

PERSPECTIVES

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

INDIA'S STRATEGIC RECKONING

THE RUSSIA RETURN: BEYOND DEFENCE TIES

Transitioning from military-centric to a \$100 billion trade target and energy security through "Programme 2030."

THE NEW FACE OF URBAN TERROR

Addressing sophisticated, indigenous terror modules involving educated professionals and decentralized networks.

THE TRUMP FACTOR VS. STRATEGIC AUTONOMY

Navigating aggressive US tariffs and a shifting National Security Strategy (NSS) while maintaining independent foreign policy.

NEIGHBORHOOD VOLATILITY: THE RING OF FIRE

Managing the complex security dynamics across Pakistan, Bangladesh, and a resurgent Taliban-led Afghanistan.

DECEMBER 26

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This December edition of our PSIR magazine India's external engagement is shown to be shaped by strategic autonomy, regional instability, and a rapidly shifting global order. In the Indian Ocean, India seeks to move beyond fragmented security structures toward cooperative frameworks such as the Colombo Security Conclave, linking maritime security with development, sustainability, and the emerging blue economy. Stewardship of the commons, climate resilience, and inclusive growth are increasingly seen as central to both security and prosperity in the Indian Ocean region.

India's long standing relationship with Russia emerges as a recurring theme. Putin's visits and India Russia summits highlight continuity rooted in defence, energy, and technology cooperation, even as the Ukraine war complicates India's balancing act with the West. Russia remains a reliable defence partner, supplying critical platforms such as S 400 and BrahMos, while India cautiously diversifies its military imports. The relationship is being recalibrated toward broader economic, technological, and connectivity based cooperation, reflecting realism rather than ideology.

At the same time, India faces relative diplomatic isolation and security stress in its neighbourhood. Pakistan's militarisation, Bangladesh's political uncertainty, and the resurgence of urban and indigenous terror networks underline internal and external vulnerabilities. These challenges demand heightened vigilance and strategic foresight, especially as terrorism evolves in sophistication and social penetration.

India's ties with the United States and Europe appear more uncertain. The return of Trump and his National Security Strategy have unsettled Europe and strained transatlantic institutions, with implications for India. Trade disputes, tariffs, immigration restrictions, and diverging approaches to Russia have tested India US relations, even as cooperation continues selectively.

Overall, the articles portray India navigating a world marked by power shifts, weakened multilateralism, and regional turbulence. The consistent thread is India's effort to balance competing relationships, safeguard sovereignty, and convert geopolitical uncertainty into sustainable strategic and economic gains.

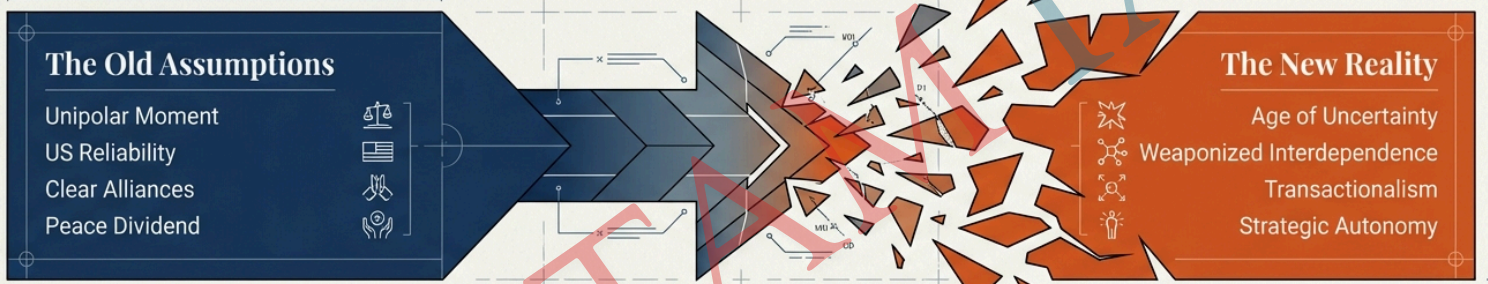
Rahul
Puri

PSIR OPTIONAL FACULTY
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The Global Flux: From Unipolarity to Fragmented Multi-Alignment

Evolution Bar



Content Panel



A TEMPLATE FOR SECURITY COOPERATION IN THE INDIAN OCEAN

HARSH V. PANT
AND SAYATAN
HALDAR

India's hosting of the 2025 National Security Adviser level Colombo Security Conclave summit marked a turning point for regional security cooperation in the Indian Ocean. The conclave, involving **India, Sri Lanka, Maldives, Mauritius, Bangladesh**, and observers and guests, reflects renewed momentum after earlier political transitions slowed collective focus. Its agenda highlights maritime security, counterterrorism, trafficking, organized crime, and cybersecurity, areas increasingly central to regional stability.

