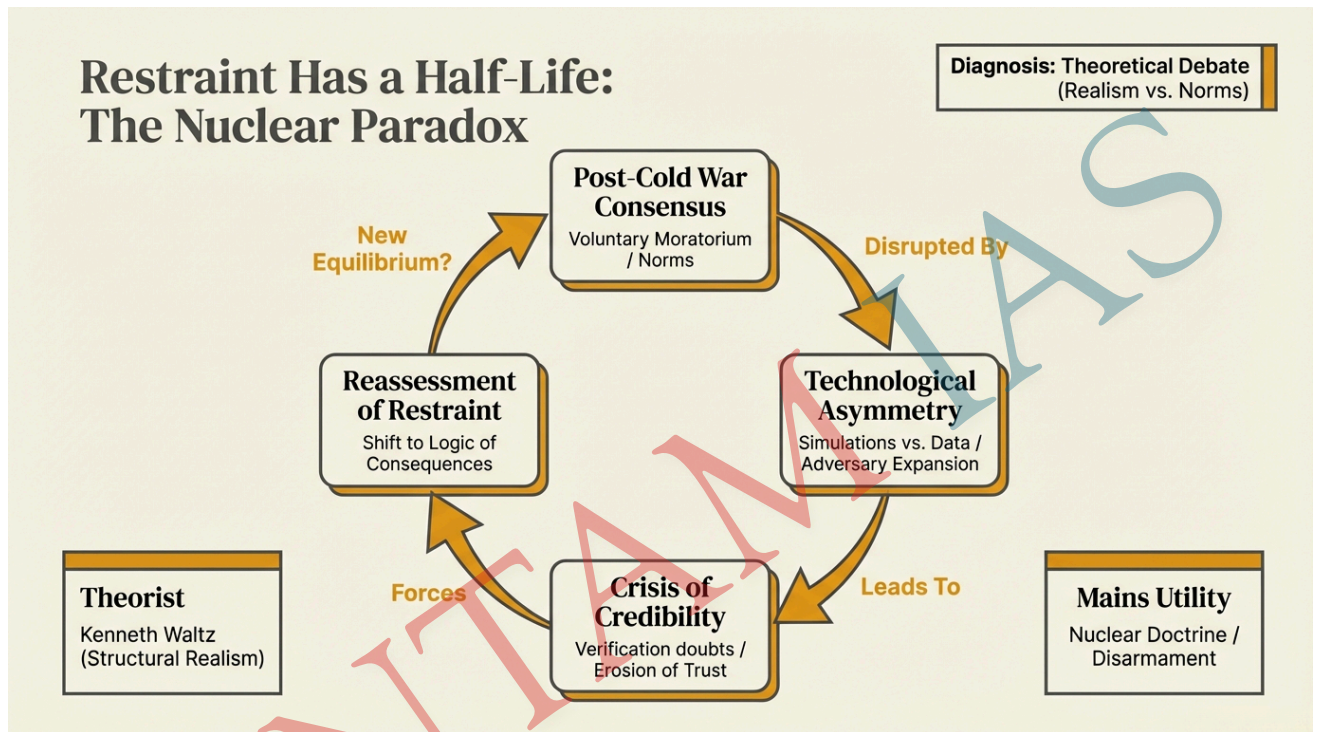
*Rahul Puri*

PSIR OPTIONAL FACULTY  
DIRECTOR & CHIEF MENTOR  
@ ANANTAM IAS



# RESTRAINT HAS A HALF-LIFE

AMITABH MATTOO



The long-standing global restraint on nuclear testing is weakening as the international environment shifts. **For decades, a voluntary moratorium on nuclear tests held not because of binding legal commitments, but due to political convenience and moral pressure.** This informal consensus now appears fragile, with major powers increasingly questioning whether continued restraint serves their strategic interests. As the shared belief in self-restraint erodes, the foundations of the post-Cold War nuclear order are beginning to crack.

India's position must be viewed against this changing backdrop. Since its nuclear tests in 1998, India's voluntary moratorium has projected strategic maturity and moral confidence. It reassured the international community that India's nuclear program was guided by restraint rather than adventurism, opening the door to diplomatic legitimacy, the lifting of sanctions, and expanded civil nuclear cooperation. Yet restraint that is never re-examined risks becoming passive adherence rather than deliberate strategy.

Several nuclear-armed states are actively reassessing their approaches. Russia has renewed activity at Arctic test sites, China is rapidly expanding its nuclear stockpile and infrastructure, and the United States is openly debating whether advanced computer simulations can indefinitely replace physical nuclear testing. When the most powerful states question verification without detonation, restraint begins to look temporary rather than permanent. Stability in the nuclear order has come to rely less on collective conviction and more on shifting calculations of advantage.

Technological and operational realities further complicate the picture. India's nuclear warhead designs remain rooted in tests conducted more than two decades ago, while delivery systems, materials, and military requirements have evolved significantly. **Intercontinental missiles and sea-based deterrents demand higher levels of confidence in yield, reliability, and survivability.** Simulations, subcritical tests, and computational models can extend knowledge, but they cannot fully substitute for empirical data, particularly when validated data points are limited.

Reconsidering restraint does not imply embracing recklessness or provocation. Any potential testing would need to be scientifically justified, limited in scope, and focused on validation rather than demonstration. **Deterrence depends not only on possessing weapons but also on confidence in their performance, both domestically and in the perceptions of adversaries.** Credibility must be seen to be grounded in capability, not assumed through restraint alone.

At a deeper level, the debate reflects a tension between moral authority and strategic necessity. India's restraint since 1998 has earned it significant ethical and diplomatic capital, reinforcing its image as a responsible nuclear power. The challenge now is to maintain that standing while adapting to a rapidly evolving global nuclear landscape. As circumstances change, strategies must be reassessed. Restraint, like all strategic choices, has a half-life, and maturity lies not in denial of change but in the ability to respond thoughtfully and decisively when the world no longer stands still.

