

How and How Much Should India Engage with the Taliban Afghanistan

By Vipul Tamhane

Author is an anti-money Laundering and combating terrorist financing specialist and provides legal and commercial advice to businesses, governments, and law enforcement organisations.

With the Taliban stumbling back onto the throne, India is left with one of its most convoluted and perplexing diplomatic riddles in years. It is now a question of how much to engage and under which conditions rather than whether to engage at all. The fact that the Taliban has set up a consular mission in Mumbai and India has kept its embassy in Kabul shows that New Delhi is taking a pragmatic view of things. Still, this interaction has to be restrained in a manner that the Taliban's outrageous support for terror and violation of human rights do not outweigh the strategic imperatives.

The Case for Calculated Engagement

India's historic involvement in Afghanistan is a strong point to keep the door open. More than \$3 billion across 400 projects in all 34 provinces of Afghanistan is not just a monetary stake but also a stamp of the trust built over the years. Salma Dam, Afghan Parliament building, schools educating thousands, these are the concrete examples of India's commitment to the development and democracy of Afghanistan. Pulling out would mean handing these investments and the influence they bring to the rival powers, mainly China and Pakistan.

What is more, the current global political situation is such that India has to make a move one way or another. The Taliban have now broken the bond that tied them with Pakistan, so this time after a while, they are not quite sitting at the same table. This time, the only side that looks certain is that Taliban 2.0 has upset the apple cart and is surprisingly independent, even defiant, despite Damascus succumbing to Kabul. The long dispute over the Durand Line, the 2,640-kilometer border that has never been officially recognized by Afghanistan, is the core of much bitterness in Pak Afghan relations. In other words, it is the very reason why the Pakistan of today, having been on the forefront of the Taliban's side for decades, may be facing a two front strategic challenge on one flank an unreconciled Afghanistan, and on the other India.

This worsening relationship between Kabul and Islamabad that is playing out so well for India represents an intersection of naturally converging interests which can be strategically exploited by India. On the other hand, the historical load on the shoulder of both countries, major problems such as territorial disputes and Pakistani intrigues in the political and the affairs of Afghanistan, is yielding New Delhi some diplomatic breathing room whereas in the meantime it is entering the arena with Pakistan backed illusions a well-prepared game. The recent rapprochement between the Taliban and India exemplified by the correlation of Deoband and better bilateral contacts, may well indicate that the two oppressed parties figured out that it is a long term strategy to rely on diversified relations and be free of the suffocating clasp of Pakistan.

The Diplomatic Tightrope

Resumption of consular services is essentially a middle ground between two extremes somewhat like still allowing connections without giving full diplomatic recognition. Consequently, India can keep looking after the interests of its diaspora, stay closely acquainted with the situation, and have brief communication sessions, all at the same time, giving a signal that going back to normal is still a matter of time. Moreover, India does not shut the door on the possibility of future conversations as it also maintains the embassy in Kabul with a few staff, however, it does not give any kind of support to the Taliban administration.

But this outreach has to be very limited and separate from other activities. The Indian government should divert its attention to humanitarian aid, initiate development programs with proper and transparent monitoring, and establish contacts between people that could be facilitated even without the involvement of Taliban authorities, if it is possible. If there is to be aid, it should be given only through well established international organizations or directly to needy communities so as to completely rule out the Taliban from dignifying themselves with credits or diverting the resources.

The Unavoidable Concerns

The idea of the Taliban having proper diplomatic relations with anyone is far from reality taking into consideration only their beginning and source of ideological doctrines. At the very least, one should never ignore that among terrorists connected most commonly to the Haqqania Deoband network there are also those that act as one. According to the studies it was really Darul Uloom Haqqania which, after imparting new militancy aspects to Deoband's teachings, became the ground not only for Taliban but also the groups like Jaish e Mohammed that targeted India directly. The recent trip of Afghan Foreign Minister to Deoband where he obtained his maulana certificate, is an instance, pointing towards the union of religious dogmas disregarding borders and causing regional instability.

India had a very difficult time with Taliban regime supporting and harboring terrorism, from the 1999 IC 814 hijacking to continuous backing of anti India forces. Thus the Taliban's reiterations that no group will be allowed to use Afghan territory for attacking other countries are rather unconvincing due to strong kinship in terrorist ideologies and long history of double dealing.

Moreover, the Taliban also had some appalling human rights abuses especially against women, e.g., rights to education and religious freedom, which are in direct conflict with the core values of democracy that India stands for. Interaction should never be viewed as a signal of approval of the generally conserved policies in the medieval times that have practically outcasted women from public life and undone two decades of development.