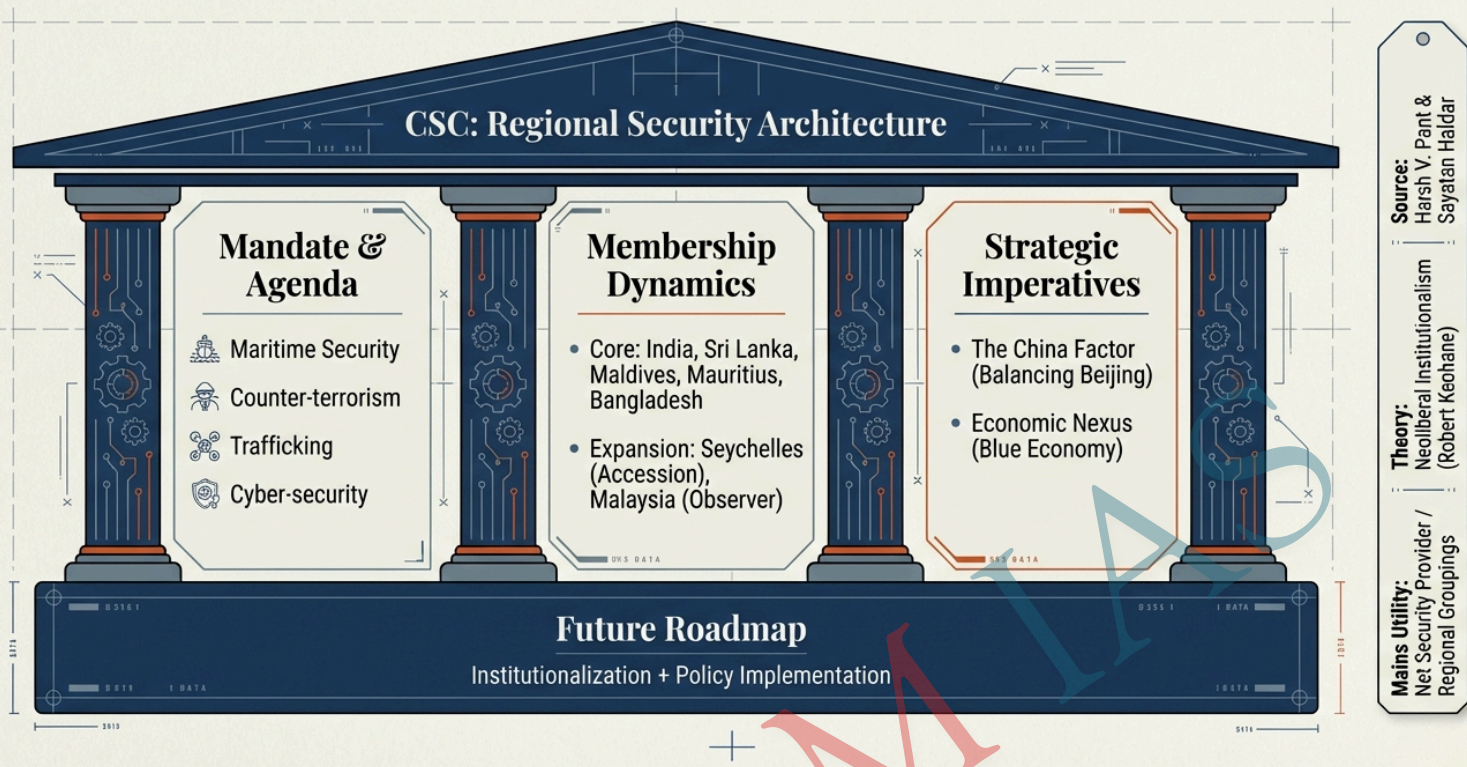
The Indian Ocean security environment remains fragmented, lacking a single institutional framework. In this context, flexible groupings like the conclave gain importance by enabling coordination, confidence building, and practical cooperation among littoral states. Maritime security challenges are closely linked with development needs, as coastal economies depend heavily on sea borne trade, fisheries, connectivity, and resilient supply chains. Addressing threats at sea therefore supports livelihoods and long term economic growth.

Recent developments signal consolidation and expansion. Seychelles' accession as a full member **and Malaysia's participation as a guest illustrate widening interest in cooperative mechanisms.** For India, the forum deepens engagement with maritime neighbors during a period of geopolitical volatility and shifting power balances across the Indo Pacific and Indian Ocean regions. The growing salience of security cooperation underscores recognition that collective responses are necessary to manage transnational risks.

The China factor looms as a complex variable. India views Chinese presence in the Indian Ocean as a significant strategic concern, while several regional partners balance security considerations with development ties to Beijing. Managing this divergence requires calibrated diplomacy that preserves unity while safeguarding core interests.

Looking ahead, strengthening institutional structures is essential. Moving beyond an adviser level format toward more durable mechanisms can align policies with implementation. Domestic political uncertainties within member states also shape the conclave's resilience. Despite constraints, the initiative demonstrates progress toward building cohesion, enhancing capacity, and fostering a shared vision for security cooperation

The Colombo Security Conclave: Architecture for a Safer Ocean



TURN SOFT SPOT FOR RUSSIA INTO HARD GAINS FOR DELHI

C. RAJA MOHAN

Russia's president Vladimir Putin's visit to India after a long gap comes at a moment of flux shaped by the Ukraine war, Western diplomacy, and shifting global alignments. India's **traditional ties with Moscow persist but have narrowed over time, remaining largely confined to defence and nuclear cooperation**, with limited commercial depth and minimal societal traction. The relationship has endured more due to personal leadership engagement than broad strategic convergence.

The war in Ukraine has exposed the limits of India's Russia policy. With Moscow locked in conflict with the West, India faces the reality that its principal economic and technological partners remain the United States and Europe. Years of neglecting economic engagement with Russia leave Delhi with little leverage.

Western positions are evolving. Ukraine's leadership has moderated its stance toward a negotiated peace, reflecting battlefield realities and waning Western appetite for prolonged confrontation. In Moscow, pragmatic voices recognize the costs of isolation and seek reintegration into global forums and a role in shaping Europe's security order. High level American engagement signals interest in brokering.

India's balancing act has become more complex. Its reluctance to condemn Russia and its surge in Russian oil imports have irritated Western partners. The United States under Joe Biden resisted pushing India to a breaking point, while a transactional American approach under Donald Trump emphasized pressure through tariffs and deals. Europe, unsettled by war and uncertain about American reliability, seeks deterrence and engagement with Moscow.