# ENGAGE THE TALIBAN, DON'T RECOGNISE THEM

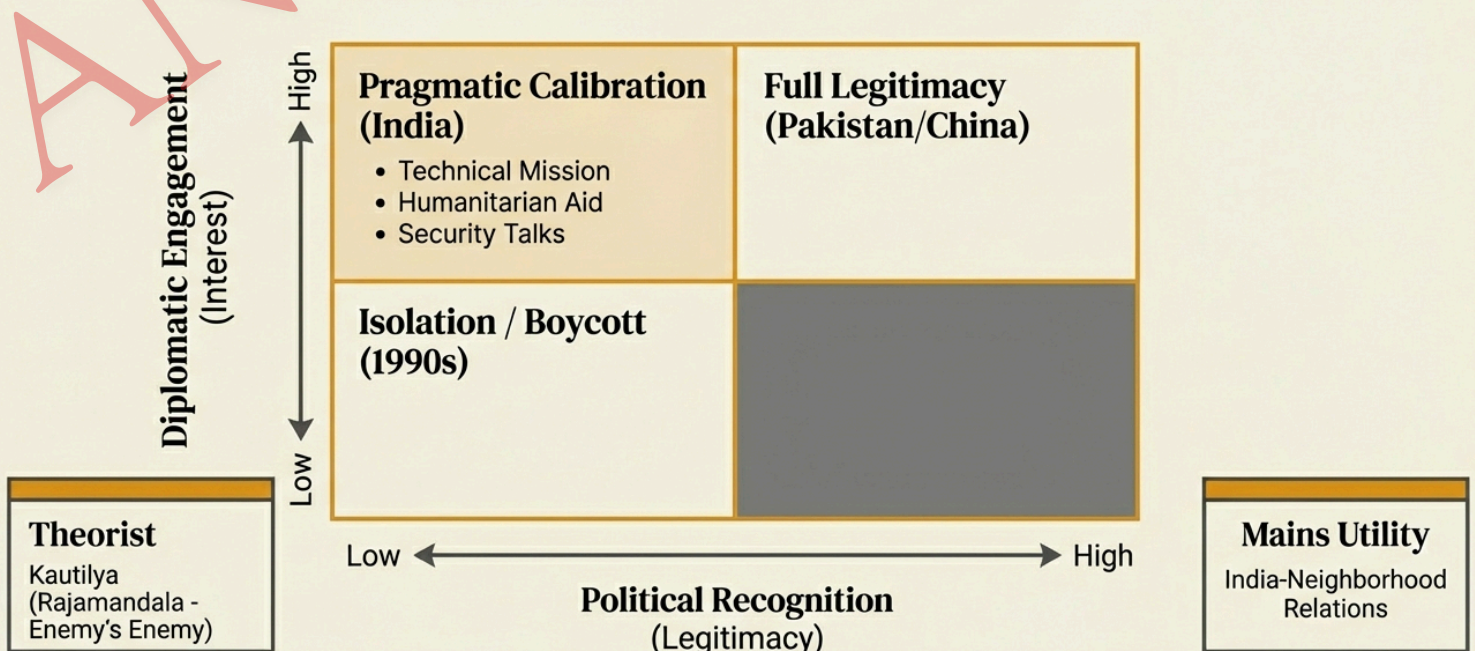
STANLY JOHNY

India's approach toward the Taliban has shifted from outright opposition to cautious engagement following their return to power in Kabul. **Once viewed as a proxy of Pakistan, the Taliban now control the Afghan state, forcing India to reassess its strategy.** Long-standing tensions between Afghanistan and Pakistan, combined with regional instability, have opened limited space for India to engage the Taliban pragmatically without endorsing their regime. Diplomatic contacts and the upgrading of India's mission in Kabul signal a willingness to stay involved while avoiding formal recognition.

India's engagement is shaped by clear objectives. It seeks to protect the significant investments made in Afghanistan since 2001, prevent Afghan territory from being used by anti-India militant groups, and limit Pakistan's strategic influence over the Taliban. Unlike the 1990s, India aims to test whether the Taliban can act autonomously rather than as an extension of Pakistan's security establishment. This has led to a policy of calibrated and conditional engagement, often described as a second phase of India-Taliban interaction.

## The Afghan Dilemma: Engage, Don't Recognise

Diagnosis: Geopolitical Conflict



At the same time, granting formal recognition to the Taliban carries serious risks. The movement remains ideologically rigid and socially regressive, particularly in its treatment of women and minorities. **Girls are barred from education beyond the primary level, women face exclusion from public life and employment, and political dissent is crushed.** These policies raise fundamental concerns about legitimacy and governance that recognition would implicitly endorse.

Security concerns further complicate the picture. While the Taliban publicly claim to have cut ties with transnational jihadist groups, evidence suggests otherwise. Networks such as the Haqqani group remain embedded within the Taliban structure, and Afghanistan continues to host a range of extremist organizations. These groups may not pose an immediate regional threat, but they retain the capacity to re-emerge if the Taliban's grip weakens or internal pressures intensify.

**Economically, Afghanistan is in deep crisis. The economy has sharply contracted, humanitarian needs are widespread,** and nearly half the population depends on external assistance. While the Taliban claim improved security, economic collapse and repression threaten long-term stability. History shows that periods of calm under authoritarian rule in Afghanistan have often been temporary, followed by renewed conflict and fragmentation.

Given these realities, a wait-and-watch strategy serves India's interests best. Engagement allows India to protect its strategic stakes and press for limited behavioral changes, while withholding recognition preserves leverage. India's long-term interests lie in a stable, inclusive and economically viable Afghanistan integrated into the region. Such stability cannot rest on coercion or ideological rigidity, but on political inclusion and respect for basic freedoms.

## AN INDIAN WAY FOR G2

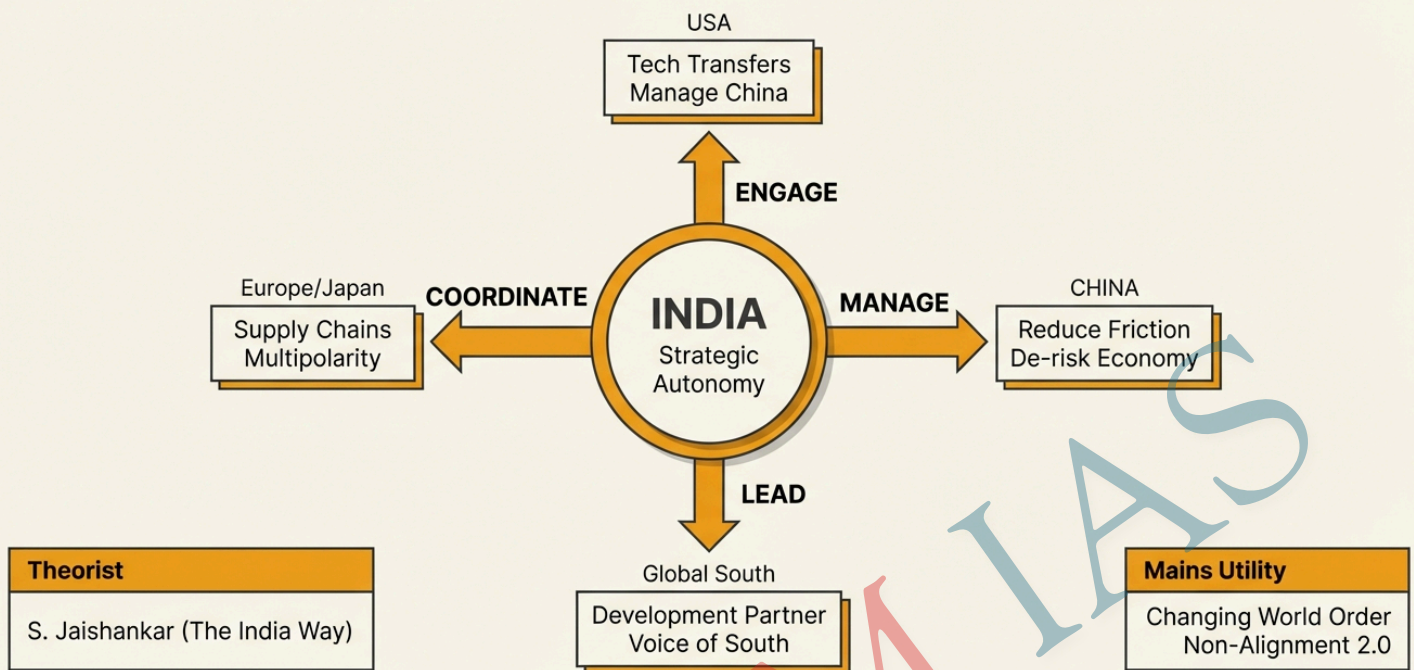
SANJAYA BARU

The idea of a G2, centered on cooperation between the **United States and China, emerged in the early 2000s as a response to global economic challenges.** It gained traction after the 2008 financial crisis, when close economic interdependence between Washington and Beijing helped stabilize the global economy. China's role in sustaining trade, growth, and financial recovery highlighted how deeply linked the two economies had become, reinforcing the perception that global stability depended on their coordination.