Essential Safeguards

India's engagement blueprint must have stringent controls. Firstly, define clear standards that link further engagement with the Taliban based on their conduct in terrorism, human rights, and inclusive governance. Secondly, keep good intelligence cooperation with Iran and Russia, which are worried about extremism that might be caused by the Taliban. Thirdly, keep on helping Afghan civil society, media, and educational institutions which are the alternative voices and values holders.

Fourth, if there is any economic engagement, it should be limited only to those projects which have oversight mechanisms and are directly beneficial to the community, thus the intermediation of the Taliban will be minimized. Fifth, India has to coordinate very well with the international partners to be on the same page regarding human rights issues so that the Taliban will not be able to manipulate the countries by playing them against each other.

Moreover, India should stay strategically ambiguous regarding the degree and duration of its engagement so as to have the leverage to cut down or stop relations if the behavior of the Taliban is not satisfactory.

Conclusion

India's Afghanistan policy should be neither overly optimistic nor irresponsible. The geopolitical opportunity that has arose due to the fact the Taliban were a problem for Pakistan and that the Durand Line was affected, is still there, as is the need to protect Indian interests and foil China. However, handling a government whose origins are in extreme religion and subsequent acts of terror, calls for always being vigilant, enforcing tight terms, and being prepared to exit if limits are overstepped. India has the capacity to engage with the Taliban without legitimizing them, which is a difficult balance, but the intricacy of the case calls for it.

De-Nuclearising Pakistan: A Strategic Necessity for Global Security

By Viraj Vaidya

The author is MMS-Finance student at MET IOM

“Today at 15:45 hrs India conducted three underground nuclear tests in the Pokhran range.” These were the words of our former Prime Minister, Late Shri Atal Bihari Vajpayee, when he declared India a nuclear weapon state in May 1998. But the story was not that easy going, India’s aspiration to go nuclear dated back to the 1970s when, in 1974, India conducted a ‘peaceful nuclear explosion’ under operation ‘Smiling Buddha’, as India had already made it clear these tests were not meant for nuclear weapons development and India being non-signatory to Non-Proliferation Treaty (NPT) India was not added to the list of nuclear weapons states.

Pakistan also conducted nuclear tests in May 1998, just a fortnight later. Was Pakistan already working on its nuclear weapons program, or did some other country hand a nuclear bomb to Pakistan to diffuse it immediately after India’s tests? Pakistan was humiliated by the defeat in the war against India in 1971, which concluded in the formation of a new country, Bangladesh. Pakistan was no match to India’s conventional warfare strategies, to offset India’s superiority in conventional warfare and to maintain the balance of power, Pakistan started developing its nuclear weapon program.

Pakistan’s nuclear weapons program also dates to the 1970s when A Q Khan, Pakistan’s father of the atomic weapons program, copied confidential centrifuge designs and supplier contacts during his work at URENCO, a Dutch firm specialising in Uranium enrichment through gas centrifuges. In 1976, AQ Khan, with the support of the state, founded Kahuta Research Laboratories, focusing on Uranium enrichment using stolen centrifuge designs. It is believed that Pakistan had a workable nuclear device by 1987-88 but conducted a test only after India detonated a nuclear bomb in the Pokhran range in May 1998.

Can the World Trust Pakistan with Nuclear Weapons?

NO, Pakistan’s continual rhetoric of attacking India with a nuclear bomb regularly, its fragile economy, political instability, separatist movements, military dominance over civilian government, open support to terrorists and their organisations and recent nuclear radiation leak reports during operation Sindhoor demonstrate Pakistan’s ineptness in handling its atomic weapons and pose a threat to World peace.

Pakistan's establishment (military) is aware of its incompetence and inferiority to India in terms of conventional warfare, as was discernible during the operation Sindhoor launched by India in retaliation for the barbaric terrorist attack in Pahalgam, Kashmir in April 2025, which claimed the lives of 26 innocent civilians. Therefore, Pakistan resorts to nuclear bluff whenever it is incapable of handling India's response to its terrorism.

Pakistan's fragile economy is surviving on IMF bailout packages and some pennies in its begging bowl, which it carries everywhere it goes. Rough estimates suggest that Pakistan requires \$2 billion to maintain its nuclear arsenal. Even after spending this much amount, Pakistan is incapable of protecting its nuclear weapons, as reported in a radiation leak during Operation Sindhoor, when India strikes Kirana Hills, where Pakistan stores its nukes.

