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Thru' the Desk of the Editor

Editorial: Global Phenomena of Gen Z Protests

People called 2019 as the “year of the protest” as civil unrest flooded streets from Hong Kong to Egypt. Before that it was 2011, marked Occupy Wall Street and Arab Spring’s pro-democracy uprisings in Middle East. But now, with what are being called Gen Z protests spreading around the world, 2025 could steal that title. From Africa to Asia, Gen Z has emerged as a formidable force in global protests, challenging governments over issues ranging from economic inequality to digital rights. Armed with smartphones, social media, and an unflinching sense of purpose, young people are standing up to systems they believe have failed them. Wave of youth-led protests has hit streets in Nepal, Morocco, Madagascar, Philippines, Indonesia, all of them mobilizing support online, driven by frustration against government corruption or incompetence.

In Nepal, anger is over allegations of decades long corruption and nepotism, prompted by recent social media ban implemented by government which was quickly reversed. In September 2025, Nepal’s Gen Z activists took to streets after government banned 26 social media platforms for failing to register locally. The protests quickly escalated, resulting in property damage and dozens of casualties. Youth demonstrators demanded restoration of digital freedom and transparency in governance. The crisis forced Prime Minister, K.P. Sharma Oli and several top officials to resign amid widening criticism of Nepal’s political elite, leaving more than 70 dead and hundreds injured. Homes of wealthy and influential families in Kathmandu were torched. The movement underscored how essential online expression has become for a generation raised on connectivity.

Protestors spilled into streets of Indonesia in late August 2025. The protests were spearheaded by gig workers employed by online delivery and transport platforms in response to welfare cuts proposed by President Prabowo Subianto. Amid rising concerns over concentration of power in hands of armed forces and business oligarchs, public outrage intensified when government gave members of parliament \$3000 housing handout for lawmakers, ten times greater than minimum wage, but unrest eventually exploded into broader movement against corruption and impunity among Indonesia’s ruling class.

In September – October 2025, Madagascar witnessed its biggest youth-led protests in decades. Thousands of young demonstrators filled Antananarivo’s streets in the Indian ocean island, demanding access to clean water and electricity amid worsening power cuts. They accused President Andry Rajoelina’s government of corruption and neglect. The unrest turned violent leaving at least 22 dead prompting government to order nighttime curfews in the capital and other cities, prompting the President to fire prime minister Christian Ntsay and rest of his government which drew thousands onto the streets. The demonstrations gathered momentum on social media and have mirrored recent youth-led anti-government protests in Nepal and Kenya. In a speech on national television Rajoelina said that “Your demands have been heard, and I apologize if there are members of the government who have not done the work that the people expected”. The protestors had called for resignation of both Ntsay and Rajoelina, but Rajoelina gave no indication that he would step down. Digital activism and social media helped coordinate marches, highlighting Gen Z’s power in mobilising under economic duress.

Morocco’s youth are rallying for social justice reforms and state of public services as Morocco invests billions of dollars into hosting 2030 FIFA World Cup. Anger has boiled over contrasts between government spending on stadiums in lead-up to 2030 FIFA World Cup and a subpar health system that lags behind countries with similarly sized economies. In October 2025, “Morocco Gen Z 212” movement erupted after death of eight women in a poorly equipped hospital. Thousands of young Moroccans protested against corruption, rising living costs, lack of opportunities, contrasting lavish infrastructure projects with collapsing public services. Organised largely on platforms like Discord and TikTok, protests reflected Gen Z’s growing frustration with systemic inequality and their ability to unite digitally for real-world change.

In France, between May and October 2025, French Gen Z-led nationwide demonstrations against proposed austerity measures, particularly cuts to public services and social welfare. The “Bloquons tout” (Block Everything) protests involved coordinated blockages across major cities. The movement showcased political engagement and influence of French youth.

In India, September 2025 saw massive demonstration in Ladakh where local youth, many of them Gen Z demanded greater political autonomy and job opportunities. Tensions flared up after talks with central government stalled, leading to violent clashes. The movement spotlighted regional disparities and growing willingness of young citizens to challenge authority through sustained civic action.

In Serbia between November 2024 and July 2025, Gen Z activists led nationwide protests following Novi Sad train station roof collapse and broader governance issues. Tens of thousands rallied in Belgrade and other cities, demanding justice, government accountability and snap elections. Clashes with police led to arrests and ministerial resignations, highlighting the youth’s pivotal role in driving systemic change.

In June 2024, Kenya’s Gen Z protesters successfully forced their government to withdraw a controversial finance bill that would have increased taxes. Youth groups organised through X (formerly Twitter) and TikTok, leading to nationwide demonstrations under the hashtag #RejectFinanceBill2024. Tens of thousands of Kenyan youths took to streets last year, storming parliament and forcing President William Ruto to fire his cabinet and withdraw the controversial tax bill. Their ire was aimed at his perceived inability to tackle rampant corruption. The protests showcased rise of “digital democracy” where young people influence national policy through coordinated online campaigns.

In Bangladesh in July – August 2024, Bangladesh Gen Z activists led a nationwide movement against controversial job quota system, demanding merit-based reforms. The protests escalated following violent police crackdown that resulted in over 100 deaths. On 5th August 2024, Prime Minister Sheikh Hasina resigned and fled Bangladesh ending her 15-year rule. The interim government led by Muhammad Yunus, pledged to hold elections by end of 2025.

Protesters clashed with police in Lima, the capital of Peru, as young demonstrators joined by bus and taxi drivers, marched over growing economic insecurity. The protests began on 20th September 2025 following passage of a reform measure that will require young people to pay into a private pension fund. Taxi and bus drivers, say gangs are extorting them for money and that the government is not doing enough to intervene. Accusations of corruption, economic insecurity and crime have also contributed to fierce government opposition and mass demonstrations. Many Peruvians have called President Dina Boluarte to leave office.

Thousands of Filipino youth flooded Manila to denounce corruption in flood-control projects in the Philippines, demanding transparency and accountability from leaders whom they accuse of betraying the public trust. More than 200 people have been arrested following clashes between police and masked protesters at anti-corruption demonstrations in the Philippine capital, Manila on 21st September 2025. While most rallies were peaceful, the gathering in some places like Ayala Bridge and Mendiola turned very violent. Thousands attended rallies in Manila over a corruption scandal linked to ghost flood control projects which cost taxpayers billions of dollars. The Philippine economy is estimated to have lost up to 118.5 billion pesos (\$ 2 billion) from 2023 to 2025 due to corruption in flood control projects, according to Department of Finance, Government of Philippines. Whether the protest will have a lasting change remains uncertain, but one thing is clear, the voice of the next generation is growing louder and it is shaping the country’s political landscape in real time.

These are some of well-known, but others, similar youth-led protests have recently emerged in other countries, including Paraguay, East Timor and Mongolia. The common thread in all of them is frustration over poor governance, lack of opportunities and rampant inequality. In many parts of the world, Gen Z as a cohort is suffering. They are coming of age and graduating into a world with political instability, increased polarisation, economic turmoil, declining living standards, widening wealth inequality, weaker job market and a large disaffected, often unemployed youth population. The future can look bleak and hopeless. Gen Z defined as those who are born roughly between 1996 and 2010, is first generation to grow up entirely in internet age. They are those who are using those digital tools to rally behind their causes.

The young people behind them have shown that they can translate digital discontent into a real-world movement that authorities cannot ignore. They differ in origin but share in common a refusal to go through institutions like political parties or unions to be heard. Coordination and activism through social media is prevalent in each case, and some protests have resulted in overthrow of national governments. The protests generally arose from mass dissatisfaction relating to government scandals, increasing difficulties of access to basic utilities and declining standard of living. Gen Z feels “short changed” with their interests not represented or taken into account, resulting into Gen Z becoming sceptical with liberal representative democracy despite still valuing democratic decision making principles.

The fact these movements spread so fast to other countries show that public display of protests via social media, particularly of large crowds can be extremely powerful. Social media is a way of unifying and connecting disparate voices and experiences, which is important in movement building. Protestors in Morocco and Nepal frequently communicated via messaging platform Discord. Other digital platforms like Instagram, TikTok, and Telegram have also been used with these tools enabling decentralised, real-time coordination, rapid information sharing, and viral symbols that unify diverse groups across the globe. Internet was used earlier also to create protest culture. There have been hashtag movements earlier also like Occupy Wall Street, Idle No More but while these protests may feel like recent memory for many observers, for a young Gen Z, they are historical.

While the name “Gen Z protest” might suggest youth-led movements are new, that is not true. Many significant protests like Tiananmen Square, Occupy Wall Street, Arab Spring, Umbrella Revolution in Hong Kong have been led by younger people. But digital technologies have made it faster and easier to mobilise today. This may give impression that Gen Z protest at a higher rate than other generations. It also allows people to see their experiences of inequality or injustice as a collective one. As more young people consume this content, they may start to see protest as an appropriate strategy to voice their frustration with local government. What is distinct about current wave of youth mobilisation is convergence of conditions across very different political environments. Young people are confronting rising costs of living and weak job creation at same time as political authority is concentrated in aging elites with little space for renewal.

Despite contextual differences, these movements share three defining characteristics of social media-driven activism. First, social media enable young people to share personal experiences of injustice and connect them to broader socioeconomic structures of inequality, abuse of power, absence of a secure future. These exchanges generate collective grievances and emotions – not only anger but also hope for change. Platform connectivity allows strangers to unite around common causes, forging group identities and solidarities. Second, social media provides space for young activists to exchange tactical knowledge both domestically and across borders, fostering a broad learning networks. Third, as online dissent escalates, illiberal and authoritarian regimes often respond with censorship, and in many cases with armed repression. Yet internet blackouts and violent crackdowns frequently backfire, sparking even larger mobilisations that threaten regime survival, especially, when protesters live stream state violence, amplifying public outrage.