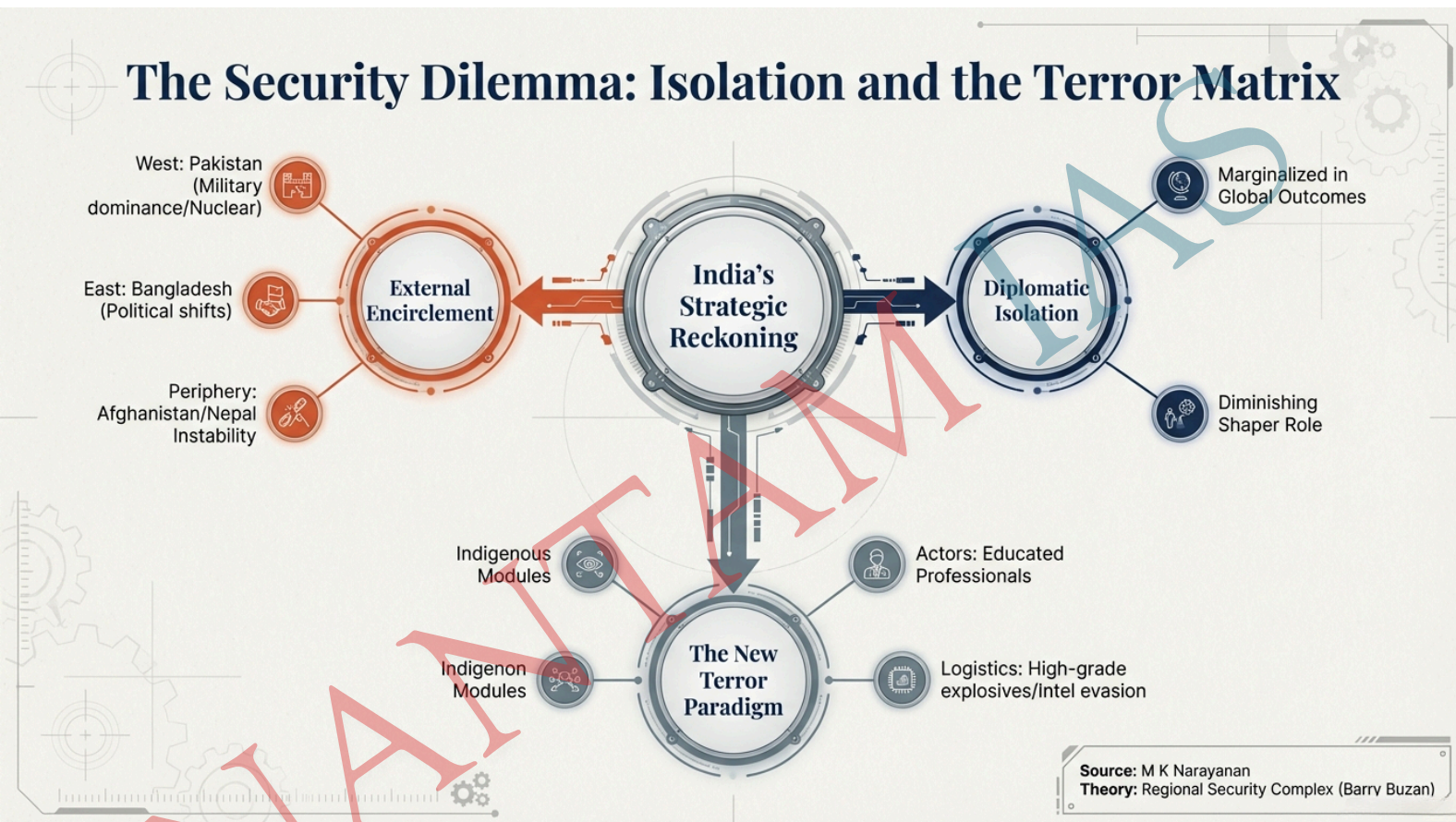
These shifts create space for India to recalibrate. A defence centric partnership with Russia is insufficient for long term relevance. A broader agenda encompassing trade, **technology, scientific collaboration, and post war reconstruction could restore balance.** With peace efforts underway and global equations in motion, India can correct distortions in its Russia policy and anchor the relationship on a modern and resilient foundation.

Recalibrating Russia: Turning a Soft Spot into Hard Gains



NEW DELHI'S RELATIVE ISOLATION, INDIA'S TRYST WITH TERROR

M K NARAYANAN



India is passing through a moment of strategic reckoning marked by diplomatic isolation and growing internal and external security threats. Despite its reputation for skilled diplomacy, the country appears increasingly marginal in shaping outcomes related to global peace and order, whether in West Asia, Europe, or the Indo Pacific. At the same time, instability across South Asia has deepened India's vulnerabilities, leaving it surrounded by uncertainty from Afghanistan and Nepal to Myanmar and the Maldives.

India faces simultaneous hostility on its western and eastern flanks. Pakistan remains an enduring threat, intensified by constitutional and military changes that have strengthened the dominance of its armed forces and concentrated control over nuclear assets. **Such centralization of power heightens the risk of miscalculation and adventurism, making sustained peace unlikely and increasing the probability of conflict.** Bangladesh adds to India's concerns, with political shifts and warming ties with Pakistan carrying serious security implications for the Bay of Bengal region.

A troubling development is the resurfacing of urban terrorism in a new and more complex form. Unlike earlier waves of terror linked directly to foreign handlers, recent incidents reveal indigenous modules operating across cities such as Jammu, Kashmir, Faridabad, and Delhi. These networks involve educated professionals, including doctors, and display sophisticated planning, logistics, and financing. The discovery of large quantities of explosives and the ability to evade security agencies point to dangerous gaps in intelligence and enforcement.

The ideological **roots of this violence draw from long standing communal fault lines**, with links extending beyond South Asia to West Asia and beyond. The involvement of academic and professional networks under the guise of social or charitable causes adds a new dimension to the challenge.

Given these developments, heightened vigilance becomes essential. India's pluralistic and tolerant social fabric remains a strength, but complacency could prove costly. Sustained alertness, strategic foresight, and careful internal and external balancing are necessary to prevent further deterioration and to safeguard national stability.

FOR PUTIN, A POLITICAL WIN; FOR INDIA, A STABLE PARTNER

SHYAM SARAN

The Strategic Calculus of the Putin Visit



President Vladimir Putin's visit to India marked a moment of political reassurance for Moscow and strategic continuity for New Delhi. The optics of a warm reception signaled Russia's **continued international legitimacy at a time of Western sanctions and isolation**. For Putin, the visit reinforced domestic political standing, while for India it reaffirmed the value of a long standing partnership during a period of global uncertainty.