The political unrest, separatist movements, and ongoing support for terrorism in Pakistan pose a risk of nuclear weapons falling into the hands of non-state actors. Should this occur, it would introduce chaos and uncertainty in the region and beyond. Although non-state actors might lack the necessary expertise and technological backing to initiate nuclear strikes, they can certainly engage in the trade of these weapons. This scenario could lead to nuclear proliferation worldwide. Imagine if Iran were to acquire these nuclear arms via its proxies or other terrorist factions; this would drastically alter the balance of power in favour of Iran against countries like Israel and Saudi Arabia. Even if Israel gets a slight hint of this happening, it will attack Iran and its proxies in the region, leading to full-scale regional war. Saudi Arabia might start its nuclear weapons program to offset the nuclear advantage of Iran, leading to a nuclear race in the Middle East.

Pakistan's record regarding nuclear proliferation is alarming. The father of Pakistan's atomic weapon program, AQ Khan, confessed on a live TV show in 2004 that he ran a network facilitating nuclear proliferation to countries such as Iran, North Korea, and Libya. In 2003, the US and International Atomic Energy Agency (IAEA) investigation into Libya's Weapons of Mass Destruction (WMD) program uncovered its links to AQ Khan. Two years later, in 2006, North Korea became a nuclear weapons state, and Iran still aspires to become one, having enriched uranium to 60%. The path to 90% enrichment is relatively straightforward; do not be surprised if Iran conducts nuclear tests in the next five years.

Can Pakistan's nuclear threat to the world be mitigated in any way?

The de-nuclearizing of Pakistan is the only option to mitigate the nuclear risk emanating from the country. A rogue nation like Pakistan has no future and therefore it has nothing to lose. In contrast, India, which has the potential to become the next superpower, has much more to lose in the event of a full-scale war or continued terrorism originating from Pakistan. Pakistan acts as an obstacle to India's development and thus justifies its disintegration. However, before that, it needs to be de-nuclearized.

South Africa is the only country to have built nuclear weapons and then voluntarily dismantled them. However, there is a fundamental difference between Pakistan and South Africa: Pakistan is not ruled by its elected government, but by its military establishment. As is often said, Pakistan does not have an army, the army has Pakistan.

We cannot expect Pakistan to voluntarily dismantle its nuclear arsenal, as South Africa did in the early 1990s. The only way to de-nuclearize Pakistan is through a 'snatch and grab' operation.

The United States was quick to assess the nuclear risk emanating from Pakistan. According to NBC News, the U.S. has a contingency plan to seize Pakistan's nuclear weapons in case of internal chaos, hostilities with India, a serious terrorist threat to nuclear facilities, or Islamic extremists taking control of the government or military. All of these scenarios are highly plausible in Pakistan, and having such a contingency plan is commendable. However, the U.S. cannot ignore India in its Pakistan strategy, as India is extensively engaged with the U.S. in military, intelligence, and other domains, and could provide vital logistical support for moving nuclear weapons out of Pakistan.

India needs to foster conditions in Pakistan that would compel the U.S. to activate its contingency plans. Internal chaos is one of the many scenarios under which the U.S. might intervene to secure Pakistan's nuclear arsenal. India must support the Balochistan Liberation Army and the aspirations of Sindhudesh, as doing so would contribute to instability within Pakistan.

Last year, the U.S. was alarmed by new developments in Pakistan. The nuclear-armed country was advancing its long-range ballistic missile capabilities, which could eventually allow it to strike targets far beyond South Asia, posing an emerging threat to the United States. In response, the U.S. imposed sanctions on four Pakistani entities involved in ballistic missile development and banned American businesses from engaging with them.

In its latest 2025 Worldwide Threat Assessment, the U.S. Defence Intelligence Agency stated: "Pakistan regards India as an existential threat and will continue to pursue its military modernisation effort, including the development of battlefield nuclear weapons, to offset India's conventional military advantage. Pakistan is modernising its nuclear arsenal and maintaining the security of its nuclear materials and nuclear command and control. Pakistan almost certainly procures WMD-applicable goods from foreign suppliers and intermediaries."

An incompetent country like Pakistan, which cannot even ensure the safety of its existing nuclear arsenal, is now modernising it, which poses a significant threat to global peace, as discussed in the blog.

From Sea Lines to Strategic Spine: India's Maritime Rise in the Indian Ocean

By Commodore (Dr) Johnson Odakkal, Indian Navy (Retd)

The Author is a maritime scholar, strategic affairs analyst, and Indian Navy veteran. He serves as Faculty of Global Politics and Theory of Knowledge at Aditya Birla World Academy, Mumbai and Adjunct Faculty of Maritime and Strategic Studies at Naval War College, Goa.

India's maritime rise transforms the Indian Ocean from a trade route into a strategic backbone of security, diplomacy, and global engagement.