Governments have sought to manage this public anger in past by ignoring, appeasing or repressing, but that approach is no longer working. Youth have clearly indicated to the state that they hold deep contempt for those institutions that promote endemic corruption, crony capitalism and inefficient governance. If unfolding of events in aftermath of Gen Z protest is any indication, then we can say that such depoliticised and instantaneous mode of conducting politics is here to stay. These group of young people are those who belong to age group which has grown up in time of internet and is hyperconnected, who belong to period of instantaneous communication and view politics very differently. This generation is not understanding politics through legacy but is focused on how their present and near past have been shaped. The fact that protesters have successfully mobilised themselves on instant messaging apps or platforms is a telling point of how mode of political communication have changed. The young protesters who took to streets against political conduct of parties, represent a new class of aspirational group. It is a sentiment that binds together protests thousands of miles apart.

Gen Z-led protests will continue to erupt as they have in various countries until governments take action at national and local levels. Keeping in mind the fact that large scale, youth-driven, leaderless demonstrations, which spiralled into violence and forced regime changes, could spill or may inspire parallel mobilisations in any country, appropriate readiness measures need to be beefed up, as a part of internal security exercise to deal with a similar situation if it were to arise in any place. A detailed contingency action plan must be in place to handle such a situation. Also, there is urgent need to both create new innovative pathways for this new generation and adapt traditional processes to meet the moment. Young people must be granted a seat at the table, but the table itself must be critically modernised. To survive and prosper, our political systems must be open to evolving for the next generation.

Articles in this edition of the Journal examine various dimensions of Diplomacy and Security related issues. All authors have presented their views on topics ranging from Impact of Israel's Technological Warfare in Gaza to Biological Weapons Convention Institutional Framework, India's strategic outreach to Maldives to Emergency 1975 in India, India United States Relations to India's strategic significance in Central Asia, with well-planned research on the topics with deep thought process. Their views will surely help in instilling the subjects and topics under discussion in the minds of the readers.

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Understanding the Impact of Israel's Technological-Warfare in Gaza-Conflict for Global Anti-Terror Policies

Abstract:

The Israel-Gaza conflict is a case study of imbalance of power in terms of technology, intelligence, military might and endurance between state and non-state actors. The involvement of Hamas, Hezbollah and Houthi's to some extent has allowed Israel to display its multi-spectrum warfare capacities in a broad domain involving their intelligence agencies which have coordinated with their military to deliver credible blows to their adversaries. Israel thus has demonstrated the capacity to engage and disable the capabilities of multi-front non-state threats. But do this technological warfare strategies herald a new beginning in the anti-terror policies all over the world? Two events from the Israel-Gaza conflict: the Lebanon's pager explosions against Hezbollah members and accurate geolocation of Hezbollah's chief are used as case studies in this paper to determine whether those tactics can act as credible measures for nations facing similar threats. Also, the global impact, scope, limitations and future improvements of these operations will also be scrutinized to understand whether these types of operations can be repeated in future in alternate theatres for other nations to generate effective deterrence against terrorist groups.

Keywords: technological-warfare, Israel-Gaza conflict, anti-terror operations, sonic-boom geolocating, intelligence

Background:

The Israel-Hamas conflict is a case study for global militaries in terms of use of technology to degrade terror organisations. As terror organisations generally follow a guerrilla warfare strategy to surprise and inflict damages on their targets, Israel has reversed that trend to confuse and dismantle the terror infrastructure of Hamas and Hezbollah thereby proving that anti-terror operations could incorporate a scope for usage of new scientific methodologies which in turn degrades the confidence of terror groups. This paper critically examines two case studies from the current Gaza conflict to understand Israel's use of technology to engage and disable the capabilities of multi-front non-state threats. Thus, we get to understand whether those strategies can be used as one-time stand-alone practices or can be incorporated as regularised anti-terror doctrine for states the world over.

Case study 1-Lebanon pager blasts:

On 17th October 2024, pagers used by members of Hezbollah terror group exploded mysteriously and simultaneously in Lebanon, killing nine and injuring several others. Those killed and injured included high profile targets including Iran's ambassador to Lebanon Mojtaba Amani and son of a Hezbollah member in Parliament. Hezbollah had earlier banned the use of cell phones due to fear of getting tracked by Israeli intelligence. The blasts were carried out by sabotaging the supply chain and contaminating the pagers with explosives. British army experts suggested the use of small explosive charges, the size of a pencil eraser, put inside the pagers by Mossad, Israel's intelligence agency. The blast occurred when an error message was sent to all the pagers making them vibrate, making the members to click the buttons to cancel the vibration leading to detonations (Mroue et al, 2024). This was followed by a second wave of attacks the next day when walkie-talkies used by Hezbollah exploded in large numbers. The sophistication of the attacks pointed towards a lengthy planning process which would involve getting physical access to pagers prior to being sold to Hezbollah, developing technologies that would be embedded in communication devices and cultivating sources who could confirm that targets were carrying the devices (Philips et al., 2024).

Past Israeli planned communication-devices explosions:

Mossad is known to carry out remote explosions to hit its targets and Lebanon's pager blasts are not a first of its kind. In 1970's Israel planted explosives in oil and fuel drums which were distributed to families of Palestine Liberation Organization (PLO) fighters. In 1973, Israel hid explosives in marble stand of phone of PLO leader Mahmoud Hamshari and exploded the device after confirming his identity by phone in Paris. In 2009, Israel killed Imad Mugniyeh, a terrorist by planting a bomb in the spare wheel compartment of his SUV (Trenta, 2024).

In 1996, a sabotaged mobile phone was used to blow up then Hamas's chief bomb maker Yahya Ayyash in Gaza City (Sabbagh, 2024). Mossad had also utilized similar tactics to disrupt Iran's nuclear program when they sabotaged nuclear and missile sites and duped Iran's purchasing networks to buy flawed equipment which was used in Natanz nuclear reactors (Melman, 2020). Those flawed equipments were supplied from a chip factory outside of Iran which Israel had managed to control (Makhoul, 2024).

Role of intelligence and shell companies:

The Lebanon pager blasts operation contained elements of intelligence, nexus of product suppliers and sophisticated technology. To begin with, Mossad hatched this plan a decade ago when they developed shell companies to sell these modified pagers covertly containing batteries embedded with made in Israel explosives. To increase their reach towards Hezbollah members, Mossad created fake marketing campaigns promoting the pagers as robust, dustproof, and waterproof (Jerusalem Post, 2024). Israel already knew that Hezbollah had placed an order for about 5,000 pagers after banning the use of smartphones in February 2024 (Sabbagh et al, 2024). To ensure successful purchase, the price of pagers was kept low enough to make Hezbollah feel it was a good deal, but not too low to arouse suspicions. The pager ringtone was set as urgent. The time to respond to message was also calculated intelligently as seven seconds corresponding to the timer on the explosive charge. Next Mossad is reported to have supplied them to Taiwanese firm Gold Apollo via shell companies in Hungary and also manufactured under licence. Mossad also reportedly hired a specific Gold Apollo saleswoman, who donated the first batch of pagers to Hezbollah while 5,000 follow-on orders were placed by September 2024 (Newdick, 2024).

There are denials from both Hungarian and Taiwanese companies which deepens the mystery how the pagers were infiltrated. Gold Apollo stated that they merely authorised the use of its name on AR-924 pagers which are said to be manufactured by Hungary based firm BAC Consulting KFT. They exported mainly to European and American countries and not to Lebanon. On the other hand, BAC Consulting KFT Chief Executive Cristiana Bársony-Arcidiacono denied the role of their company in production of these pagers (Euronews, 2024). But BAC Consulting was registered in the recent past as a limited liability company in May 2022. People are still unable to link BAC with the Lebanon pager attacks since the Hungarian government officials said the pagers were never in Hungary and BAC Consultants merely acted as an intermediary (Spike, 2024). The above situation makes the picture quite clear that the operation was executed by Mossad in such a way that no government or company could be blamed by the international community for supplying the deadly pagers to Hezbollah. While the Taiwanese company's statements seem more genuine and valid, the establishment of Hungarian BAC consulting in 2022 could be a handiwork of Israel but no evidence exists as of now. With regards to the radio walkie-talkies which exploded a day after the pagers, they had stickers bearing the logo of ICOM, a Japanese company, which manufactures radio equipment. But ICOM which manufactures such radios in Japan, could not confirm whether they shipped the radios that exploded in Lebanon, as they stopped manufacturing that specific model 10 years ago (Unit for Political Studies, 2024).

Modus-operandi behind blasts:

The pagers were exploited in various phases for causing blasts. Battery manipulation/tampering of vulnerable pagers by inducing conditions like overcharging or short-circuiting can lead to thermal runaway which could create explosive blasts. This tampering with components could have occurred during manufacturing. The final phase is the remote triggering capability which utilizes the remote signals to activate pagers (Aditya, 2024). Here it is important to underline the emergence of cyber physical attack which targeted the hardware security of pagers and where the boundary between the digital and the physical entities got erased (Soni, 2024). But experts are still divided whether pager blasts were actually a result of cyber-attacks. The pagers were activated shortly before detonating explosively, unlike the smoke and high temperatures typically observed from overheating lithium-ion batteries. It is also very challenging for Israel to contain a cyber-attack conducted on these pagers through malware as that carries a risk of being reverse-engineered and repurposed. All these points towards Israel's cyber-espionage capabilities to some extent (Singh & Hokayem, 2024).

Generally, cybersecurity attacks through supply chain are targeted at the software. But in Lebanon hardware supply chain attack was attempted which is rarer. Mossad is reported to have injected a board containing explosive materials inside the pager which was hard to detect through scanners or any other means (Middle East Eye, 2024). Any explosive's main feature is the critical diameter which defines how small it can be designed. There is also the need of an effective initiator or detonator. Israelis may have implanted a very small amount of explosive, of highly explosive material in the pager's electronic circuit (Chadwick, 2024).