India's foreign policy assumptions, stable for decades, are now under strain. The Indo US strategic partnership has lost momentum amid shifting American priorities, unpredictability in leadership, and reduced focus on the Indo Pacific. Trade frictions and tariffs have added pressure. **In contrast, India has retained space to maneuver with Russia, particularly in energy and defense.** Continued purchases of Russian oil, even when others stepped back, underscored India's limited capacity to fully align with Western pressure.

India Russia ties today differ significantly from the Cold War era. Shared threat perceptions have faded, yet defense cooperation remains the backbone of the relationship. Russia continues to be a critical partner in nuclear submarines, missile systems, and advanced platforms, alongside cooperation in nuclear energy, including small modular reactors. Economic engagement, while limited, is being pushed through long term frameworks to diversify the

Europe's discomfort with India's outreach to Putin contrasts with its own strategic dilemmas. European anxieties stem more from doubts about American reliability than from India's choices. Meanwhile, India has maintained a careful position on Ukraine, avoiding public condemnation while supporting principles of sovereignty and early peace.

China remains a complicating factor. Beijing views closer India Russia ties with caution, though Moscow's dependence on China limits strategic convergence with India. For New Delhi, sustaining relations with Russia provides balance in a volatile environment, especially when ties with the United States face uncertainty.

Overall, the visit highlighted India's emphasis on strategic autonomy, pragmatic engagement, and stability in partnerships while navigating a rapidly changing global order.



THE REAL STORY OF THE INDIA RUSSIA SUMMIT

PANKAJ SARAN

The 23rd India Russia Summit in New Delhi highlighted the **complex geopolitical terrain** shaping today's world, with the Ukraine war forcing major global actors into opposing camps. India's handling of the summit demonstrated diplomatic confidence and strategic clarity at a time when navigating relations with competing partners has become increasingly difficult. The timing and optics of the summit carried strong signals for both domestic and international audiences.

The **red carpet reception for President Vladimir Putin** underscored the importance India continues to attach to its relationship with Russia despite global pressures. The presence of a high powered Russian delegation, including figures associated with peace efforts, emphasized India's role as a serious and credible interlocutor. For India, the summit removed ambiguity about its ties with Moscow, while for Russia it reaffirmed India's relevance in its foreign policy priorities.

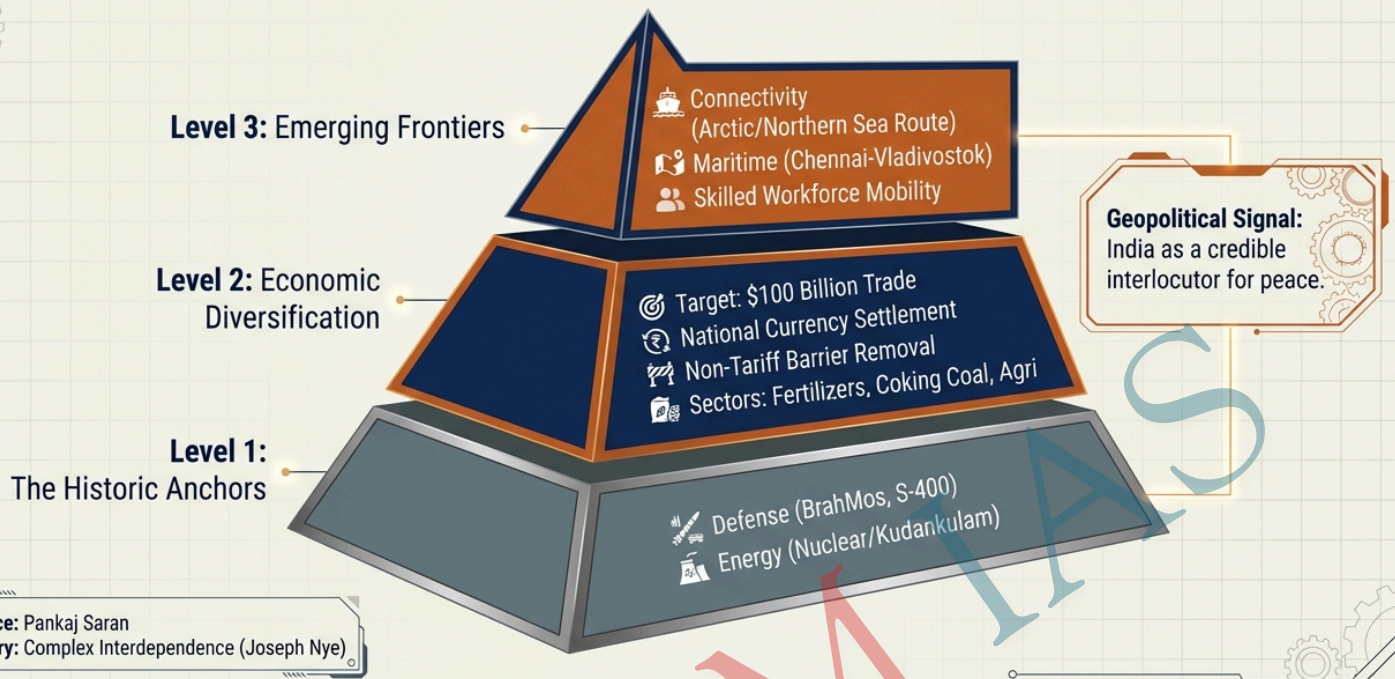
The summit took place amid intense battlefield pressure on Russia and growing fatigue in Western support for Ukraine. India's support for peace initiatives aligned with efforts driven by Washington, reinforcing the view that New Delhi and the United States share common ground on ending the conflict, even if their methods differ. Europe emerged as the outlier, facing the challenge of preserving its interests while recalibrating relations with both Russia and India.