In the 21st century, the seas have reemerged not merely as conduits of commerce, but as crucibles of geopolitical contestation. The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has long been central to India's civilizational journey, shaped by culture, commerce, and connectivity. Today, the IOR and the broader Indo-Pacific theatre represent the pulse and rhythm of global trade, energy flow, and digital infrastructure.

With 11,098.81 km of coastline and a pivotal geographic location bridging the eastern and western maritime chokepoints, India's maritime domain is no longer a peripheral theatre of defence. It stands as the strategic spine of India's global engagement, anchoring both its security and outreach in an increasingly interconnected world.

Historically, India's defence posture has been heavily framed by the two-front threat construct across the northern and western continental borders. Yet, this land-centric obsession has often obscured a critical truth: India's prolonged colonial subjugation was enabled not by defeat on land, but by maritime vulnerability. Strategic blindness at sea allowed successive incursions through ports and coastlines. The narrative of the "Great Game" may have dominated modern strategic thinking, but it overshadowed the substantial maritime legacy of ancient and medieval India—a legacy now being consciously reclaimed.

In this context, the growth of India's Navy and maritime institutions is not a reactive maneuver to neighbours' provocations. Rather, it is part of a capability-based, future-ready vision,

where maritime power is integral to economic resilience, regional leadership, humanitarian response, and credible deterrence. This transformation aligns with India's evolving strategic doctrine, from the foundational philosophy of SAGAR (Security and Growth for All in the Region) to the more expansive Mahasagar (Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions).

Reframing Indian Maritime Strategy

Despite recurrent narratives suggesting that India's naval expansion is a reaction to China-Pakistan maritime alignments, this is an oversimplification. While such factors may shape tactical considerations, they are not the primary strategic drivers. India's maritime vision was outlined decades ago, born from the recognition that control of the seas is central to sovereignty and stability in the modern world. The 21st-century battlespace includes digital seabeds, critical chokepoints, and dispersed threats, requiring not just response, but anticipation and reach.

Thus, the Indian Navy's growth is rooted in a capability-centric doctrine—one that emphasises blue-water presence, indigenous shipbuilding, island infrastructure, and regional cooperation. This doctrine is not about confrontation, but about establishing India as a responsible maritime stakeholder, committed to rules-based order and collective security. The Navy's strength lies not only in hard power or deterrence but in building regional trust. India now conducts over 30 bilateral and multilateral naval exercises, reflecting its transition from a regional responder to a regional shaper. In the maritime domain, geography yields to connectivity. In this era of global shipping lanes and cross-border maritime concerns, any nation across the seas can become a strategic neighbour. Consequently, India's maritime neighbourhood today stretches from Jakarta to Mombasa, from Fremantle to Muscat—a span that underscores the importance of interoperability, maritime domain awareness, and strategic foresight.

Strategic Response to Military and Non-Military Challenges

While capability is the bedrock, readiness for conflict remains essential. The Indian Navy ensures comprehensive maritime security across the western and eastern seaboard through constant vigilance against two distinct categories of challenges. State-based threats primarily include conventional military risks posed by regional adversaries such as Pakistan and China, ranging from naval incursions and undersea warfare to grey-zone operations. These are deliberate, organized threats emanating from sovereign military forces. Non-traditional disruptions encompass asymmetric and transnational risks such as piracy, maritime terrorism, trafficking of arms and narcotics, illegal fishing, and cyber threats to critical offshore infrastructure. These challenges, though less overtly combative, erode regional stability and require persistent maritime domain awareness. A key facet of state-based threat management is Pakistan's procurement of Hangor-class submarines from China, aiming to shift the undersea power balance in South Asia. India's response, however, has been layered and assured. With 12 P-8I Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft, MH-60R Seahawks, and Scorpene-class submarines armed with the indigenous Varunastra torpedoes, India's anti-submarine warfare capabilities are both deep and resilient.

The commissioning of Project 15B guided missile destroyers and the advancement of Project 75 Alpha nuclear submarines underscore India's long-term focus on indigenous development and comprehensive sea control, including robust sea denial capabilities. As for China, its growing presence in the Indian Ocean, via bases and port access agreements from Djibouti to Gwadar, is no longer a matter of speculation. Yet India's approach is not to mirror but to outmanoeuvre. Strategic depth is being enhanced through island infrastructure upgrades in the Andaman & Nicobar and Lakshadweep, forward basing arrangements, and increased operational reach from the African coast to Southeast Asia. In parallel, India deepens its strategic anchorage through active roles in QUAD, the Indo-Pacific Oceans Initiative (IPOI), and cooperative surveillance and information-sharing mechanisms with like-minded navies, building a lattice of trust that reinforces regional security beyond sheer naval tonnage.