Over time, however, this cooperative vision weakened. Strategic thinking in the United States shifted from engagement to containment, followed by attempts at decoupling and risk reduction. Trade wars, technology restrictions, and strategic competition replaced earlier optimism. While allies such as Europe and Japan often sought moderation, China's capacity to absorb pressure and respond effectively altered the balance. The persistence of economic interdependence made full separation unrealistic, forcing a rethinking of earlier assumptions.

# An Indian Way for the G2 (US-China)

Diagnosis: Global Governance



Earlier strategic thinking in India assumed that strong ties with Washington would enhance India's position across Asia, Europe, and Eurasia. This approach shaped diplomacy when alignment with the West promised global leverage. That context has changed, with power now more dispersed and Asia emerging as the central arena of global politics, economics, and security.

In this evolving context, engaging China has taken on a new meaning. What was once viewed as a way to manage China is now seen as a tool to manage relations with the United States. This reversal places India in a complex position. Strategic autonomy requires balancing competition and cooperation, avoiding dependence on any single power while maintaining flexibility in foreign policy choices.

India's current approach reflects this balancing act. It involves engaging the United States, managing China, strengthening ties with Europe, reassuring Russia, cultivating Japan, and deepening relations with neighbors. This multi-directional strategy seeks to maximize options rather than lock India into rigid alignments. The success of this approach depends on diplomatic patience, consistency, and the ability to navigate contradictions without strategic drift.

The global order continues to evolve, shaped by shifting power equations and economic realities. Old formulas no longer deliver predictable outcomes. **As circumstances change, so must strategic calculations. A distinct Indian approach is needed, grounded in realism, regional engagement, and strategic autonomy.** Adaptation, rather than attachment to outdated frameworks, offers the best path forward in a world where balance, not blocs, defines influence.

# A TALE OF TWO POPULISMS: MAGA MINES RESENTMENT, MAMDANI HOPE

C RAJA MOHAN

## A Tale of Two Populisms

Diagnosis: Democracy & Ideology

### EXCLUSIONARY (MAGA)

|               |                               |
|---------------|-------------------------------|
| <b>Logic</b>  | Resentment / Cultural Anxiety |
| <b>Target</b> | The Other (Immigrants)        |
| <b>Goal</b>   | Restoration of Hierarchy      |

### INCLUSIONARY (Mamdani)

|               |                             |
|---------------|-----------------------------|
| <b>Logic</b>  | Hope / Economic Justice     |
| <b>Target</b> | The Elite (Corporate Power) |
| <b>Goal</b>   | Redistribution & Inclusion  |

#### Theorist

Cas Mudde (Thin-centered Ideology)

#### Mains Utility

Crisis of Democracy / Social Movements

The rise of Zohran Mamdani in New York politics highlights a sharp contrast between two forms of populism shaping the United States today. At a time when American politics is dominated by polarization, immigration anxieties, and nationalist rhetoric, Mamdani's campaign reflects a different political current that prioritizes economic justice and social inclusion. His growing influence signals deeper changes in the political mood of urban America rather than just the success of an individual candidate.

**Mamdani's appeal lies in his ability to center everyday economic concerns such as housing affordability,** public services, and cost of living pressures. In a political environment saturated with cultural conflict, his message redirects attention to material conditions faced by ordinary Americans. This approach resonates particularly with younger voters and marginalized communities who feel excluded from the promises of economic growth and liberal globalisation. For many, his campaign represents a break from the dominance of elite-driven politics.

The broader ideological roots of Mamdani's rise can be traced to the revival of democratic socialism in the United States. The Democratic Socialists of America, once marginal, have grown significantly amid rising inequality and declining faith in traditional institutions. Events such as the 2008 financial crisis, prolonged wars, and the pandemic have weakened belief in the American Dream, creating space for political alternatives that challenge market-driven orthodoxy while remaining within democratic frameworks.

Mamdani's coalition is notable for its diversity and organisational strength. It brings together working-class voters from multiple racial and ethnic backgrounds along with young professionals and progressive activists. Grassroots campaigning, neighbourhood-level mobilisation, multilingual outreach, and direct voter engagement have been central to this success. These methods contrast sharply with top-down political strategies and have drawn attention from political observers across the country.

This form of **populism stands in opposition to the MAGA movement, which mobilises resentment by framing immigrants and minorities as threats.** While both currents challenge establishment politics, they diverge sharply in tone and purpose. One seeks exclusion and cultural confrontation, while the other projects hope through inclusion and economic reform. Together, they reflect a country deeply divided over identity, opportunity, and the meaning of democracy.

The implications extend beyond local politics. Mamdani's rise has unsettled the Democratic Party, exposing tensions between centrist pragmatism and progressive ambition. His message has found strong support in urban America, raising questions about future electoral strategies and ideological direction. Whether or not he ultimately secures executive office, his emergence underscores a broader struggle over America's political soul, with competing visions of populism shaping the path ahead.