At the bilateral level, the adoption of Programme 2030 marked a decisive step toward strengthening economic cooperation. Measures such as trade in national currencies, removal of non tariff barriers, and diversification beyond energy aim to reach a 100 billion dollar trade target. Energy security remains central, with Russia's vast resources offering India assured and affordable supplies critical to economic stability.

Long standing cooperation in **defence, nuclear energy, space, and science and technology** continues to anchor the relationship. Systems like BrahMos and S 400 highlight the strategic depth of defence ties, even as India advances indigenisation. Emerging areas such as maritime connectivity, Arctic cooperation, and skilled workforce mobility signal future potential.

Overall, the summit reflected a re engineering of India Russia relations, grounded in realism, resilience, and India's pursuit of strategic autonomy in a shifting global order.

Programme 2030: Re-engineering the Partnership



THE INDIAN OCEAN AS CRADLE OF A NEW BLUE ECONOMY

KILAPARTI
RAMAKRISHNA

The Indian Ocean occupies a central place in India's past and future, shaping its security, prosperity, and global outlook. From its early support for the **United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea**, India positioned itself as a champion of fairness, equity, and the idea of the oceans as the common heritage of humankind. Today, climate change, rising sea levels, ocean warming, and illegal fishing threaten marine ecosystems, making renewed leadership essential.

The Indian Ocean region, home to nearly one third of humanity, is among the most climate vulnerable in the world. India has both the opportunity and responsibility to ensure that the ocean becomes a laboratory of sustainability, innovation, and resilience, rather than a space of rivalry. This requires moving beyond rhetoric to practical leadership that shapes norms and outcomes.

A credible **Blue Ocean Strategy** rests on three pillars: **stewardship, resilience, and inclusive growth**. Stewardship demands ecosystem restoration, biodiversity protection, and sustainable fisheries, reinforcing the idea of the Indian Ocean as a shared space.

Resilience focuses on adaptation to climate risks through regional cooperation, early warning systems, ocean observation networks, and technology transfer, particularly to small island and coastal states. Inclusive growth highlights green shipping, offshore renewable energy, sustainable aquaculture, and marine biotechnology as pathways to development aligned with climate goals.

Global momentum is building. Major climate finance initiatives, multilateral development **banks, and new partnerships announced at forums such as COP30 and the Blue Economy Finance** Forum signal growing recognition of the ocean's role in climate action. India can channel this momentum through region focused mechanisms such as an Indian Ocean Blue Fund, turning financial pledges into concrete projects.

Security in the Indian Ocean increasingly depends on sustainability, as ecological collapse undermines livelihoods and stability. India's vision of Security and Growth for All in the Region reinforces cooperation, stewardship, and shared prosperity. Rooted in history and guided by responsibility, the Indian Ocean can emerge as the cradle of a new blue economy, balancing development, justice, and environmental care.

Blue Ocean Strategy: From Rivalry to Resilience

Philosophy: SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region)

Stewardship



- Ecosystem Restoration
- Biodiversity Protection
- Sustainable Fisheries

Resilience



- Climate Adaptation
- Early Warning Systems
- Tech Transfer to SIDS

Inclusive Growth

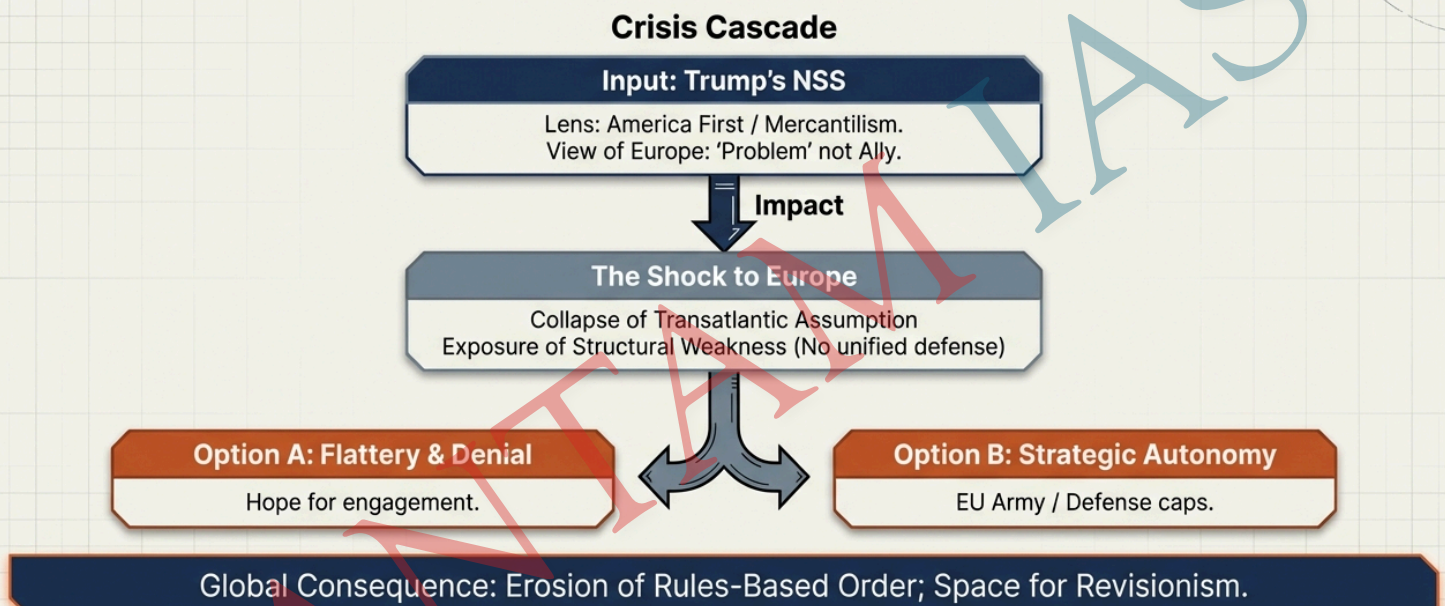


- Green Shipping
- Offshore Energy
- Indian Ocean Blue Fund

THE TRUMP NSS, EUROPE'S EXISTENTIAL CRISIS

PRIYANKALI MALIK

The Atlantic Rift: Europe's Strategic Dilemma



Source: Priyankali Malik
Theory: Structural Realism (Mearsheimer - Tragedy of Great Power Politics)

Europe is confronting a profound moment of uncertainty triggered by the **Trump Administration's National Security Strategy** and the signals it sends about America's changing priorities. For much of the year, European leaders assumed that US support for NATO and the transatlantic partnership would ultimately endure. The strategy document, however, suggests a far less reassuring view, portraying Europe not as a trusted ally but as a problem shaped by perceived decline and dependency.