Understanding wider implications:

The pager blasts operation of Israel has various lessons and implications. At tactical level, Hezbollah lost its ability to communicate at a large level and the psychological impact of the blasts was unprecedented which is a huge success for Israel (Lischinsky, 2024). At strategic level there are favourable outcomes for Israel. For example, Iran feared that this type of operation could also be carried out inside Iran, so Iran's elite Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) instructed its members to stop using any type of communication devices as it was concerned about possible infiltration by Israeli agents. Iran's defence industry has already developed its own military-grade secure radio transmissions to avoid communicating via foreign products (Nakhoul, 2024). Iran is reported to rely on end-to-end encryption in messaging systems in the aftermath of the Lebanon attacks as it was mainly concerned about the protection of its nuclear and missile facilities (Reuters, 2024).

In spite of Iran's cautious posture, Israel has achieved strategic gains in the current battlefield. Experts have various opinions. Marc Polymeropoulos a non-resident senior fellow at the Forward Defense practice of Atlantic Council underlines the Israeli strategy of 'escalate to de-escalate' which means that Israel sent a brutal warning to Hezbollah. This event sowed seeds of distrust among members of Hezbollah which could paralyse the group. Another expert, Jonathan Panikoff from same institution states that the psychological impact of this operation will lead to internal conundrum. But in contrast to above views Kirsten Fontenrose believes that this operation will alert the other terror planners and fighters in Iran's Axis of Resistance to stop using their phones, pagers or walkie-talkies which could slow down other global intelligence community's initiatives in the region (Atlantic Council, 2024). Israel can also gain favourable conflict-management understandings/deals with Hezbollah by forcing Hezbollah to remove their military assets from the northern border along Lebanon (Satloff, 2024).

The dominance of Western companies particularly in encrypted communications is highlighted, but equally important is the use of such companies to be set-up and used by intelligence agencies for covert operations (Shadi & Ahmed, 2024). The impact of supply chain attacks is long-lasting and can't be comprehended easily. One aspect is that it reduces the public trust regarding the usage of electronic devices. As a result, countries could start to adopt policies which advocate for producing indigenous technology to maintain stricter control over supply chains protocols, like the US CHIPS Act. This in turn can lead to technology cold-war by raising technology barriers (Dalati, 2024). Unlike Hezbollah which didn't have access to reputable devices, the high value personnel who have access to premium devices may come on the hitlist because even the reputable and established firms' devices could be intercepted, opened, tampered with, and resealed to customers (Lin, 2024).

The popularization of such operations and related technology could have adverse impacts. Technology journalists have reported that even normal mobile phone batteries could be triggered remotely to overheat. That raises the concern for safety for use of electronic devices in airlines, public transport, schools, hospitals, cinemas etc (Shaheen, 2024). One expert has pointed out the dangerous precedent set by this operation, noting that communication equipment's owned by state ministers or other important individuals could be similarly rigged to capture recordings, listen to live conversations, or even activate cameras covertly. From international security perspective, even states can use such tactics. There could be possibilities that software for controlling cranes unloading merchandise owned by China could have potential hidden backdoors that could be exploited against the US at seaports (Salmon, 2024).

Limitations of low-intensity warfare:

Though Israel's operation heralds a new form of warfare against non-state groups, it has certain limitations. Innovations in battery technology which prevents manipulation to ensure stability under extreme conditions could prevent such tactics. The verification of devices at every stage of their lifecycle for integrity can help clients to detect flaws but it also slows down the process of shipping (Aditya, 2024). Unfortunately, these kinds of attacks don't require the resources/expertise of a nation state only. They can be planned and executed from motivated individuals or groups if they can access the personal devices of their targets (Ryan, 2024). This means that someday even non-state terror groups can attempt such attacks to spread mass casualty and fear. Also, the fact that these kinds of operations are just one-time attempts and can't be repeated with the same device like pagers as in Israel's case is a drawback (Bob, 2024). Hybrid devices used as a weapon generally have a poor shelf life. They always carry the risk of getting exposed which can make it lose its military value. Therefore, sabotaged electronic devices can only be detonated at a particular time or opportunity and not at any state or group's own will, time or choice which diminishes their utility (Pytlak et al, 2024). Sometimes the state authorities may have differing voices/opinions within themselves such as the decision makers and political parties. Israel's think-tank experts have also reacted cautiously against the pager blasts and are not too optimistic. Instead, they are hoping for a political process that establishes a front against the Iranian axis (Shelah, 2024).

Volker Turk, the U.N.'s High Commissioner for Human Rights stated that simultaneous targeting of thousands of individuals, whether civilians or members of armed groups, without knowledge as to who was in possession of the targeted devices, their location and their surroundings at the time of the attack, violates international human rights law and, to the extent applicable, international humanitarian law and those who ordered and carried out the attacks must be held to account (Serhan, 2024). Therefore, major outrage and resistance to such tech-war operations may come from the legal perspective. Lebanon blasts may come under the purview of law of armed conflict, or International Humanitarian Law (IHL). Violations of the IHL can be triggered on various aspects. Lack of distinction of the targets as lawful targets is one flaw of such low-intensity warfare. Proportionality of the attacks is often violated under IHL due to harm to civilians and civilian objects and discredit military benefits. The absence of precautions taken to protect civilians also harms the reputation of attacker. Amended Protocol II of the Convention on Certain Conventional Weapons prohibits the use of certain weapons like pagers as booby-traps under Article 7(2). Article 7(3) of Amended Protocol II prohibits use of booby-trap weapons in areas where combat between ground forces is not taking place or does not appear to be imminent and has similar population of civilians (Finucane, 2024). Peter Stano, Lead Spokesperson for Foreign Affairs and Security Policy of the European Union has condemned the explosion of a high number of electronic devices across Lebanon and termed that as unacceptable and called for an independent investigation.

Case study 2: Hezbollah chief's targeting:

After Lebanon's pager attacks, Israel also successfully killed Hezbollah's leader Hassan Nasrallah in an airstrike in southern suburb of Beirut in last week of September 2024. Iran's U.N. Ambassador Amir Saeid Iravani revealed that U.S. supplied 1,000-pound bunker buster ammunitions were used to blow the headquarter of Hezbollah in Dahiyeh (Mroue & Lidman, 2024). It was further reported that he was attacked in Hezbollah's war operations room from where he used to plan his operations (Chehayeb, 2025).

Application of intelligence:

According to unsubstantiated reports via French newspaper Le Parisien, an Iranian mole provided the information that Hassan Nasrallah was on his way to his underground bunker. Israel's airforce was also tracking the location for a long time. The challenge for intelligence agencies was not to let the target escape by getting information about fighter jets' arrival or the launch of munitions towards the target. This kind of comprehensive intelligence often involved human intelligence (Sabbagh, 2024). The Israeli spies succeeded in tracking down the exact movements of Hezbollah members by hacking into their communication devices, surveillance cameras and their car's odometers (Reyes, 2024).

Mossad also recruited human sources within Hezbollah to plant listening devices in bunkers to expose hideout locations (Wallace, 2024). Israel spent around 20 years of intelligence efforts focusing on Hezbollah (Samia et al, 2024). Israel strategically timed the airstrike to coincide with the meeting of Nasrallah with Hezbollah leaders (Shafaq news, 2024).

Apart from the intense intelligence, which was gathered for the above operation, it has also come to light that Israel used innovative tracking methods to track Nasrallah. Unverified reports from Saudi news channel Al Hadath stated that an unidentified man travelled from Iran to Beirut to meet Nasrallah with the sole purpose of transferring a traceable substance onto Nasrallah's palm by shaking his hand. This substance was constantly being tracked by Israeli agencies (Fink & Zbeedat, 2024).

Geolocation through sonic boom:

A western expert has speculated the use of Israeli air-force direct involvement in tracking Hezbollah chief through sonic booms generated by fighter jets flying in excess of speeds of Mach 1. Guy Cramer, president of Hyper stealth assesses those Israeli jets flew a specific pattern of Mach 1+ overflights over the area of interest from where Nasrallah did live broadcast of his public speech about the pager blasts. Israeli technicians are likely to have reviewed that speech later for studying those sounds on the recording which could have allowed them to triangulate his precise location using Artificial Intelligence (AI). AI could have been used to review the speech in close real time and decode the flight paths of the numerous Israeli jets to analyse the sound data to extract his geolocation. This technique has future applications for geolocating any person doing a live video feed with a time stamp on any communication device. Further tracking the sound of detonation of weapons in a battlefield on those devices could also help in geolocation (Cramer, 2024).

Limitations of geolocating:

Does the method of successful targeting of Hezbollah chief makes a way forward to apply such tactics in other locations or with other targets? It has to be acknowledged that Israeli intelligence agencies reach is far higher than any other nation except the US. Cultivation of moles and spies is a yearlong process and not every country can develop such networks in any other country. Lebanon as a country was already under political shambles and Israel found it easier to find dissenters which won't happen normally in a politically strong functioning country. Air-strike is also a bit difficult in nations with contested airspaces with air-defence systems. As observed in previous sections, hacking into communication devices of terror group requires the use of sophisticated software like Pegasus which no other nation apart from Israel has achieved so far. The sonic boom methodology being discussed by western experts is a next-generation tracking methodology and nations will require to explore the use of AI to utilise those techniques, but the way the Israelis jets used the sonic booms can't be replicated in nations with air-defence.