# PAKISTAN'S DOUBLE GAME WITH CHINA AND AMERICA IS ITS TICKET TO DISASTER

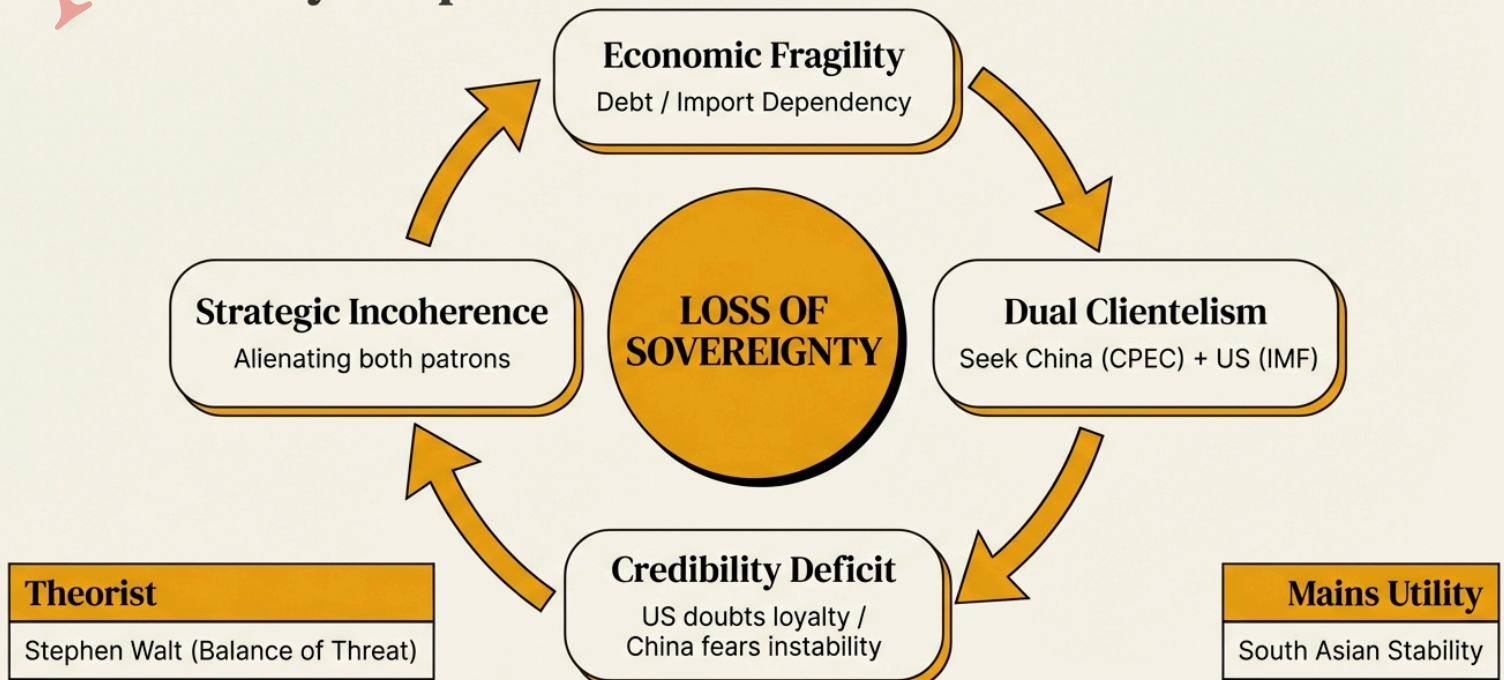
SHASHI THAROOR

Pakistan's foreign policy is increasingly shaped by a risky attempt to balance two rival powers, China and the United States. Deep strategic alignment with China has grown through massive investments under the China Pakistan Economic Corridor, making Beijing Pakistan's most important economic and diplomatic partner. At the same time, Islamabad seeks renewed engagement with Washington, hoping to regain financial assistance, political relevance, and strategic leverage. This dual approach reflects short-term calculation rather than long-term coherence.

China's role in Pakistan goes beyond infrastructure funding. **Beijing provides diplomatic cover at international forums, military cooperation, intelligence support, and strategic backing against regional pressures.** These ties are structural and enduring, rooted in decades of defence collaboration and economic dependence. For Pakistan, China represents stability and continuity, particularly as Western partners have become more transactional and skeptical.

## Pakistan's Double Game: The Stability Trap

**Diagnosis:** Bandwagoning Failure



Engagement with the United States, however, operates on a different logic. Washington's approach is driven by shifting interests, limited patience, and expectations of alignment. Pakistan's attempts to court American investment while remaining firmly anchored to China create credibility problems. Simultaneous outreach to competing power blocs risks alienating both, especially when loyalty and strategic clarity matter more than rhetorical balance.

**Economic fragility lies at the heart of Pakistan's strategy.**

The country is heavily import dependent, faces chronic foreign exchange shortages, and relies on external financing to avoid economic collapse. Playing China and the United States against each other is seen as a way to attract capital, monetize natural resources, and buy time. While this may offer temporary relief, it fails to address structural weaknesses and deeper

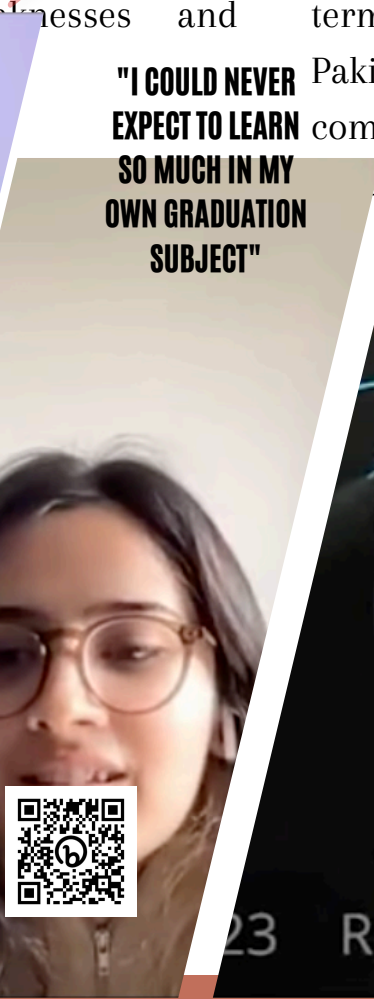
The geopolitical consequences are severe. Strategic competition between China and the United States is intensifying across South Asia and the Indian Ocean. Pakistan's manoeuvres risk turning its territory into a frontline of great power rivalry. Projects such as ports and transport corridors become symbols of strategic contestation, raising security risks, fuelling internal unrest, and destabilising already fragile regions like Balochistan.

In the end, this balancing act undermines Pakistan's strategic autonomy. Dependence on China limits policy flexibility, while transactional engagement with the United States erodes trust. The absence of a clear, value-based foreign policy weakens diplomatic credibility and fuels domestic instability. Short-term survival tactics may deliver immediate gains, but they carry long-term costs. Without course correction, Pakistan's economic and political

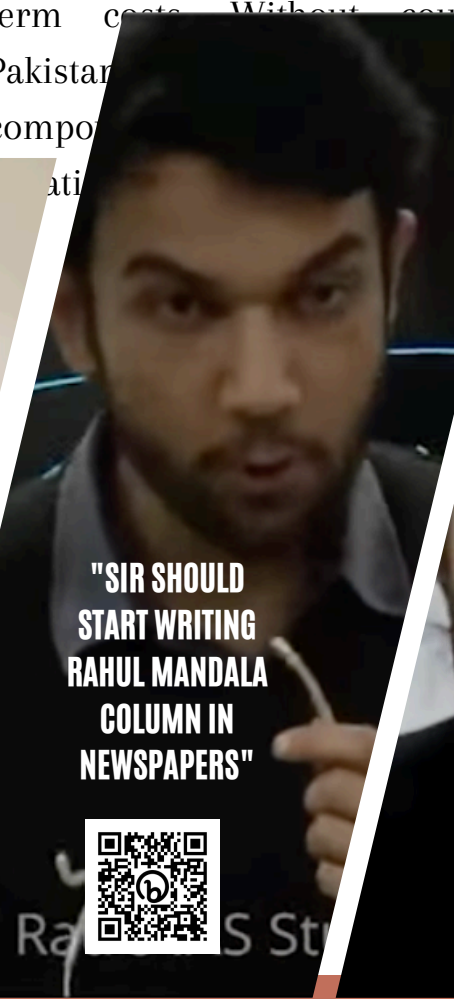
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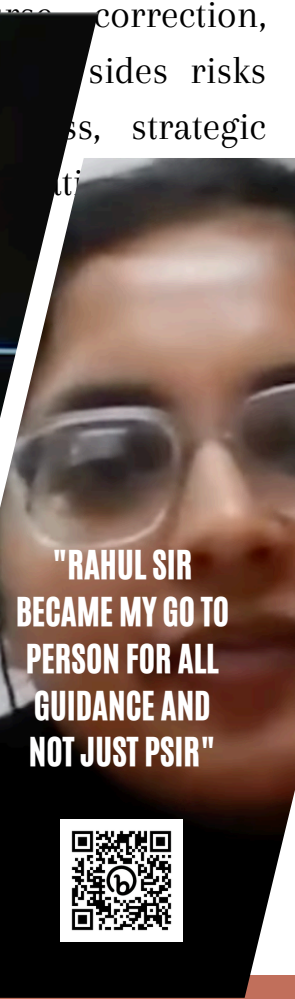
"WORDS CAN NOT EXPRESS THE GRATITUDE WE HAVE FOR SIR"