The NSS frames global politics through a narrow America First lens, focused on trade imbalances, mercantilism, and hemispheric defense rather than collective security. Europe is criticised for cultural erosion, weakened sovereignty, and reliance on American protection. Such language raises doubts about Washington's long term commitment to Europe's security architecture and challenges long standing assumptions underpinning the post war order.

For Europe, this moment exposes structural weaknesses. The continent lacks a unified defense identity, depends heavily on American intelligence and military capabilities, and has made limited progress toward integrated defense projects.

Even ambitious initiatives, such as joint fighter aircraft development, remain stalled. If US troops were reduced or withdrawn, Europe would face manpower shortages, unresolved debates over nuclear deterrence, and fragile political cohesion, further complicated by Brexit.

Europe now faces difficult choices. One option is to downplay the NSS and rely on diplomacy and flattery to retain US engagement. **Another is to accept that American reliability can no longer be assumed** and to invest seriously in autonomous defense capabilities. Germany and France have begun revisiting this debate, but progress remains slow and politically sensitive.

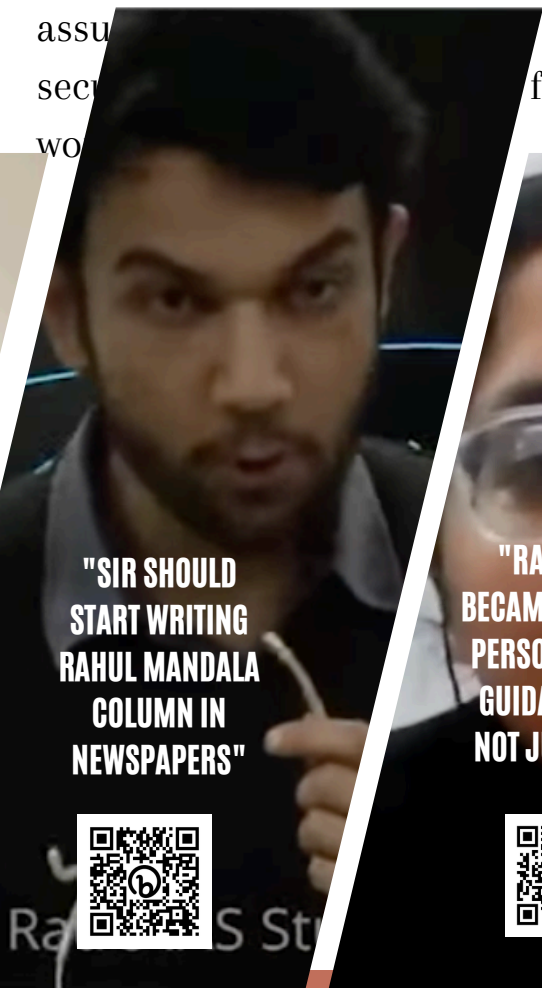
The implications extend beyond Europe. A weakened transatlantic bond undermines multilateral institutions, erodes the rules based international order, and opens space for powers like China and Russia to expand influence. The crisis, therefore, is not only about a policy document, but about whether Europe can adapt, defend its values, and assume its own security in a fragmented world.



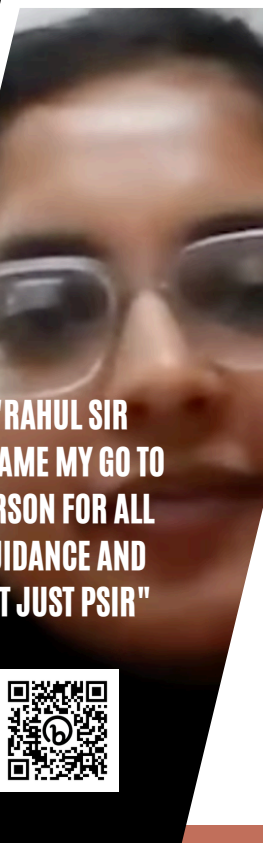
"WORDS CAN NOT EXPRESS THE GRATITUDE WE HAVE FOR SIR"



"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"



AMNTIAS

UNLOCKING THE POTENTIAL OF INDIA AFRICA ECONOMIC TIES

AMAL KRISHNAN AND
BADRI NARAYANAN

India Africa economic relations are entering a decisive phase, driven by renewed political engagement and shifting global market conditions. Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visits to African nations highlight the growing importance of the continent in India's external economic strategy. While India and Africa share long standing cultural and political bonds, the relationship today is increasingly shaped by **trade, investment, and supply chain considerations**.

Uncertainty in traditional Western markets, particularly the United States and the European Union, has strengthened the case for diversification. Africa already stands as India's **fourth largest trading partner**, with bilateral trade nearing 100 billion dollars. India's exports span petroleum products, engineering goods, pharmaceuticals, rice, and textiles, while Africa remains a relatively under tapped market compared to China's deep commercial penetration. As global supply chains restructure, Africa offers India both scale and strategic depth.

A five pillar strategy can unlock this potential. The first pillar focuses on reducing trade barriers through preferential trade agreements and deeper engagement with regional blocs such as the African Continental Free Trade Area.