Impact analysis and conclusion:

As observed in the above sections, Israel executed some unique and first of its kind anti-terror operations in the current Gaza conflict. The effectiveness of Lebanon's pager blasts was immense, but can that be applied in other global theatres with other terror groups? It will be extremely difficult to execute such operations in other theatres because Israel invested heavily towards developing its ground and human intelligence in the Middle east over a period of several years. Also as seen with the reports the intelligence agencies themselves admit that repeating such operations will be impossible because such operations typically alert the terror groups and they adopt measures to safeguard themselves. The second aspect of Lebanon blast deals with setting up of device manufacturing shell companies overseas which also is a time taking and a labourious process. The third aspect deals with remote trigger process of explosions over a wide area at a specific time which again is highly complex and depends on a nation's technological dominance. Since the American intelligence was also caught off-guard with Israel's operations it will be apt to acknowledge that developing such cyber-attack capabilities can be extremely complex and difficult for other agencies. The only scope for improvement in this method is to address the issue of counter-moles/counterintelligence which can inform the designated targets that can disrupt the timing of operations as that happened with Israel.

The second extraordinary operation of geolocating and targeting the Hezbollah chief again will be a difficult process to replicate in other theatres because the Israel-Gaza conflict was primarily fought in an air-domain with absence of any significant air-defence challenges to Israeli air-force. The use of sonic booms is an assessment which is at a preliminary stage and not yet confirmed by any Israeli official, but its application is real and can be used in a hypothetical scenario. The extensive use of AI to measure the sound and time parameters to determine the exact underground location of the target is an application which can be utilized by other militaries, but successful targeting may depend on other hard parameters like political will, force coordination, deterrence offered in other possible theatres. But the theory and technology of use of sonic booms for geolocating itself is unique and can be achieved in real world conditions with adequate precision and accuracy. The improvements which could be applied in this case is the use of such methods in the presence of contested air-defence environments which could challenge the fighter jets to gain a low-altitude flight path and release the sonic-booms.

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About The Author:

Ajay Kumar Das, M.A in International Relations, Security & Strategy, Jindal Global University, Sonapat, Haryana, India.

Maritime Terrorism in the Indian Ocean Region

Abstract:

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR) poses a significant threat to international security and economic stability due to maritime terrorism. As a crucial route for global trade, the IOR encompasses vital Sea Lanes of Communication (SLOCs) and strategic chokepoints. The threats of illegal activities like piracy, terrorism, smuggling etc. are increasing in the region day by day. Terrorist organizations like Al-Qaeda and ISIS, have expanded their illegal operations to include violence via land, sea, air, and cyberspace, making the security landscape more and more complex. These terrorist groups exploit marine areas for illegal activities such as trafficking and smuggling of drugs and weapons. The connection between piracy and terrorism further complicates the situation, as pirates often collaborate with terrorist organizations.

As response to such illegal activities, the international community and regional state have implemented various counter-terrorism measures. These include increased naval patrols, enhanced global collaboration, and the establishment of maritime security frameworks. Despite these efforts, the economic impact of maritime terrorism remains significant, leading to potential economic disruption and loss of life.

This paper aims to elucidate the concept of maritime terrorism, offering an assessment of marine based attacks, threats, vulnerabilities, and the implications of such activities in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). It also underscores the importance of sustained vigilance and international cooperation to tackle the evolving threat of maritime terrorism in the IOR.

Key Words: - Maritime Terrorism, Coastal Security, Counter-Terrorism and Indian Ocean Region.

Introduction:

Definition of Maritime Terrorism

Though there is no universally accepted definition for maritime terrorism, it is widely accepted to cover a wide range of potential attack scenarios, including terrorists entering under false pretenses of being seafarers, smuggling of weapons of mass destruction to terrorist organizations on merchant ships, and hijacking and use of the weapons against other ships or port facilities. The Council for Security Cooperation in the Asia Pacific (CSCAP) has defined maritime terrorism as “the use of violence at sea or to a ship or fixed platform for political ends, including any use of violence for the purpose of putting the public or any section of the public in fear.”¹

In other words, Maritime Terrorism refers to the use or threat of violence at sea or in maritime environments by non-state actors, aimed at achieving political, religious, or ideological objectives. This type of terrorism targets vessels, ports, offshore energy installations, and maritime trade routes, intending to create fear, disrupt economic activities, and exert pressure on governments or societies. The growing importance of maritime trade and offshore resources makes maritime terrorism a significant global concern. Maritime terrorism often focuses on critical chokepoints like the Strait of Malacca, the Suez Canal, or the Strait of Hormuz, where attacks can cause significant disruption to global trade and energy supplies.

Factors contributing to Maritime Terrorism

Maritime Terrorism in the Indian Ocean Region is fueled by several factors that create vulnerabilities for terrorist groups to exploit. Authorities encounter significant limitations when boarding vessels under foreign flags on the high seas or in their exclusive economic zones (EEZs), which grant special rights over marine resources. Terrorists exploit these restrictions by using vessels registered to complicit states or shipping containers to conceal their activities, contributing to nuclear proliferation. Countries with extensive coastlines have numerous points of entry, making comprehensive maritime security difficult and providing opportunities for terrorist infiltration. Support from state and non-state actors, through the supply of arms, bases or both can offset weaknesses in an organization’s capabilities, allowing them to carry out larger operations than they could manage independently.

The Bab el-Mandeb Strait, flanked by Yemen and Somalia, has been a focal point for major terrorist events. These include the 2000 al-Qaeda bombing of the USS Cole and an attack on a French oil tanker in the Gulf of Aden, just south of the strait. As recently as January 2024, Houthis launched a missile at a British tanker in the Gulf of Aden. After three months, the Houthis began assaulting cargo ships, and the rebels from Yemen destroyed four submarine communication cables that run under the Red Sea connecting the East African nation of Djibouti with the Saudi Arabian city of Jeddah. Internet connections between Europe and Asia have been severely disrupted by these cables, which are controlled by AAE-1, Seacom, EIG, and TGN, especially affecting Gulf countries and India.²

Maritime Terrorism in Indian Ocean Region: Risk and its Implications

The Indian Ocean Region (IOR), extending from Southeast Asia to the East Coast of Africa is one of the most culturally diversified regions in the world. Its status as one of the dangerous areas is a result of its diversity, since multiple security risks affect not just the millions of residents but also the United States and its allies. The Indian Ocean region is increasingly recognized as a strategic focal point in global affairs. This area is marked by significant trade and energy transfers, alongside a spectrum of activities ranging from political instability to threats like piracy, terrorism, and transnational crime. Around 80 percent of the world's oil and main commodities are transported through the region's crucial sea lanes and major chokepoints, including the Straits of Malacca, Bab-el-Mandab, and Hormuz. Since trade is the foundation of the world economy, the Indian Ocean Region is essential to its facilitation. The high volume of trade passing through these routes enhances the geopolitical significance of the IOR. This perspective remains relevant amid the ongoing competition for maritime supremacy in the region. The absence of a leading authority has led to power struggles and terrorist groups targeting major powers' vessels in the region.³ The significance of the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) increases its vulnerability with the presence of busy Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), unstable governments in the neighboring countries, several shatter belts, abundant resources and the lack of a dominant power all contribute to its threats and weaknesses. Such conditions draw the terrorist organizations to carry out illegal activities in these regions.

The blast of 1993 and the 26/11 terrorist attack in Mumbai underscored the risks of Maritime Terrorism when coastal waters are not properly secured. Historical incidents such as the 2003 attack on Iraqi oil terminals in the Persian Gulf by explosive-laden speedboats further illustrates such threats. Although the Indian Ocean Region (IOR) has seen comparatively fewer acts of Maritime Terrorism in recent years, extremist organizations connected to Al-Qaeda are nonetheless keen to target critical maritime chokepoints such as the Bab al-Mandeb, which divides Yemen from Djibouti. Recent attacks have included Houthi missile strikes on commercial vessels in the Red Sea. These incidents highlight the ongoing threat to maritime security in the region. Furthermore, it has been stated that since 2019 Lashkar- e-Taiba (LeT) has been preparing to employ marine channels in order to disrupt ports, assault high-value targets such as coastal nuclear power facilities, and infiltrate and strike India's oil assets in Bombay High.⁴

Terrorist organizations like as Abu Sayyaf Group (ASG) of the Philippines, Kumpulan Mujahidin Malaysia (KMM), and Jemaah Islamiya (JI) were well-known for their considerable maritime capabilities twenty years ago. With the highest potential of executing marine based illicit activities, ASG stood out. The majority of its members are from the provinces of Sulu and Basilan. They have carried out multiple kidnappings of coastal communities and vessels, including the raid on Ipil in 1995 that left almost 100 people dead. ASG was connected to the bombing of "Super Ferry 14" in Manila Harbor and was responsible for more than 100 fatalities when they bombed the ferry "Our Lady Mediatrix" in February 2004.⁵ Terrorist activities in Africa have been an imminent threat to the political stability and security of the continent since the beginning of the twenty-first century. Terrorist groups have multiplied across the continent, especially in West and East Africa, where the actions of groups like Boko Haram and Al- Shabaab are causing states to become unstable. These groups posture themselves against Western ideas and influences, seeking to upend the current power structures and promote the Islamization of these countries. Africa has thus been significantly harmed by organized Maritime Terrorism. Following the collapse of the Islamic State in Syria and Iraq, terrorist groups extended their extremist ideologies across the continent, focusing especially in the Gulf of Aden, the Gulf of Guinea, and the Sahel.

Analysis of sea attack in the Indian Ocean Region

- **Houthi Attack and its implications**

The Houthis, a Shia-Islamist group originating in the Saada area of Yemen, control the country's northwest, which includes Sanaa, the capital. They are seen as a component of the "axis of resistance," which is led by Iran and consists of Hamas in the Gaza Strip and Hezbollah in Lebanon. The Houthis have repeatedly attacked commercial ships travelling the Red Sea since November 2023. These assaults jeopardize the safety of civilians and pose a significant threat to the freedom of navigation along this vital global trade route.