"I COULD NEVER EXPECT TO LEARN SO MUCH IN MY OWN GRADUATION SUBJECT"



"SIR SHOULD START WRITING RAHUL MANDALA COLUMN IN NEWSPAPERS"



"RAHUL SIR BECAME MY GO TO PERSON FOR ALL GUIDANCE AND NOT JUST PSIR"



# AFTER TRUMP XI CEASEFIRE IN BUSAN HERE'S A TO DO LIST FOR NEW DELHI

SHASHI THAROOR

The Trump Xi meeting in Busan signaled a temporary easing of tensions between the United States and China, marked more by symbolism and restraint than by dramatic breakthroughs. The setting and tone suggested mutual recognition of limits, with China emphasizing parity and the United States maintaining its performative style. The outcome reflected pressure management rather than reconciliation, creating space for a pause in confrontation without resolving underlying rivalries.

China's behavior after the meeting pointed to a calibrated shift. **Military signaling around Taiwan became more predictable, diplomatic rhetoric softened, and selective economic concessions were offered.** These moves indicated tactical adjustment rather than strategic retreat. Domestic pressures, including economic slowdown, debt, and declining confidence, appear to have encouraged Beijing to reduce external friction while preserving leverage. Stability, not escalation, became the immediate priority.

This pause presents India with both opportunity and risk. A calmer regional environment allows New Delhi to strengthen its economic base, rebuild external trust, and invest in technological and military resilience. At the same time, China's adjustments could enable it to regain momentum quietly, making complacency costly. The challenge lies in using the breathing space to prepare rather than relax.

India's recent caution has largely served it well. **Avoiding public theatrics and refraining from overt alignment have preserved room for maneuver.** Managing relations with China requires steady communication, reduced friction, and readiness for change when conditions shift. Lessons from earlier crises show that measured confidence is more stabilizing than displays of bravado.

Equally important is managing relations with the United States beyond personalities. Continuity across institutions matters more than transactional gestures. India benefits from firm but unsentimental partnerships that protect autonomy and prevent entanglement in great power rivalry. Clear boundaries, set privately and early, help avoid miscalculation.

The **Busan pause should be treated as a strategic interval**, not an endpoint. History suggests such moments rarely last. India must reinforce deterrence, reduce economic vulnerabilities, and deepen partnerships that serve long term interests. Success will depend on knowing when silence signals retreat and when it merely masks preparation. Strategic patience, backed by readiness, remains the most reliable guide.

# The Post-Busan Pause: A Strategic Interval

Diagnosis: Policy Strategy



- **Economic:** Strengthen Supply Chains
- **Military:** Invest in Tech Resilience
- **Diplomatic:** Avoid Theatrics

**Theorist**  
Robert Jervis (Perception/Misperception)

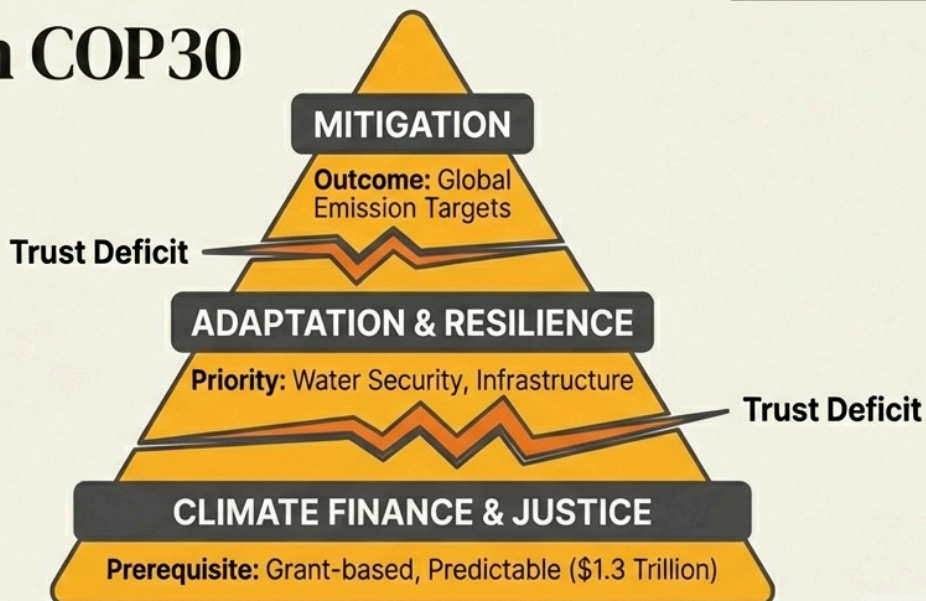
**Mains Utility**  
Indo-Pacific Strategy

## WHAT SOUTH ASIA WANTS FROM COP30

ARUNABHA GHOSH AND  
JHALAK AGGARWAL

### What South Asia Wants from COP30

Diagnosis: North-South Debate



**Concept**

CBDR (Common But Differentiated Responsibilities)

**Mains Utility**

Climate Politics /  
Global Commons

South Asia faces intensifying climate risks ranging **from floods and heatwaves to glacial melt and water stress, making climate action an urgent developmental priority.** The region's response has been pragmatic and collaborative, driven by necessity rather than choice. Countries are focusing on renewable energy, climate resilient agriculture, disaster preparedness, and integrating adaptation into development planning. Regional cooperation has emerged as a practical pathway to scale solutions and share knowledge across borders.

A central concern is the gap between climate promises and actual delivery. Implementation remains the weakest link, particularly in climate finance. While national climate plans exist, access to predictable and adequate funding remains limited. **Only a small fraction of global climate initiatives have achieved stated goals, highlighting the need for targeted regional efforts and stronger governance frameworks.** Transparent reporting systems and inclusive institutions are essential to ensure accountability and progress.

Adaptation must receive the same priority as mitigation. South Asia is projected to experience severe economic and non economic losses due to climate impacts, including food insecurity, displacement, and health stress. Locally led adaptation practices, supported by scientific innovation, can strengthen resilience while preserving community ownership. International processes should adopt simple and flexible indicators under the Global Goal on Adaptation that focus on tracking progress rather than penalising capacity constraints.

Trust is another critical deficit. Delayed financing, diluted commitments, and unfulfilled pledges from developed countries have weakened confidence in global climate governance. Developed nations must meet existing obligations, align new commitments with the 1.5 degree pathway, and support enhanced climate plans from developing countries. Rebuilding trust requires clarity on who delivers finance, how much is delivered, by when, and under what accountability mechanisms.