The second pillar emphasizes a shift from commodity exports to value added manufacturing and joint ventures, enabling Indian firms to integrate into African industrial growth while maintaining access to global markets.

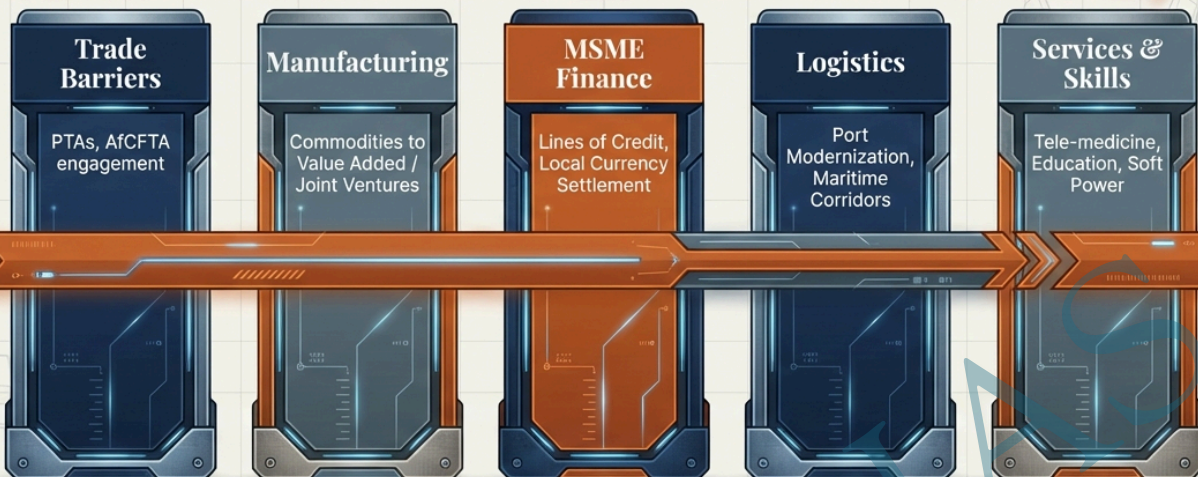
The third pillar highlights micro, small, and medium enterprises, which face financing and risk constraints. Expanding Lines of Credit, improving trade finance, using local currency settlements, and creating insurance mechanisms can significantly enhance MSME participation. The **fourth pillar stresses the need to lower logistics costs through port modernization**, hinterland connectivity, and maritime corridors, improving competitiveness on both sides.

The fifth pillar underlines the growing role of services trade, including information technology, health care, digital services, and skill development. Services can catalyse higher value exports and strengthen people to people ties. A stronger role for Indian public sector enterprises in manufacturing, infrastructure, renewable energy, mining, and critical technologies can further anchor long term partnerships.

Ultimately, India's engagement with Africa must move beyond transactional trade toward long term, sustainable economic partnerships, positioning Africa as central to India's global economic ambitions.

India-Africa: The 5-Pillar Economic Roadmap

Goal: From Transactional Trade to Value Chain Integration.



Source: Amal Krishnan & Badri Narayanan
Theory: South-South Cooperation
(Breaking Core-Periphery Dependency)

PUTIN'S VISIT TO INDIA AND THE AFTERMATH

M K NARAYANAN

Russian **President Vladimir Putin's** visit to India for the annual India Russia Summit attracted wide global attention, particularly in the West, which closely watched whether the visit would weaken the diplomatic isolation imposed on Moscow after the Ukraine conflict. India managed the engagement with care, maintaining strategic autonomy while avoiding open confrontation with Western sensitivities.

India Russia relations have long been anchored in deep historical trust and high level political engagement. **From the 1971 Treaty of Peace, Friendship and Cooperation** to decisive moments such as Russia's support during the Bangladesh liberation and later strategic defence assistance, the partnership has often reshaped regional balances. Over decades, sustained leadership level understanding has preserved this relationship despite global shifts and external pressure.

The Ukraine war placed the partnership under strain, testing India's balancing approach. India chose neutrality, refusing to join sanctions while continuing economic and energy engagement with Russia. Putin's visit, his first after Western travel restrictions, signaled the durability of bilateral ties. The optics of warmth between the leaders reassured Moscow and demonstrated India's independent foreign policy stance.

The Joint Statement issued after the summit reaffirmed commitment to the **Special and Privileged Strategic Partnership**, marking continuity rather than change. It emphasized mutual respect for core national interests and highlighted cooperation in connectivity, trade corridors, technology, and industrial collaboration. Defence, traditionally the backbone of the relationship, was notably less prominent in public messaging, suggesting either tactical restraint or a quiet evolution in priorities.

Despite diversification of defence sourcing by India in recent years, Russia remains a critical supplier of advanced military platforms. Systems such as the S 400 air defence, BrahMos missile, Sukhoi aircraft, tanks, and helicopters continue to form an integral part of India's defence preparedness. Russia's willingness to share technology and support joint manufacturing has added enduring value.

While India has options to expand defence ties with Western partners, shifting away from Russia entirely would be strategically costly. The visit underscored that Russia remains a reliable partner at a time when Western policies toward India remain inconsistent. Overall, the summit reflected continuity, realism, and India's preference for stable long term strategic relationships amid global uncertainty.

Post-Summit Assessment: Continuity with Nuance

Continuity

- ⚙️ **Trust:** 1971 Treaty legacy.
- ⚙️ **Defense:** S-400/Sukhoi remain integral.
- ⚙️ **Tech:** Willingness to share & Joint Mfg.