Maritime Diplomacy and the Mahasagar Vision

India's maritime posture today is not defined by isolated assertions of power but by a shared architecture of peace, stability, and regional development. The transition from the doctrine of SAGAR to the broader Mahasagar Vision reflects this shift. More than semantics, Mahasagar represents India's strategic aspiration to be a maritime leader, first responder, and trusted partner across a vast, interconnected oceanic space. Within this vision, the Indian Navy performs four distinct yet interlinked roles:

- 1.** Military role – Anchors traditional defence and deterrence operations, ensuring India's maritime borders are secure and sea lanes remain open.
- 2.** Diplomatic role – Executed through goodwill visits, naval diplomacy, and participation in multilateral groupings, enhancing India's global maritime footprint.
- 3.** Constabulary role – Involves enforcing laws at sea, combating piracy, illegal trafficking, and upholding international norms such as UNCLOS (United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea).
- 4.** Benign role – Reflects the Navy's humanitarian heart, delivering Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), supporting climate resilience, and extending logistics and medical aid to smaller regional partners.

Rather than isolated acts, these roles operate in a synergistic framework, reflecting a holistic maritime outlook that underpins India's regional credibility. Naval exercises exemplify this ethos. Large-scale engagements like MILAN, Varuna, Malabar, and SLINEX go beyond tactical interoperability. They showcase maritime friendships built on trust, transparency, and shared responsibility. These exercises help standardise operating procedures, deepen mutual understanding, and reinforce the message that India stands not as a lone actor, but as a collaborative power committed to regional prosperity and maritime order.

Technology, Indigenous Industry, and Infrastructure

India's march towards maritime strength is mirrored by its investments in domestic shipbuilding and defence production. From the INS Vikrant, India's first indigenously built aircraft carrier, to modern destroyers, frigates, and auxiliary ships, the aim is strategic autonomy without insulation. Programs like Make in India – Defence, along with private sector involvement, are key to making the naval ecosystem sustainable. Coastal radar chains, satellite-enabled surveillance, and GAGAN and RISAT systems ensure real-time domain awareness. India is not just defending its waters—it is digitally mapping the Mahasagar.

A Strategic Culture Anchored in Resilience

Unlike many powers where military projection overshadows national purpose, India's Navy remains a quiet enabler, offering strength without provocation and presence without posturing. It is the arm of statecraft that signals resolve without rhetoric and extends compassion without compromise. Whether during Operation Samudra Setu in the COVID-19 pandemic, or in the aftermath of Cyclone Mocha, or through fuel and currency support to Sri Lanka, the Indian Navy has repeatedly shown that maritime power is as much about credibility and care as it is about capability. From ocean mapping for the Maldives to medical and humanitarian missions across the region, India's seaborne outreach exemplifies soft power with strategic depth.

Yet, a truly future-ready strategic culture must transcend the cycles of defence procurement and weapon platforms. It must foster a maritime consciousness among citizens, embed a sense of continuity and institutional memory in policy-making, promote serious investment in maritime research and scholarship, and prioritise resilient logistics chains and sustainable coastal economies. These are not ancillary aspects; they are the scaffolding on which long-term maritime strength rests.

Sea of Opportunity

India's maritime future will not be written in reaction, but in reclamation of its civilisational oceanic identity, its strategic foresight, and its unshakable resolve. The Indian Ocean is not a theatre of contestation alone; it is a vast canvas where the waves of trade, diplomacy, and defence intersect. In Mahasagar, India does not seek domination; it seeks direction. Direction born of clarity, courage, and confidence. A direction where capability means choice, not confrontation. Where ships are not just platforms of deterrence, but symbols of partnership, presence, and peace. Today, the Indian Navy does more than secure seas; it builds trust, fuels regional resilience, and steers a collaborative future. It is India's vanguard in shaping a maritime world order grounded in rules, respect, and responsibility.

In this expansive blue frontier, India is not just a resident power, it is an anchoring power. And as it sails into the Mahasagar of the future, it does so with quiet confidence and open arms, charting a course of strategic autonomy, collective security, and global leadership.

Swadeshi Defence Technologies of BHARAT: A Way Forward

By - Dr. Dhanpant Ram Agarwal and Dr. LN Raghavendra

Dr. Dhanpant Ram Agarwal, National Co-convenor, SJM

Dr. LN Raghavendra, Outstanding Scientist Director (Propulsion), Centre for Military Airworthiness and Certification. DRDO, Ministry of Defence, GOI

With ambitious new projects including the Advanced Medium Combat Aircraft stealth fighter and hypersonic missiles nearing completion, India stands poised to emerge as a global leader in defence technology.