The vulnerability of African maritime security has been highlighted by the Houthi militia's attacks on Red Sea shipping. Since November 2023, 133 incidents have been reported, including 14 ships targeted by missiles or drones and 18 seized by Somali pirates. The disturbances caused by non-state actors pose serious threats to the security and economic development of Africa since they violate international law and carry standoff weapons.⁶ The attacks have hampered commercial lanes that connect the Red Sea, the Gulf of Aden and the Western Indian Ocean—a region that accounts for 25% of all marine activity worldwide. The consequences of these disruptions were immediately visible.⁷ More than 10 million refugees and Internally Displaced People (IDPs) were among the 57 million East Africans who experienced severe food insecurity. Through the Red Sea, food supplies from Europe, Russia, Ukraine, and the Western Hemisphere reached the Horn of Africa and East Africa.⁸ In particular, the 6.6 million internally displaced people in Sudan were largely reliant on food supplies shipped over the Red Sea. The people of Africa bear the brunt of the marine instability in the Red Sea and Western Indian Ocean, which results in delays, higher consumer goods prices, economic disruptions, and contaminated waterways.⁹

- **Mumbai Attacks of 26/11¹⁰**

Over the course of four days, ten members of the Islamist terrorist group Lashkar-e-Taiba (LeT), based in Pakistan, executed a well-planned series of seaborne operations. The terrorists avoided Indian border crossings and security checkpoints by taking the marine route. They managed to avoid being identified by the Indian Coast Guard by seizing an Indian vessel. Originated from Karachi, Pakistan, the terrorists boarded the large cargo ship and headed south through the Arabian Sea along the Indian Coastline. The terrorists captured an Indian fishing boat after a day at sea, killing every member of the crew but the captain. The attackers dispersed into four groups after landing, each carrying grenades, improvised explosive devices (IEDs), and AK-47 rifles. They executed well-planned attacks on six separate sites throughout the city.¹¹

The Mumbai attacks sparked a re-evaluation of India's maritime security, which resulted in an extensive review of the approach in which the state police, coast guard, and navy work together to counter unconventional threats. Since the Mumbai attacks, intelligence reports have suggested that Lashkar-e-Taiba has been planning another strike on Indian ships and coastal facilities. Additionally, other reports indicate that Pakistani militant leaders continue to train for "samundari jihad" (seaborne jihad) in Indian waters.¹² The Mumbai attack exposed loopholes in India's security strategy in detecting and responding swiftly to seaborne threats. Despite several intelligence warnings before November 26, the attacks underscored India's ineffective coastal monitoring, largely due to the Coast Guard's lack of surveillance equipment. At that time, there were fewer than 100 boats to cover over 5,000 miles of coastline, along with limited aviation resources.¹³

- **The 2004 bombing of Super Ferry 14¹⁴**

One of the most catastrophic incidents was the 2004 attack on the Philippine Super Ferry 14. On February 27, 2004, a ferry weighing more than ten thousand ton departed Manila for Cagayan de Oro City with 899 people onboard. Later, an explosion triggered a fire, leading most survivors to jump into the sea or board rescue boats before the vessel sank. The explosion claimed the lives of 116 people in total, comprising 114 passengers and 2 crew members. Initially, it was assumed that the explosion was a result of a gas explosion gone wrong.

According to officials, Redondo Cain Dellosa admitted to installing a bomb on board on behalf of the Abu Sayyaf organization, which is affiliated with al-Qaeda. The explosives were hidden inside a television. Dellosa belonged to the Rajah Sulaiman Movement, which Ahmed Santos started in the Philippines in 1991. The attack was planned and carried out by the Abu Sayyaf group in collaboration with Jemaah Islamiyah and the Rajah Sulaiman Movement.¹⁵

- **USS Cole Bombing**

The US Navy destroyer Cole was attacked on October 12, 2000, in Aden Harbor, Yemen, when it stopped for refueling. A fleet of harbor ships supporting the Cole were joined by a motorized rubber boat carrying explosives. The dinghy was able to approach the ship without any intervention and the explosives detonated. The explosion caused a 40-by-40-foot hole in the ship's port side leading to the deaths of 17 sailors and injuring more than 38 individuals. Al-Qaeda was the architect behind the strike inflicting a serious blow to both the United States and the rest of the globe. In January 2001, the United States Department of Defense (DoD) published the USS Cole Commission Report, emphasizing the need for a more comprehensive Anti-Terrorism and Force Protection (AT/FP) strategy for US forces in transit.¹⁶

- **The hijacking of the Achille Lauro**

The Maritime Terrorism framework gained significance in 1988, following the hijacking of the Achille Lauro on 7 October 1985 when four members of the Palestine Liberation Front (PLF) seized the Italian cruise ship MS Achille Lauro off the coast of Egypt.¹⁷

The Palestine Liberation Front chief Abu Abbas and the hijackers were aboard an Egyptian Airline when U.S. Navy F-14 fighter immediately intercepted the plane. The aircraft was compelled to land at a military base shared by the United States and Italy in Sicily and the Italian authorities detained the four hijackers but allowed Abu Abbas to leave the country. This incident led to the temporary collapse of Prime Minister Bettino Craxi's government and strained relations between the United States, Egypt, and Italy.¹⁸

The Achille Lauro incident highlighted significant concerns about the security protocols within the shipping industry particularly for cruise liners. Maritime Terrorism, being less common than other forms of terrorism left the industry unprepared for such an event. This incident underscored the urgent need for enhanced security measures both at ports and on ships. One of the key takeaways from the Achille Lauro hijacking was the ease with which terrorists could breach ship security. Reports indicate that there were multiple instances where officials and crew members should have been alerted and taken preventive actions.¹⁹

Counter Terrorism Policy in the Indian Ocean Region

The International Maritime Organization (IMO) implemented regulations to enhance the identification and deterrent of threats to international shipping in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in the United States. As a result, the Safety of Life at Sea (SOLAS) convention was amended to include the International Ship and Port Facility Security (ISPS) Code. In order to combat risks at sea, the ISPS Code focusses on improving the security of ports, port workers, seafarers, and vessels. Under the ISPS Code, ships are equipped with a Ship Security Alert System (SSAS) that sends security alerts to shore authorities in case of threats along with an Automatic Identification System (AIS) to track the ship's location. (Singh, 2019)²⁰

By implementing a “coordinated and multi-layered security regime,” Singapore also has strengthened its maritime security in order to counter terrorist threats on land as well as at sea. One of the examples of this strategy is the creation of the Singapore Maritime Crisis Centre (SMCC). The SMCC has improved coordination amongst Singapore's marine security agencies, resulting in enhanced training, drills, operational planning, threat assessment, surveillance, and capability development. Improving interoperability amongst security agencies for planning and operational responses is one of its major accomplishments reducing effort duplication and closes any operational gaps.²¹

In August 2024, India inaugurated the Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) in Chennai, Tamil Nadu with the objective of significantly boosting the efficacy and coordination of maritime rescue operations for fishermen and seafarers in distress at sea. This initiative demonstrates government's dedication to preserve lives and ensuring prompt response to any emergency. The Centre has state-of-the-art communication technologies for managing alerts in real-time and modern technology for monitoring crises through satellite and terrestrial networks. Highly-trained personnel from the Indian Coast Guard specializing in Search and Rescue procedures operate the Centre which includes rescue aircraft, ships and other facilities.²² India's ISRR is divided into three areas under the National Maritime SAR Coordinating Authority (NMSARCA), and each area has a Maritime Rescue Coordination Centre (MRCC) located in Mumbai, Chennai, or Port Blair. There are 36 Maritime Rescue Sub Centres (MRSCs) functioning under these MRCCs. Modern ships and planes are sent by the Indian Coast Guard Stations with several missions to offer SAR coverage in ISRR.²³

The Philippines, Indonesia, and Malaysia signed the Trilateral Cooperation Agreement (TCA) in 2017 to combat Maritime Terrorism particularly in the Malacca Strait region. This agreement mandates intelligence sharing, integrated air and sea patrols, and the establishment of cooperative maritime Coordinating Centres in every country. To effectively combat illicit activities such as terrorism, piracy, and others in the region, the TCA aims to enhance collaboration and synchronization between the three nations.

Assessment of India's Coastal Security

Following the 26/11 attacks in Mumbai, India took a number of initiatives to increase security in the Indian Ocean Region (IOR). One of the major projects was the setting up of the Information Fusion Centre (IFC) in Gurugram. With a focus on Indian waters, it is an expansion of the Information Management and Analysis Centre (IMAC) of the Indian Navy. The IFC collects, aggregates, assesses, and distributes marine data to surrounding nations. India also formed the National Committee for Strengthening Maritime and Coastal Security (NCSMCS) and the State Maritime Security Coordinators in an attempt to enhance coordination in response to emerging maritime threats. Radars, electro-optical sensors, and sonar technology are all used in the Integrated Underwater Defence and Surveillance System (IUHDSS) that the Indian Navy has deployed. This advanced system is designed to detect and monitor potential illegal activities.²⁴