Nuance

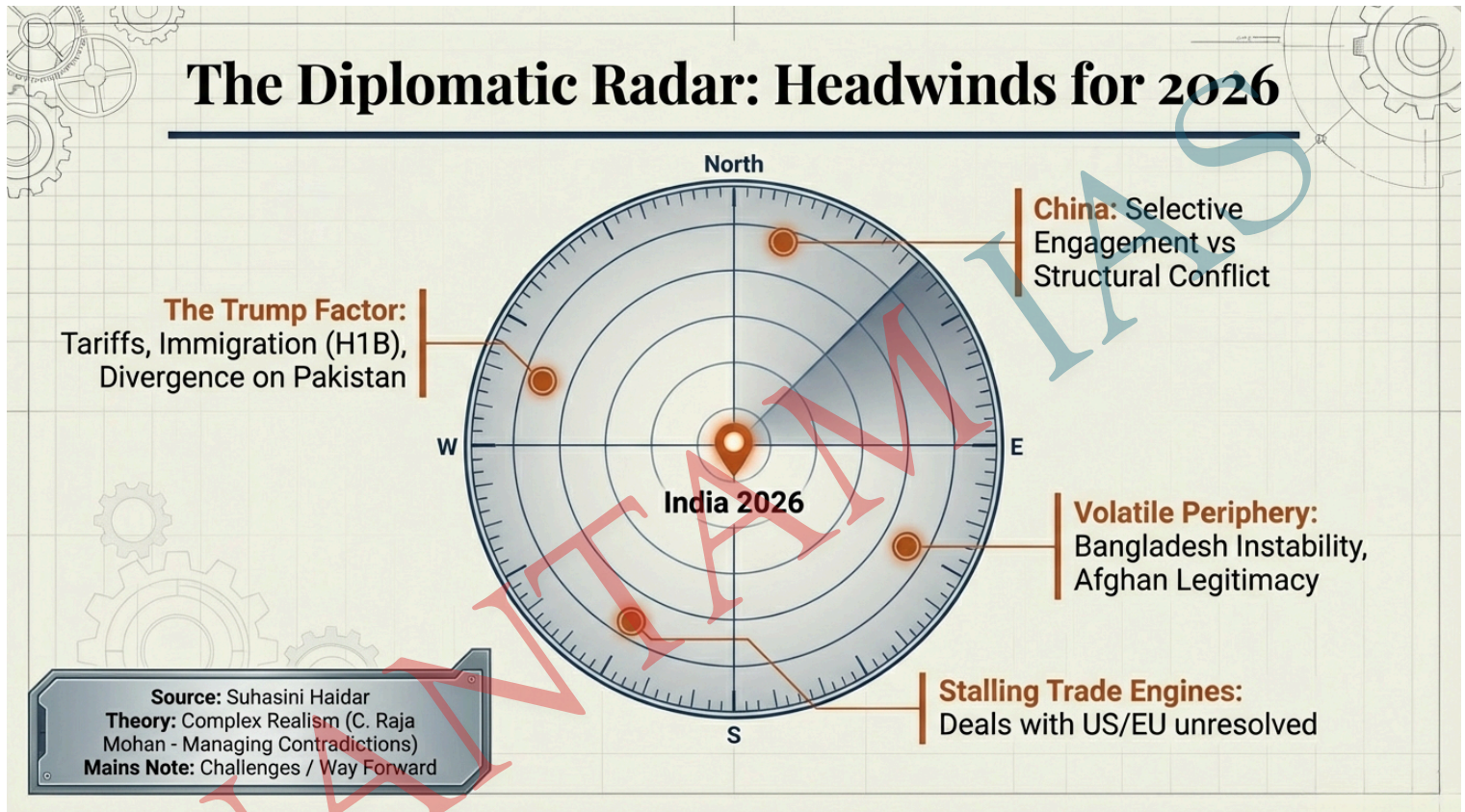
- ⚙️ **Neutrality:** Refusal to join anti-West alliance.
- ⚙️ **Messaging:** Emphasis on 'Connectivity & Trade' over 'War'

Strategic Realism: Shifting away from Russia is costly; West remains inconsistent.

Source: M K Narayanan
Theory: Neoclassical Realism
(Gideon Rose)

WHAT ARE INDIA'S DIPLOMATIC HEADWINDS AHEAD?

SUHASINI HAIDAR



India's foreign policy in 2025 has unfolded amid repeated shocks and unexpected turns, forcing New Delhi to recalibrate long held assumptions. The return of Donald Trump to the US presidency has emerged as the single most disruptive factor, reshaping global diplomacy through aggressive tariff policies, transactional alliances, and pressure on multilateral institutions. These shifts have unsettled Europe, affected trade flows, and complicated India's strategic calculations.

Relations with the United States faced renewed strain due to higher tariffs on Indian exports, penalties linked to Russian oil purchases, and stricter immigration measures affecting Indian professionals and students. Claims by Washington of mediating regional ceasefires and engaging Pakistan created unease in New Delhi, while differing perceptions during Operation Sindoor added to diplomatic friction. The cumulative effect has been a visible downturn in India US ties, prompting debate within India's foreign policy establishment.

India's neighbourhood has remained volatile. Conflict with Pakistan, political instability in Bangladesh, unrest in Nepal, and continued turmoil in Afghanistan have tested India's regional strategy. **While the deterioration of Afghanistan Pakistan relations reduced pressure on India, concerns persist over extremism,** migration, and security spillovers. India has cautiously engaged the Taliban, balancing humanitarian concerns with strategic interests, even as criticism mounts over legitimising a restrictive regime.

China policy has shown selective engagement. Diplomatic dialogue resumed through multilateral forums and bilateral measures such as restored visas and pilgrimages, despite Beijing's continued support for Pakistan. India also strengthened outreach to Sri Lanka, Bhutan, the Maldives, and other neighbours, reinforcing its role as a first responder during crises and a reliable development partner.

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Amid challenges, some diplomatic successes emerged. Relations with Canada improved after prolonged tension, and progress was made in limited trade agreements with partners like the UK. However, larger trade deals with the US, EU, and regional blocs remain unresolved.

Looking ahead to 2026, India anticipates intense diplomatic activity, including major summits and elections in neighbouring countries. After a turbulent year, policymakers hope for fewer surprises, steadier engagement, and a more realistic assessment of India's diplomatic options in an increasingly fragmented global order.