Introduction

The landscape of modern warfare is undergoing an intense transformation. Where once the strength of a nation's military was measured by the sheer number of soldiers or the size of its arsenal, today's battles are increasingly defined by technological superiority, precision weaponry, and rapid innovation. The emergence of high-tech systems ranging from stealth aircraft to precision-guided missiles has rendered traditional metrics of military might less relevant. In this new era, it is not the largest armies that prevail, but those equipped with the most advanced and agile technologies.

India has embraced this paradigm shift with remarkable resolve. Through the Swadeshi movement, championed by the Make in India and Atma-Nirbhar Bharat initiatives, the nation is not only reducing its reliance on foreign imports but is also nurturing a robust ecosystem of indigenous research, development, and manufacturing. The result is a new generation of world-class platforms such as the new generation Tejas fighter, BrahMos Supersonic cruise missile, and INS Vikrant aircraft carrier that reflect India's growing prowess in defence technology. It has been amply demonstrated in "Operation Sindoor" that many indigenous technologies including Akash missiles have been deployed to achieve intended goals.

This commitment to self-reliance is a testament to the ingenuity and vision of Indian scientists, engineers, and industry leaders. By investing in home grown innovation and fostering a culture of excellence, India is forging a path toward true strategic autonomy ensuring that the nation's security and sovereignty are best protected by the Bharat itself.

However, the global security environment has witnessed unprecedented changes, with defence expenditures reaching remarkable heights that reflect the intensifying nature of contemporary geopolitical challenges. According to the International Institute of Strategic Studies (IISS), global defence spending reached \$2.46 trillion in 2024, marking a substantial increase from \$2.24 trillion in the previous year. This represents an average of 1.9 percent of the world's GDP, reflecting heightened security challenges across multiple regions.

The surge in military spending has been primarily driven by deteriorating security environments and sharpened threat perceptions in regions such as Europe, the Middle East and North Africa (MENA), and Asia. The ongoing Russia-Ukraine conflict, the ongoing Israel-Iran-Lebanon-Palestine conflict, tension in the South China Sea and various regional disputes have compelled nations to reassess their defence priorities and allocate increased resources to military capabilities, with the Top 10 countries accounting for 73 percent of worldwide military expenditure.

Indian Defence Capabilities: A Swadeshi Renaissance

India's trust with indigenous defence capability began soon after independence. Recognizing the strategic vulnerabilities of relying on imported critical defence systems, India gradually built its own institutions and industrial base. In the 1950s and 1960s, the country established the Defence Research and Development Organisation (DRDO) and started indigenous production of basic arms and ammunition. In 1974, India's first nuclear test at Pokhran, codenamed Smiling Buddha, was a testament to its scientific capability and determination for self-reliance. The 1980s and 1990s saw the emergence of indigenous programs such as the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA) Tejas, the Arjun Main Battle Tank, and the Prithvi missile program. In 1998, Operation Shakti—a series of nuclear tests—reaffirmed India's position as a self-reliant nuclear power. Over these decades, restrictive international regimes like the MTCR, NSG, and Wassenaar Arrangement forced India to innovate under constraints, laying a resilient foundation for its modern Swadeshi defence ecosystem.

India's journey toward self-reliance in defense began with the Integrated Guided Missile Development Program (IGMDP) in 1984, led by Dr. Abdul Kalam. This program developed several key missile systems including Agni, Prithvi, Akash, Nag, and Trishul. Today, all except Trishul have been successfully inducted into the Armed Forces.

The Agni missile series, with ranges up to 5,000 kilometers, and Prithvi missiles, with ranges up to 500 kilometers, form India's ballistic missile arsenal. These precision-guided systems can accurately strike intended targets. The Akash surface-to-air missile and Nag anti-tank missile complete this diverse missile portfolio. Through the IGMDP, India developed crucial technologies in structures, propulsion, guidance systems, navigation, and warhead design. Building on this foundation, India has also produced newer systems like the Quick Reaction Surface to Air Missile (QRSAM) and Medium Range Surface to Air Missile (MRSAM).

The success of India's missile program stems from early partnerships with development partners. Public sector companies like Bharat Dynamics Limited (BDL), Hindustan Aeronautics Limited (HAL), and Bharat Electronics Limited (BEL) have played crucial roles. Equally important has been the integration of private sector companies such as L&T, Godrej and Boyce, and Tata Advanced System Limited into both development and manufacturing processes. India has also embraced international collaboration, as seen in joint projects like the BrahMos missile with Russia and MRSAM with Israel, showing how India has evolved from purely local development to strategic partnerships that integrate global knowledge and design expertise.

These collaborative efforts have produced remarkable results. India's defense production reached a record Rs. 1.27 lakh crore (approximately \$15.3 billion) in 2023-24, marking a significant milestone in the nation's journey toward self-reliance.