Climate finance must be predictable, adequate, and accessible. Funding should balance mitigation and adaptation needs, prioritise vulnerable countries, and avoid increasing debt burdens. **The roadmap to mobilise 1.3 trillion dollars must be backed by clear delivery pathways.** Dedicated regional allocations and innovative mechanisms such as a South Asian resilience finance facility can help channel resources toward domestic priorities and nature based solutions.

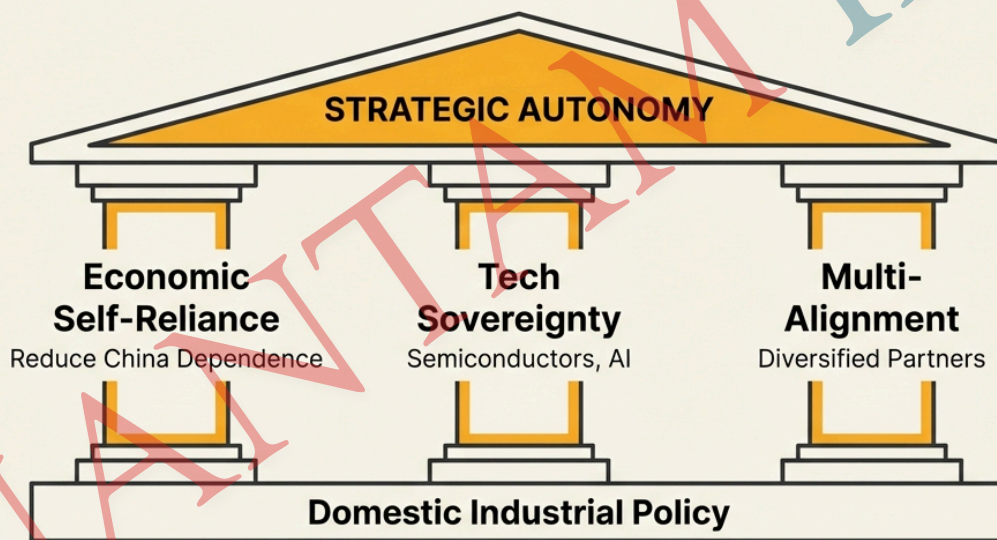
Finally, transformation depends on the convergence of finance, technology, and innovation. South Asia remains largely excluded from global technology flows, limiting its ability to scale solutions. Channeling capital through blended finance, debt swaps, and digital innovation can unlock systemic change. Delivery at COP30 must rest on mutual clarity, cooperation, and implementation, restoring credibility to multilateral climate action through tangible outcomes.

# FROM TRUMP XI G2 A MESSAGE FOR INDIA BUILD YOUR OWN LEVERAGE

SHASHI THAROOR

Diagnosis: Internal Balancing

## Message from the G2: Build Your Own Leverage



### Theorist

Kenneth Waltz (Internal Balancing)

### Mains Utility

Economic Diplomacy / Technology Geopolitics

The Trump Xi engagement under the idea of a G2 highlights a shifting global balance that carries important lessons for India. Warming ties between Washington and Beijing suggest that great powers will prioritise their own transactional interests over the strategic expectations of partners. This reinforces the reality that India cannot rely on any external power to counterbalance China on its behalf and must reassess long held assumptions about global alignments

A key vulnerability exposed by the US China dynamic is India's economic dependence on Chinese imports, particularly in critical sectors such as electronics, pharmaceuticals, and manufacturing inputs. China's dominance of global supply chains gives it leverage that India lacks. This **asymmetry limits India's bargaining power and underscores the urgency of diversifying supply chains** and strengthening domestic manufacturing capacity through a clear strategy of economic self reliance.

The idea that closer ties with the United States would automatically constrain China has proven unreliable. American policy toward China is driven primarily by domestic political calculations and economic priorities, which can change rapidly. Trade disputes, tariffs, and selective engagement reveal a hierarchy of interests where India does not occupy a central place. This makes it essential for India to prepare for a more transactional and unpredictable international environment.

**Strategic autonomy therefore becomes the core objective.** India must build leverage by investing in national power across multiple domains. This includes accelerating industrial policy, supporting indigenous technology development, and reducing dependence on external suppliers for critical goods. Emerging technologies such as semiconductors, artificial intelligence, and quantum computing are especially important for long term competitiveness and security.

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Diplomatically, India should pursue a genuinely multi aligned approach. **Deepening ties with Europe, Japan, ASEAN, the Gulf states, and Africa can expand options and reduce overreliance on any single partner.**

Regional engagement and leadership can also enhance India's influence while allowing flexibility in dealing with major powers, including China.

The broader message is clear. In a multipolar world shaped by competing interests, leverage matters more than alignment. India's future security and prosperity depend on its ability to strengthen internal capabilities while remaining outward looking. Building economic resilience, technological capacity, and strategic confidence is the most reliable way to protect national interests amid shifting great power equations.



# INDIA NEEDS TO CONNECT, BUILD AND REVIVE WITH AFRICA

SYED AKBARUDDIN

India Africa relations have expanded steadily over the past decade, moving beyond symbolism to deeper economic, political, and people centred engagement. Diplomatic outreach has grown, trade has crossed significant milestones, and India has supported Africa's voice in global forums. Yet the moment calls for reflection on whether the foundations laid so far are strong enough to meet future ambitions, especially as Africa's demographic and economic weight continues to rise.

Africa represents both opportunity and responsibility for India. By mid century, one in four people globally will live on the continent, while India itself will emerge as one of the world's largest economies. **This convergence creates a natural corridor for growth in commerce, technology, and human capital.** Indian investments have increased, but the engagement model is evolving from basic infrastructure and trade toward value addition, technology collaboration, and long term partnerships.

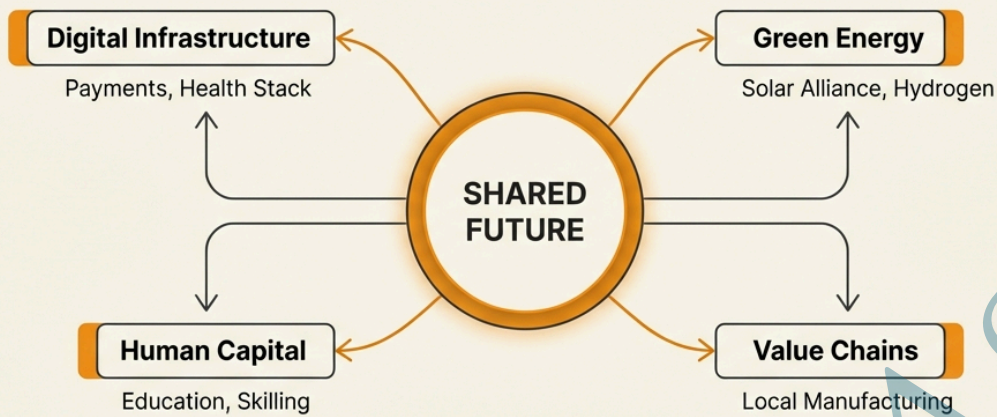
Education and capacity building remain central pillars. Indian institutions, training programmes, and digital platforms have enabled thousands of Africans to study, skill, and return home with knowledge that shapes governance, business, and innovation. These exchanges are not isolated initiatives but part of a wider ecosystem of trust built over decades. The presence of Africans in India, and Indians working across Africa, reinforces people to people bonds that no agreement can replicate.