Owing to the susceptibility of coastal regions to illicit and illegal operations, the first phase of the Coastal Security Scheme was formulated and sanctioned in January 2005, with a five-year implementation period starting in 2005–06. Later, the program was renewed for a further year, ending in March 2011. Many coastal security measures including the supply of interceptor boats were implemented during the Phase- I of the Coastal Security Scheme.²⁵ The Indian government carried out a comprehensive assessment of coastal security measures in the wake of the 26/11 Mumbai attack. Union Territories (UTs) and Coastal States were directed to work with the Coast Guard to undertake a vulnerability and gap analysis in order to ascertain their further needs for the establishment of the Coastal Security Scheme Phase-II. These Coastal States and UTs submitted comprehensive proposals, which served as the foundation for the program's acceptance of Phase II. With a total budget of ₹1,579.91 crore, the initiative was implemented over a five-year period starting in April 2011 and covering nine Coastal States and four UTs.²⁶ The objective of the Coastal Security Scheme was to strengthen the capabilities of the Marine Police Force for patrolling and monitoring the coastal areas especially the shallow areas close to the shore. Phase I of the program equipped Coastal States and union territories with 204 boats, 153 Jeeps, 312 motorcycles, 97 Check Posts, 58 Outposts, 30 Barracks, and 73 Coastal Police Stations (CPSs). Coastal States and Union Territories were authorized to have 131 Marine Police Stations, 60 Jetties, 10 Marine Operations Centres, 150 Boats, 35 Rigid Inflatable Boats (RIBs), 10 Large Vessels, 131 Four Wheelers, and 242 Motorcycles under the Coastal Security Scheme (Phase-II).²⁷ The Indian Coast Guard built the Coastal Surveillance Network (CSN) made up of a series of stationary sensors as part of the coastal security framework. These sensors which are located across 46 locations on the Coast and Islands, consist of meteorological sensors, day-and-night cameras, radars, and Automatic Identification Systems (AIS). Additional 38 radar stations, 8 mobile surveillance systems, and Vessel Traffic Management System (VTMS) connectivity at the Gulf of Kutch and Gulf of Khambhat have been implemented under CSN Phase-II in order to ensure monitoring of the whole coastline.²⁸

Four Joint Operation Centres (JOCs) have been established by the Ministry of Defence in Mumbai, Visakhapatnam, Kochi, and Port Blair. The Coast Guard and Navy coordinate staffing and management of these JOC, with additional support from appropriate Central and State authorities. Additionally, the Director General of Shipping released two circulars mandating that all vessels—including fishing vessels longer than twenty meters—be outfitted with Type B transponders for the Automatic Identification System (AIS). For boats under 20 meters, suitable tracking technology was identified based on a pilot study conducted by the Ministries of Defense and Shipping. The government is actively considering rolling out this pilot project along the entire coast.²⁹ To improve safety and security in ports, various initiatives and technological advancements have been made. In accordance with SOLAS (the International Convention for the Safety of Life at Sea) and the ISPS Code under SOLAS Chapter XI-2, the Central Government released the Merchant Shipping (Ships and Port Facility Security) Rules 2024 on June 19, 2024. Ports of call are updating their access control systems with biometric and radio frequency identification (RFID) technology. For enhanced surveillance, Closed Circuit Television (CCTV) systems have also been deployed at all major ports.³⁰

Way Forward

Due to a number of circumstances, the Indian Ocean region has been susceptible to Maritime Terrorism. Therefore, combating terrorism at sea is necessary to address these issues. Since there is no dominant authority in this region, limited advanced technology capabilities for gathering data, and no political and economic stability, fighting terrorism has been challenging. To effectively combat maritime terrorism in the Indian Ocean region, there is a need to establish dedicated regional group focused on maritime security to enhance coordination and response capabilities. Further, the maritime law enforcement and coastal security agencies (Navy, Coast Guard, Marine Police etc.) needs to enhance their capabilities through training, advanced equipment, and infrastructure development.

Combating Maritime Terrorism in the Indian Ocean region requires improving Maritime Domain Awareness. This can be achieved by deploying radar systems, satellite surveillance, and Automatic Identification Systems (AIS) to track vessel movements and identify potential risks. It is also crucial to set up a strong system for exchanging real-time intelligence with international and regional partners so that suspicious persons and vessels may be effectively monitored. Consistent and efficient law enforcement will be ensured by bolstering legislative frameworks for prosecuting Maritime Terrorism and promoting the ratification of International Maritime Security accords. Furthermore, the detection and response capabilities can be improved by investing in developing technology like drones, underwater sensors and sophisticated surveillance systems. These steps, if effectively implemented, may significantly reduce the likelihood of Maritime Terrorism in the Indian Ocean region.

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About The Author:

Ms. Antima Singh, Manager, School of Integrated Coastal and Maritime Security Studies, Affiliation: Rashtriya Raksha University. Area of Interest: Coastal and maritime security law, international law and affairs and polar law research.

"From Prohibition to Prevention: A 50-Year Retrospective on the Biological Weapons Convention and its Institutional Framework"

Introduction

Now 50 years down, the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) has gained prominence. It is basically the first multilateral disarmament treaty to ban an entire category of weapons of mass destruction. Since its inception the Convention has been a key component of the global disarmament regime, codifying a strong and long-standing norm that the use of biological weapons would be repugnant to the conscience of humanity. The total 188 countries' adherence to the convention itself is a testimony to the importance and significance of the BWC as a safeguard to mankind. BWC has been put forth on the basis of Geneva Protocol, which was signed in 1925, to eliminate the threat of weapons of mass destruction. This research article provides the past and present of the convention and the 'glimmers of hope' from the Ninth Review Conference' which was held in November 2022 to make thoughtful proposals for approaches to identify and respond to the potential challenges in the future.

About BWC

The seeds of the Biological Weapons Convention were sown after World War I i.e after 1918 and the formation of Geneva Protocol of 1925. The discussions started on closing the loopholes in the language of the Hague Conventions of 1899 and 1907. The two prominent improvements were to be made in this regard.

First, in order to ban not simply the 'projectiles' whose sole object is 'The Diffusion' of these weapons but to 'prohibit the use of Asphyxiating, Poisonous or other gases and all the analogous liquids materials and devices.'

Second, in the language of the Geneva protocol, 'To ban the use of Bacateriological methods of warfare.'

The Protocol, however, only banned the use of these weapons; its remit did not extend to their production, use, stockpiling, acquisition or retention. Nor did it have any enforcement mechanism. In addition, some signatories submitted reservations, and retained the right to retaliate in kind, if attacked or against non-signatories. It provided the normative framework for treaty-based prohibitions of weapons of mass destruction, not only in the form of the Biological Weapons Convention, but the Chemical Weapons Convention and even the Treaty on the Prohibition of Nuclear Weapons and the Treaty on the Non-Proliferation of Nuclear Weapons (in particular, its Article VI).(The Biological Weapons Convention at Fifty – UNODA, 2025)

At the same time, it became clear that the prohibition on use of biological weapons, as contained in the Geneva Protocol, was the foundation and not the capstone of efforts to rid the world of biological weapons and ensure against their return and use.

After World War I, the new era of arms racing began in the form of cold war between the United States of America and the then Soviet Union (USSR). But the main threat of weapons of mass destruction was more of a nuclear weapon. Both the sides, rightly remembered for a build-up of nuclear weapons and there was a clear threat of immediate and existential annihilation.

However, and absence of any prohibition against any activities, the arms racing of the Cold War era also entailed the development of biological weapons by both sides. Growing concerns about the dangers of biological weapons, and the likely inability to contain or control them once deployed, lent themselves to an ongoing normative shift in the international community away from unconstrained arms racing and towards more meaningful constraints on weapons of mass destruction beyond simply preventing their use.

This led to successful negotiation on the ban of the entire class of weapons of mass destruction in the form of Biological Weapons Convention. This convention was explicitly built on the basis of Geneva protocol, saying it as a ready-made foundation of the convention which prohibits the use of weapons of mass destruction. Article VIII of the Convention made clear that "Nothing in this Convention shall be interpreted as in any way limiting or detracting from the obligations assumed by any State" under the Geneva Protocol. (The Biological Weapons Convention at Fifty – UNODA, 2025)

In doing so, the BWC represented a shift from principle to practice, by virtue of its prohibition against development, production and stockpiling of biological weapons and by containing specific, enforceable provisions.

On the centenary of the 1925 Geneva Protocol, its offspring the Biological Weapons Convention has 188 States Parties and four signatories. It has indisputably made the world a safer place. However, the capstone of the elimination of biological weapons, is still not yet in place; in spite of its enforceable provisions, the Convention lacks an enforcement mechanism. In a world where, as the UN Secretary-General António Guterres has said “distrust has replaced dialogue” and amid fears that the nexus between technology and WMD is lowering the barriers to acquisition, it is an understatement to say that there is still work to be done.

The Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) effectively prohibits the development, production, acquisition, transfer, stockpiling and use of biological and toxin weapons. It was the first multilateral disarmament treaty banning an entire category of weapons of mass destruction (WMD). BWC is comparatively short and comprises only 15 articles. Over the years, it has been supplemented by a series of additional understandings reached at subsequent Review Conferences.

The key components of the convention are as below as per given by the United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs (UNODA):

Article	Provision
Article I	Undertaking never under any circumstances to develop, produce, stockpile, acquire or retain biological weapons.
Article II	Undertaking to destroy biological weapons or divert them to peaceful purposes.
Article III	Undertaking not to transfer, or in any way assist, encourage or induce anyone to manufacture or otherwise acquire biological weapons.
Article IV	Requirement to take any national measures necessary to prohibit and prevent the development, production, stockpiling, acquisition or retention of biological weapons within a state’s territory, under its jurisdiction, or under its control.
Article V	Undertaking to consult bilaterally and multilaterally and cooperate in solving any problems which may arise in relation to the objective, or in the application, of the BWC.
Article VI	Right to request the United Nations Security Council to investigate alleged breaches of the BWC and undertaking to cooperate in carrying out any investigation initiated by the Security Council.
Article VII	Undertaking to assist any State Party exposed to danger as a result of a violation of the BWC.
Article X	Undertaking to facilitate, and have the right to participate in, the fullest possible exchange of equipment, materials and information for peaceful purposes.

The above data is taken from the official website of United Nations Office of Disarmament Affairs. (The Biological Weapons Convention at Fifty – UNODA, 2025)

BWC States Parties have strived to ensure that the Convention remains relevant and effective, despite the changes in science and technology, politics and security since it entered into force. Throughout the intervening years, States Parties have met approximately every five years to review the operation of the BWC. Between these Review Conferences, States Parties have pursued various activities and initiatives to strengthen the effectiveness and improve the implementation of the Convention. A total of nine Review Conferences has taken place since the first one in 1980.