What makes this achievement even more impressive is that over 70% of these contracts went to Indian companies, demonstrating the growing capability of domestic defense manufacturers.

The export success is equally noteworthy, with defense exports reaching Rs. 21,083 crores (\$2.5 billion)—a nearly 20-fold increase over the past decade. This growth reflects global recognition of Indian defense platforms, with indigenous systems like Tejas, BrahMos, and Pinaka generating significant international interest and establishing India as a respected player in the global defense market.

Indian Air Force: Indigenous Wings of Power

The transformation of India's aerial warfare capabilities represents one of the most significant achievements of the Swadeshi movement. At the forefront of this revolution stands the Tejas, the Light Combat Aircraft (LCA), a 4.5-generation multi-role fighter that serves as a powerful symbol of Indian engineering excellence. This sophisticated aircraft incorporates cutting-edge technology including a glass cockpit, fly-by-wire controls, precision targeting systems, and beyond visual range missile capability, placing it in the same league as globally renowned fighters like the F-16 and JAS 39 Gripen. The Indian Air Force has already inducted over 40 jets into service, with an additional 83 Mk-1A variants on order, while export interest continues to grow from countries including Malaysia, Argentina, and Egypt.

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Trump's Trade, Tariff and Peace: A Warning in 2018

By Vappala Balachandran

The author is former special secretary, cabinet secretariat.

A study of history reveals that President Donald Trump is not the first American president to use trade as a foreign policy instrument. The 27th President William Howard Taft (1909 to 1913) who was the only one to become Chief Justice of US Supreme court after his presidency (1921 to 1930), used his "Dollar Diplomacy" to promote trade.

This was revealed by Alan Wolff, senior fellow at the Peterson Institute for International Economics, who was formerly Deputy Director-General of the World Trade Organisation (WTO), in a lecture at the American University in Washington DC on 5 February 2018, during the first term of President Trump.

Taft used government officials, including diplomats to assist the sale of American products overseas, particularly heavy industrial goods and military hardware. He gave high priority to American investments overseas especially in South and Central America, the Caribbean, and the Far East.

Like Trump, Taft believed that "the U.S. military was a tool of economic diplomacy". Alan Wolff quotes Peri Arnold, Professor Emeritus of Political Science in University of Notre Dame to claim that Taft urged U.S. banks to rescue the "Rightist" but debt-ridden Honduras with loans and grants. He sent 2,700 U.S. marines to stabilize the pro-U.S. Nicaragua regime when rebels threatened to overthrow its government.

The Han Dynasty China used its military power in the 3rd century BCE to maintain the Silk Road for its value for trade. Rome conquered Egypt to have a better supply of grain in 30BCE. Similarly, the British East India Company conducted the country's foreign policy toward South Asia based on its trading interests in the 18th century.

In a similar manner, trade dominated the thinking of the U.S. government in its relations with East Asia from the mid-19th century. On July 8, 1853, American Commodore Matthew Perry led four ships into the Tokyo Bay, seeking to re-establish, for the first time in over 200 years, regular trade and discourse between Japan and America.

I may add here that even President Bill Clinton followed that policy by making economic relationship with Japan a model for his distinctive approach to trade policy. He even used the words “pry open Japanese market” in his trade policy statement.

In a similar manner, Trump is not the first US President to use trade and tariff to “promote peace”. President Woodrow Wilson’s formula to promote peace at the 1919 Paris Peace Conference contained his “Fourteen Points” which, inter alia, mentioned “the removal, so far as possible, of all economic barriers and the establishment of an equality of trade

conditions among all the nations consenting to the peace and associating themselves for its maintenance”.

However, Alan Wolff wryly adds here, reminding us of Trump’s present policy: “This lofty objective did not, however, appear to have been a driving force in either trade policy or foreign policy of the Wilson Administration. Tariffs levels were set in order to accommodate domestic private sector interests and the Federal government's need for revenues”.

President Franklin D. Roosevelt and others followed Woodrow Wilson’s policy of using trade and economics for international peace and also to resist Soviet Communist expansion: the 1948 Havana Charter for an International Trade Organization (the ITO), the reconstruction of Europe under the Marshall Plan, the Atlantic Charter and its reaffirmation, the founding of the Bretton Woods and related institutions and the General Agreement on Tariffs and Trade (the GATT), successor to the ITO.

However, Alan Wolff adds a caveat in his lecture, a forewarning for Trump’s second term: “These supporters of the President, concerned with their own failure to participate in the benefits of globalization, are likely to believe that America has done enough for the world trading system. More pointedly, in the view of some, it is time for America to be paid back for the investments it made for the global public good. This is not a majority public view according to polling data”.