Economic engagement, however, faces constraints. Indian companies often struggle with scale, financing, and bureaucratic hurdles, while competition from China is intense. The solution lies not in retreat but in moving up the value chain. **Co investing in sectors such as renewable energy, electric mobility, digital infrastructure, and green hydrogen can align with Africa's development** priorities and India's technological strengths. Africa today is setting its own terms, and partnerships must respect that agency.

The future agenda requires three clear moves. Finance must be tied to visible outcomes and used to crowd in private capital rather than replace it. A shared digital corridor can combine India's digital public infrastructure with Africa's innovation ecosystems to deliver solutions in health, education, and payments. Institutional engagement also needs revival, including renewed summit level dialogue to restore momentum and coordination.

Ultimately, the partnership is human at its core. Talent flows, cultural exchange, and shared aspirations define the relationship more than statistics. India and Africa are no longer merely trading goods but exchanging confidence, capacity, and ideas. The next chapter depends on sustained commitment to building together, as equal partners shaping a shared future.

# India-Africa 2.0: Connect, Build, Revive



**Concept**  
Joseph Nye (Soft Power)

**Mains Utility**  
Global South Leadership

## THE LETTER HAS WON BUT THE SPIRIT HAS NOT LOST

— GOPALKRISHNA GANDHI —

India's constitutional system places immense responsibility on high offices such as the President and Governors. Their signatures and decisions are not meant to be routine acts of compliance but exercises of judgment rooted in constitutional morality. History shows that these offices can either protect democratic values or weaken them through passivity. The difference lies in whether authority is exercised with independence, fairness, and a sense of moral responsibility.

The recent Supreme Court judgment in the 16th Presidential Reference reaffirms this balance. By holding that Governors cannot indefinitely delay decisions while also recognising limits on judicial interference, the Court upheld both the letter and the spirit of the Constitution. It clarified that inaction can be as damaging as wrongful action and that constitutional authority must be exercised within reasonable timeframes.

Past experience demonstrates that constitutional discretion, when used with care, can strengthen democracy. **Presidents such as R. Venkataraman and K. R. Narayanan showed that it was possible to question executive advice without confrontation,** delay decisions when fairness demanded it, and insist on constitutional propriety. Their actions were guided not by politics but by conscience and an understanding of the spirit behind constitutional provisions. Such restraint enhanced trust in institutions rather than undermining them.

Similar expectations apply to Governors. Their role is not to serve as agents of the ruling party at the Centre but as impartial constitutional authorities. When recommendations such as the dismissal of elected governments were returned for reconsideration in the past, it was done to uphold fairness and federal balance. Moral clarity, not political alignment, shaped those interventions, reinforcing the idea that constitutional offices must rise above partisanship.

Importantly, the judgment avoids prescribing rigid deadlines, recognising that constitutional functioning depends on judgment rather than mechanical rules. It **places responsibility back where it belongs, on those who hold office.** The message is clear that misuse of discretion, whether through obstruction or haste, violates constitutional trust.

Ultimately, the strength of Indian democracy depends less on legal technicalities and more on the character of those entrusted with power. Offices do not make individuals great; individuals give meaning to offices. The Constitution survives not only through compliance with its text but through fidelity to its values, ensuring that even when procedures prevail, the spirit of democracy remains alive.

## **TRUMP'S UKRAINE PEACE PLAN IS AUDACIOUS INDIA HAS A STAKE IN ITS SUCCESS**

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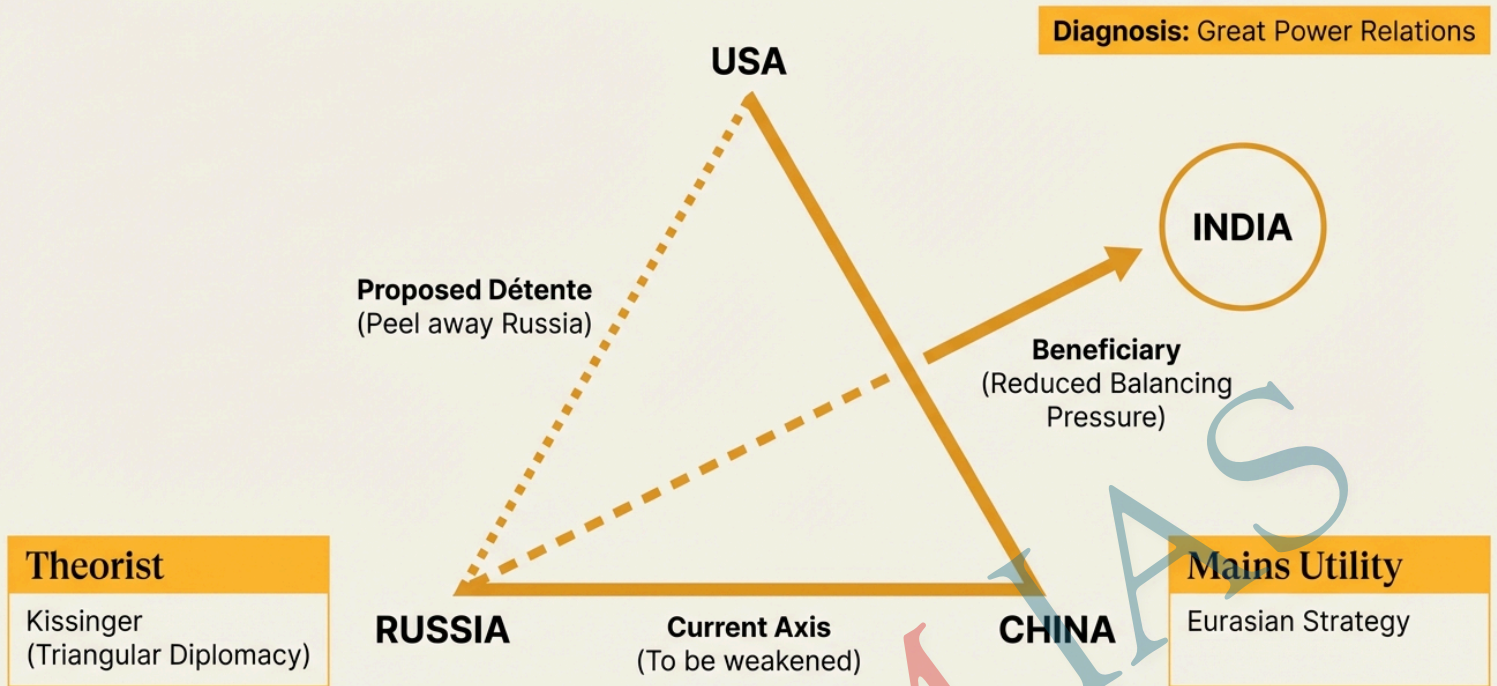
C. RAJA MOHAN

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Donald Trump's proposed Ukraine peace plan reopens the possibility of a fundamental reset in United States Russia relations. By seeking to reintegrate **Russia into the global economy and reduce the confrontation that has defined Europe since 2014,** the plan challenges the assumption that rivalry between Washington and Moscow is permanent. Its scale and ambition have unsettled Europe and Ukraine, but they also force a reconsideration of long standing geopolitical orthodoxies.