Evolution of BWC from the past fifty years

The Biological Weapons Convention should not be merely seen as the product of the Cold War, rather it had already gained impetus and the discussions were alongside the prevention of nuclear weapons in the form of 1963 Limited Test Ban Treaty and 1968 Nuclear Non-Proliferation Treaty.

BWC was negotiated by the conference of the committee on disarmament from 1969 to 1972 and then opened for the signature and finally entered into force in 1975 with obvious shortcomings. But the BWC was considered as a ‘real achievement’ not only for the United Kingdom of Great Britain and Northern Ireland (UK), which spearheaded international talks in the area, but also for communities (including scientists) who had pushed for the ban on biological weapons. The Convention “became the first multilateral disarmament treaty to prohibit an entire class of weapons” and “represents a milestone of the international disarmament regime” (Shearer et al, 2023, p.47; Revill and Blancafort, 2023). The first review conference was held in 1980, according to the Article XII of BWC. (CONVENTION on the PROHIBITION of the DEVELOPMENT, PRODUCTION and STOCKPILING of BACTERIOLOGICAL (BIOLOGICAL) and TOXIN WEAPONS and on THEIR DESTRUCTION, n.d.)¹

Significantly, the article XII also notes that such a review conference should also take account of new scientific advancements and developments in the field of biotechnology and microbiology to understand the technological threats to make bioweapons. Therefore, it shows that BWC was nothing just an agreement but was also a mechanism continually built into a regime.

After the initial Review Conference, a further eight have been undertaken. The Fifth Review Conference in 2001 witnessed a degree of acrimony over the United States of America’s proposal to end the Ad Hoc Group mandate to establish a legally binding protocol to strengthen the Convention (Littlewood, 2005). In terms of the BWC’s structure, a more positive outcome was the establishment in 2002 of an Intersessional Programme consisting of annual Meetings of Experts (MXs) and Meetings of States Parties (MSPs), to be held between successive Review Conferences. The Third Review Conference in 1991 saw the establishment of an Ad Hoc Group of Governmental Experts to Identify and Examine Potential Verification Measures from a Scientific and Technical Standpoint which held four sessions from 1992 to 1993. The subsequent Special Conference in 1994 established an Ad-Hoc Group which convened 24 sessions from 1995 to 2001. These decisions increased the requirement for dedicated support given the frequency of meetings under these processes. Therefore, the Office for Disarmament Affairs hired staff on temporary contracts for a few weeks or months at a time to service the meetings. The collapse of the negotiations within the Ad Hoc Group in 2001 brought an end to this process and to the idea of creating a large international organization for the BWC modelled on the Organization for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons. However, agreement on a new intersessional programme at the resumed Fifth Review Conference in 2002 meant that secretariat support would again be required for the annual Meetings of Experts and Meetings of States Parties to be convened in Geneva. In 2006 Implementation Support Unit (ISU) was established by the review conference. Prior to the creation of the ISU, the BWC lacked any dedicated and ongoing secretariat support. Without regular annual meetings there was little need for a full-time secretariat. Instead, the various predecessors of the current Geneva Branch of the United Nations Office for Disarmament Affairs provided secretariat and administrative support as and when required, mainly for the five-yearly review conferences. In addition, since 1987, the Office also supported the annual collation and circulation to all States Parties of the annual confidence-building measures (CBM) reports. Writing at the time, Chevrier notes that these sessions provided a substantive forum for discussion and a procedural means for inter-state communication (Chevrier 2002). The Ninth Review Conference in 2022 replaced the MXs with a “Working Group on the Strengthening of the Convention.”

The ISU was mandated to provide administrative support to meetings agreed by the Review Conference as well as support for the comprehensive implementation and universalization of the Convention and the exchange of confidence-building measures. The Seventh Review Conference in 2011 decided that the ISU would also establish and administer the Assistance and Cooperation Database and administer the Sponsorship Programme. Since the ISU was formally launched in August 2007, it has worked to fulfil these mandates. Working with the chairpersons of the annual Meetings of States Parties, a total of 188 States are now party to the BWC.

Current Scenario

As mentioned before, the Biological Weapons Convention is not a fossilized agreement. As mentioned, the BWC, unlike many other international treaties, is not a fossilised agreement. The Review Conferences, inter-sessional meetings and activities of the ISU together create an on-going focus of attention on biological weapons control. The steadily increasing involvement of civil society groups in the BWC adds further scrutiny. Moreover, long-term commentator on the BWC, Malcolm Dando, observes that, where there would otherwise be a geopolitical vacuum, the treaty performs multiple functions that include: (Dando, 2002, p.24)

1. Deterrence of violation, inducing compliance through threat of discovery
2. Reassurance through confirmation that the treaty is being implemented
3. Channel of communication that enables States able to identify and deal with disputes before they escalate
4. Precedent for subsequent, more advanced stages of disarmament
5. Mechanism for distinguishing between major and minor violations

In 2024, a record number of 111 States Parties submitted their annual CBM reports. The Assistance and Cooperation Database currently contains a total of 28 offers for assistance from 12 States Parties and one group of States Parties and a total of 71 requests for assistance from 30 States Parties. In 2024, thanks to voluntary contributions from four States Parties and the European Union, around 60 national experts from developing countries were able to attend BWC meetings in Geneva and participate actively by making statements, participating in side events and having bilateral discussions.²

The Seventh Review Conference also noted that States Parties in a position to do so could provide voluntary contributions to the ISU to enhance its ability to carry out its mandated tasks.⁶ Given that the funding received for the ISU from assessed contributions does not cover capacity-building or training activities, such voluntary contributions are crucial for addressing requests for assistance, primarily from developing States Parties. Donors have provided funds to the ISU to enable it to conduct implementation support activities at the request of States Parties, and to employ additional staff to carry out these activities.³

Given that States Parties agreed to renew the mandate of the ISU at the Seventh, Eighth and Ninth Review Conferences, they clearly value the support that it has provided. In addition to the support that it provides to States Parties, the ISU also acts as the institutional memory of the BWC. At the Ninth Review Conference, States Parties finally agreed to expand the ISU by adding a fourth staff position.⁴

Organisational Shortcomings

Unlike other arms control treaties, the BWC lacks a formal verification mechanism to monitor compliance with the treaty. This makes it difficult to ascertain whether states are adhering to their obligations.

The ISU has also faced challenges during its lifetime. The mandate of the ISU is not continuous and has to be reviewed and renewed at each five-yearly Review Conference. The staff members of the ISU are also not permanent UN staff but instead employed on fixed-term one-year contracts. The ISU, as with the BWC as a whole, receives no support from the UN regular budget.⁸ All these factors make long-term planning and sustainability difficult. The BWC's Implementation Support Unit (ISU) is understaffed and underfunded, further hindering its ability to effectively manage the treaty's implementation and address emerging challenges. The ISU has only four staff members and a budget of ~\$2.1 million, while the Organisation for the Prohibition of Chemical Weapons, which oversees the Chemical Weapons Convention, has a budget of roughly \$94 million according to NTI. (Essix et al., 2025)

The BWC lacks a clear framework for responding to potential biological attacks, including coordination among state parties, international organizations, and health/security sectors. Advances in bioscience and biotechnology, including synthetic biology and gene editing, pose significant challenges to the BWC's effectiveness. These advancements can be used for both peaceful and harmful purposes (dual use), making it difficult to monitor compliance and prevent the development of biological weapons. (Gerstein & Giordano, 2017)

Future of Biowarfare and Vision for BWC in near future

The future of biowarfare may see a shift towards information warfare, with potential for targeted, small-scale attacks causing significant psychological impact. Advances in biotechnology could also lead to new, more precise biological weapons, requiring increased preparedness and international cooperation. The BWC (Biological and Toxic Weapons Convention) needs strengthening through mechanisms for international cooperation, review of technological advancements, and improved verification to address these evolving threats.

The “Pact for the Future” adopted by the Member States of the United Nations in September 2024, underscores the urgent need to strengthen the Biological Weapons Convention (BWC) and reaffirms their shared determination to exclude completely the possibility of using biological agents and toxins as weapons. This endeavour critically relies on the active engagement of the next generation of scientists who are the leaders of tomorrow. The next generation of scientists can positively support these efforts, if they are equipped with knowledge and a strong understanding of the issues relating to the BWC. The role of education and advocacy programmes cannot be overemphasized because when young people are knowledgeable, they become advocates who support the development of, for example, a verification mechanism. (The Biological Weapons Convention at Fifty – UNODA, 2025)

Engaging the next generation of scientists through education and advocacy programmes is key to driving innovation for peaceful purposes. Education is vital, as it helps raise awareness about the dangers of biological weapons as well as the importance of adherence to the BWC. Actively involving the next generation of scientists in BWC-related events provides valuable insights and perspectives on emerging scientific and technological developments. Various youth programmes have been seen to create a massive impact in fostering understanding and cooperation on BWC-related issues. One example is the Youth for Biosecurity Initiative which educates young scientists about the BWC, its history, and significance in preventing the use of biological weapons. This knowledge empowers them to become informed advocates and responsible researchers.

Education and advocacy programmes play a critical role as they help promote ethical research. Some of the significant achievements of the Youth for Biosecurity Initiative include the contributions of young scientists in developing the Youth Declaration for Biosecurity and the Youth Recommendations for the Ninth Review Conference of the BWC. These education and advocacy programmes have given the young people who are the next generation of scientists a voice to support efforts to reaffirm the shared determination to exclude completely the possibility to use biological agents and toxins as weapons.