Article first published in Lokmat Times Nagpur Main on August 10, 2025

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India is Proud of:

Veerapandiya Kattabomman (3 January 1760 - 16 October 1799)

Who stood against British Oppression



Veerapandiya Kattabomman, a name that resonates with bravery, resistance, and sacrifice, was one of Tamil Nadu's fiercest freedom fighters. As the ruler of Panchalankurichi, Kattabomman fiercely opposed British rule in the late 18th century. His refusal to submit to British demands became a symbol of Tamil pride and resistance, marking him as one of the earliest leaders to challenge colonial oppression in India.

Veerapandiya Kattabomman was born in 1760 into the royal family of Panchalankurichi, a small kingdom in Tamil Nadu. From a young age, he showed remarkable courage and a strong sense of justice. As the eldest son, he succeeded his father, Jagavira Pandiyan, as the king in 1790. Kattabomman's reign began with a deep connection to his people. Under his leadership, Panchalankurichi thrived, but it wasn't long before the British East India Company turned their eyes toward his prosperous kingdom.

At the time, the British East India Company was rapidly expanding its control over India. They imposed heavy taxes on local kings, including Kattabomman. In 1798, the British demanded an increase in the already burdensome taxes from Kattabomman's kingdom, which sparked a confrontation that would define his legacy. Kattabomman refused to bow to the unjust demands of the British. He believed that paying such high taxes would ruin his kingdom and oppress his people. His defiance set the stage for a historic conflict.

When Kattabomman was summoned to meet the British tax collector, Jackson, Veerapandiya Kattabomman was treated with disrespect. The meeting quickly turned into an argument, and Kattabomman realized the British had no intention of negotiating. He left the meeting, determined to defend his kingdom from foreign control. His refusal to comply with the British demands became an iconic moment of resistance in Tamil history.

In 1799, Kattabomman's refusal to pay the taxes led the British to launch a military attack on Panchalankurichi. Undeterred, Kattabomman and his army fought back with extraordinary valor. Although outnumbered and less equipped than the British forces, Kattabomman led his men with skill and courage.

Kattabomman's leadership in battle was legendary. He fought fearlessly, using his knowledge of the terrain to his advantage. The people of Panchalankurichi stood by him, inspired by their king's unwavering resolve to protect their land and honor.

After the fall of Panchalankurichi, Kattabomman continued to evade capture for several months. However, he was eventually betrayed by the Pudukottai Raja, who handed him over to the British in October 1799.

Kattabomman faced trial before the British, but he refused to show any signs of submission. His defiant stance and pride in his Tamil heritage remained strong until the very end. On October 16, 1799, Veerapandiya Kattabomman's was hanged publicly by the British in Kayathar.

Even in death, Veerapandiya Kattabomman's influence remained. He became a symbol of the Tamil people's fight for freedom and justice.

Veerapandiya Kattabomman's courage and defiance against the British made him a folk hero in Tamil Nadu. Veerapandiya Kattabomman's valor, his refusal to submit to British authority, and his dedication to his people are still recounted in Tamil literature, songs, and plays.

The remains of Kattabomman's fort in Panchalankurichi stand as a testament to his legacy. It has become a historical site, attracting visitors who wish to honor the memory of the brave king who fought for his people's freedom. Kattabomman's stand against British rule inspired many later freedom fighters in India's independence movement. His refusal to accept foreign domination became a rallying cry for resistance, and his life serves as a reminder of the importance of defending one's culture and sovereignty.

Veerapandiya Kattabomman was not just a king; he was a fearless warrior who dared to defy the might of the British Empire. His courage in battle, his unwavering dedication to his people, and his ultimate sacrifice made him a hero of Tamil Nadu.

Much of the modern currency of the legend comes from the 1959 motion picture starring Chevalier Sivaji Ganesan in lead role portraying the life of Veerapandiya Kattabomman. The Movie directed by B.R. Panthulu starring Nadigar Thilagam Sivaji Ganesan got a wide international recognition and earned many international awards for his epic performance and this particular film is one of the most remembered in his 45 years of filmdom. The film received ubiquitously positive reviews and adjudged the best film at the Cairo International Film Festival and Sivaji received the prize for best actor from Col. Nasser, the then president of Egypt.

Kattabomman's legacy lives on, not just in the history books, but in the hearts of the Tamil people. His life continues to inspire those who fight for justice, freedom, and the preservation of their culture.

Write to us at:

bulletin@finsindia.org

***OFFICE :4, Belle View, Lakhamsi Nappu Road,
Dadar (East), MUMBAI - 400014
Phone 022 24127274, 98339 24371***

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