The plan rests on difficult trade offs. It envisages limits on Ukraine's military options and NATO aspirations in return for an end to hostilities and a broader accommodation with Russia. For Trump, the priority is to reduce American entanglement in European conflicts and redirect strategic focus. This approach has generated resistance within the United States and among allies, yet it reflects a wider fatigue with prolonged war and escalating costs.

# Trump's Ukraine Plan: The Geopolitical Triangle



Russia views the initiative as an opportunity to break out of isolation. Sanctions and the rupture with the West have pushed Moscow closer to Beijing, tightening its economic and technological dependence on China. A partial thaw with the United States and Europe could allow Russia to rebalance, reclaim strategic autonomy, and reduce its reliance on a single partner. Even limited cooperation with the West would strengthen Russia's position as an independent great power.

For India, these shifts carry significant implications. A reduction in hostility between the United States and Russia would ease the pressure on New Delhi to constantly balance between competing partners. It would make it easier for India to sustain ties with both without being drawn into rigid camps. India's concern has never been US Russia engagement in Europe, but the prospect of a Sino American condominium shaping Asia without adequate space for other powers.

India's strategic **interest lies in preventing excessive alignment between Russia and China.** Improved US Russia ties could loosen that bond and create greater flexibility in Eurasian geopolitics. This would benefit India's security environment and expand diplomatic room for maneuver.

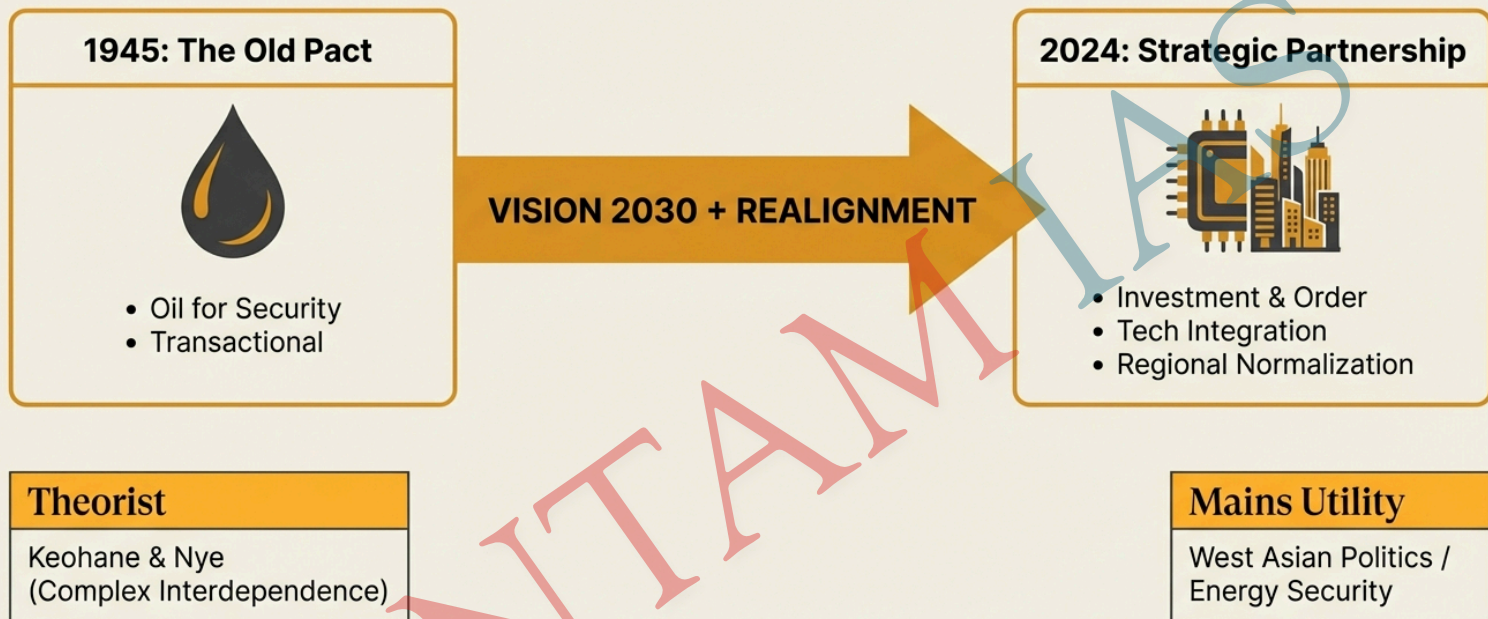
At the same time, India remains cautious about great power bargains. History has shown that major power realignments often overlook third party interests. New Delhi's priority must remain strengthening its own national power, avoiding entanglement, and engaging all sides pragmatically. The peace plan may or may not succeed, but its implications underline the need for India to stay agile, realistic, and focused on its long term strategic autonomy.

# TRUMP MBS SUMMIT \$1 TRILLION AMONG FRIENDS

MAHESH SACHDEV

Diagnosis: Complex Interdependence

## Trump-MbS Summit: The \$1 Trillion Evolution



The recent summit between Donald Trump and **Saudi Crown Prince Mohammed bin Salman** marked a significant renewal of one of the oldest strategic partnerships in global politics. Rooted in decades of transactional cooperation, the relationship is now being redefined through ambitious economic, military, and technological commitments. The scale of proposed Saudi investments in the United States, potentially reaching one trillion dollars, signals Riyadh's intent to anchor its long term economic future closely to Washington

Under Trump's presidency, bilateral ties have taken on a more explicit and assertive character. High profile symbolism, large defence agreements, and expansive economic pledges reflect a relationship that is no longer discreet but openly strategic. Saudi Arabia's designation as a major non NATO ally and commitments on defence cooperation underscore Washington's view of Riyadh as a central pillar of its regional strategy in West Asia.

Energy remains at the core of this partnership, though its nature has evolved. While oil dependence has declined in relative terms, coordination over global oil markets continues to serve mutual interests. Both countries seek price stability, **market dominance, and leverage over competitors.** Sanctions on other oil producers have further aligned their interests, allowing Saudi Arabia and the United States to shape supply dynamics and reinforce influence over global energy flows.

Regionally, Saudi Arabia is asserting greater autonomy. Its diplomacy has expanded to include outreach to Iran, engagement with Israel through indirect channels, and a more visible role in conflict mediation. Support from Washington strengthens Riyadh's confidence as it navigates a more complex regional environment while pursuing Vision 2030 and post oil economic diversification.

The summit also carries implications for India. Shifts in US Saudi defence cooperation may indirectly affect **South Asian security dynamics. Stable oil prices benefit India as a major importer,** while Saudi investment ambitions open new economic opportunities. Enhanced Saudi ties with Israel and regional connectivity initiatives could also advance projects such as the India Middle East Europe Economic Corridor.

Overall, the Trump MbS engagement reflects a transition from a security for oil arrangement to a broader strategic partnership based on economic ambition, regional influence, and geopolitical recalibration. While uncertainties remain about implementation, the renewed alignment suggests that US Saudi ties are entering a potential new phase with global repercussions.

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