Scientists are at the frontier of biotechnology innovation, and also the first line of defense against technology misuse and abuse. Therefore, to prevent the misuse and abuse of dual-use biotechnology, it is important to meaningfully engage with them on biosafety and biosecurity issues. The delegations of China and Pakistan jointly submitted the “Proposal for the Development of a Model Code of Conduct for Biological Scientists” to the Eighth BWC Review Conference in 2016.³ In June 2018, the BWC Implementation Support Unit (ISU), the Ministry of Foreign Affairs of China and TJU co-hosted an international workshop on “Building a Global Community of Shared Future for Biosecurity: Development of a Code of Conduct for Biological Scientists” in Tianjin, during which Mr. Ljupčo Jivan Gjorgjinski, then Chair of the BWC Meeting of States Parties, suggested to name this proposal with the term “Tianjin” to recognize the far-reaching impact of the workshop. Since January 2021, experts from Tianjin University Center for Biosafety Research and Strategy, Johns Hopkins University Center for Health Security and the InterAcademy Partnership (IAP), engaged in active discussions with scientists from more than 16 countries across four continents to improve the guidelines. The efforts led to the final version of the Tianjin Biosecurity Guidelines for Codes of Conduct for Scientists which was endorsed and certified by the IAP on July 7, 2021. The Tianjin Biosecurity Guidelines were then submitted to the Ninth BWC Review Conference in November/December 2022. (The Biological Weapons Convention at Fifty – UNODA, 2025)

Conclusion

The year 2025 marks the 50th anniversary of the BWC. It is a pivotal moment to seize the opportunity and make concrete progress towards strengthening the BWC and its implementation. Education and advocacy programmes offer the platform for which the next generation of scientists can be inspired to achieve the BWC goals and ensure a future free from the threat of biological weapons.

Before a better understanding of the risks of Bioweapons and feasible governance is in place, scientists in different countries should accord with the principles and codes of conduct highlighted in the Tianjin Biosecurity Guidelines and other relevant norms, when conducting research towards creating mirror organisms. This universal adherence to the Guidelines and relevant norms of scientists could mitigate risks from the mirror life research even if national oversight has not yet been adapted to the new challenge.

We should sincerely hope State Parties and other key stakeholders should meaningfully engage with scientists when they take measures to comprehensively address the evolving biothreats and biotechnology advancements for strengthening the implementation of the BWC. Such efforts are critical to realize the future promise of the BWC as a cornerstone of international security.

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About The Author

Harshada Deshpande, Research Assistant at Forum for Integrated National Security (FINS)

India's strategic outreach to Maldives and its strategic connotation in the Indian Ocean

Abstract:

Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi's recent visit to Maldives has opened an important gambit in India's strategic posturing towards the greater Indian Ocean. The warm welcome given to the Prime Minister during the country's 60th Independence Day has increased India's strategic radar towards the atoll nation generally and more specifically to the Western Indian Ocean. The trip and strategic significance of it is a continuation of India's increased engagements with countries in the atoll nations and also develop its own military capabilities in its island outpost such as Lakshadweep which has got increased strategic interest from New Delhi. Further, India wishes to nullify China's Island Strategy of encircling India's immediate neighbourhood with Beijing's military outpost. Further, the trip was a paradigm shift in India's strategic outreach towards Maldives as previously Indian military personnel were asked to leave the atoll country following Maldivian President Muizzu taking power in 2024. In that regard, strategic observers within India note that the Indian Prime Minister visit to Maldives is a continuation of the neighborhood first policy developed by the Modi government. The visit will amplify India's strategic emphasis in the Indian Ocean as a part of its overall maritime security strategy in the wider Indo Pacific region.

Keyword: India Maldives relations, Indo Pacific, Geopolitics, Indian Ocean, Maritime Strategy

Introduction

As a part of expanding its maritime horizon, India has taken a leap forward in increasing its strategic presence in the Indian Ocean by forming the maritime alliance with Maldives which was sealed during the Indian Prime Minister Narendra Modi state visit to the atoll country late July this year.¹

Prime Minister Modi's visit to the Maldives conveys multiple strategic messages which includes but not limited to resetting of bilateral relations, a counter to China's rising influence, and a strong reaffirmation of India's naval assertiveness in its backyard.²

India's strategic interest in Maldives and its expanded strategic choices in the Indian Ocean

In the above context, Indian PM Modi's visit to the Maldives is seen as a major turnaround in bilateral ties after a spell of strain and tension between Maldives and New Delhi. It assumes significance as Muizzu, known to be close to China, came to power in the island nation in November 2023 on the back of an "India Out" campaign.

Earlier, Muizzu's policies resulted in fissures between Maldives and India. Muizzu government asked the Indian Military personnel to leave Maldives.

On the other hand, India and Maldives will initiate talks for Free Trade Agreement in the near future. The change in dynamics of the relationship could be attributed to the growing need for India as an economic partner to Maldives and the importance of New Delhi as an important geopolitical player in the Indian Ocean.

Earlier, around 70 Indian defence personnel were stationed in Maldives to maintain radar stations and surveillance aircraft in the archipelago. Indian warships also help patrol the Maldives' exclusive economic zone. This collaboration was of strategic interest to New Delhi amid its geopolitical competition with China in the Indian Ocean region.³

Meanwhile, Maldivian President Mohamed Muizzu campaigned against Indian Military Personnel in his country.

Earlier, India has provided assistance to Male when needed most as evident during In 1988, a group of Maldivians led by Abdullah Luthufi and assisted by about 80 armed mercenaries of a Sri Lankan secessionist organization, People Liberation Organization of Tamil Eelam (PLOTE), attempted to overthrow the government of the island republic. Back then, President Gayoom was saved from the coup by inviting Indian forces to intervene.⁴

On the other hand, it is noted that China has envisaged a “string of pearls” strategy that prescribes the construction of maritime bases aimed at encircling India.

It’s understood that all Great Powers which wants to dominate in the Indian Ocean have set their eyes on Maldives historically. Traditionally, all powers that aspired to control the Indian Ocean have sought a base in the Maldives.

The southernmost island, Gan Island in the Seenu Atoll, served as a base for the British Royal Navy during World War II. Gan met the requirements for safe, deep anchorage in a strategic area. In addition, Antsiranana on Madagascar, the Diego Garcia atoll as well as the Aldabra and Farquhar islands and the Desroches in the Seychelles are important strategic locations in the western part of the sea.

The strategically important Gan Island base was set up by Britain to curtail Japan’s westward expansion in the Indian Ocean. Further, in 1957, it was transferred to the British Royal Air Force which vacated it in 1971 after the Maldives had gained independence. Following the British departure, Iran, Libya and the Soviet Union all tried to secure the Gan Island base to counter the American military presence in Diego Garcia.

Meanwhile, in 2008, terrorist activity in the Maldives spiked with a bombing in Malé and the settlement of a jihadist community in Himandhoo, a previously uninhabited Maldivian atoll. India seeks to coordinate counterterrorism efforts with the Maldives to stamp out this presence.

Earlier, a 2009 security agreement between India and Maldives envisages that network across the atolls will be constructed and it will be linked to the coastal command in Cochin. The plan also involved that it regular surveys be constructed with the islands with military flights and plans to erect an air force station in the Maldives was also mooted.

The pact was signed in August 2009 during then Indian Defence Minister A.K. Antony’s visit there. He was accompanied by an Indian military delegation which included top navy officials.

It’s noted that the plan to construct radar was mooted keeping in view of the fact Maldives does not have a Navy of its own. During discussions, the Maldivian authorities had expressed concerns over the “crucial tasks of safeguarding and protecting their vast exclusive economic zone (EEZ) of the Maldives, while expressing its need to develop and enhance maritime surveillance and aerial mobility capabilities.”⁵

It’s true that Mauritius plays a crucial role in India’s Neighborhood First Policy. On the other hand, Mauritius’s Agalega island remote and strategic location and proximity to Seychelles, Madagascar, and Diego Garcia would help India closely monitor the entire region. The inauguration of the airstrip and jetty is expected to boost security cooperation between the two nations through joint maritime patrolling, monitoring of Exclusive Economic Zones, hydrography, and Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief programs.⁶

Furthermore, the new airstrip will accommodate Mauritius and India’s air and naval equipment, including the Indian Navy’s Dornier and P8-I maritime aircraft for the surveillance and reconnaissance of the regional waters.

While jointly inaugurating the airstrip and jetty at Agalega, Mauritian Prime Minister PravindJugnauth discredited rumors aired since 2018 about India establishing a military base at Agalega, assuring Mauritius’s sovereignty. However, Indian military could maintain its presence through man and material at Agalega for maritime patrol missions and the security of development projects. Furthermore, India is a key defense partner that has exported several helicopters, aircraft, ships, fast patrol boats, and other naval equipment to the Mauritian military forces.

Maldives strategic significance in the Indian Ocean

It’s understood that geographically, the Maldives lies between Lakshadweep and Diego Garcia, an important U.S. military base in the IOR. With the backing of Indian naval bases in Lakshadweep and Agalega, Diego Garcia would provide a more effective counterbalance against China’s rising footprint in the region, now further strengthened by the recent Male-Beijing defense pact. The two naval facilities would help India keep a close eye on the entire region while also facilitating India’s joint recce of the blue waters with the United States and other island nations.

Lastly, India's increased Indian Ocean presence will also enable closer ties with other strategically significant island nations, such as Madagascar and Seychelles. While New Delhi already enjoys a strong defense partnership with these countries, these bases will extend security, humanitarian assistance, and cooperation between India and island nations in the IOR. If the Agalega project brings India success, it would further motivate New Delhi to establish its presence in the Seychelles Assumption Island, which has been in negotiation between the two governments since 2015

In recent years, India has also made a series of attempts to counter Chinese influence in the IOR, including SAGAR and Necklace of Diamonds. The tug-of-war between China and India has resulted in both countries establishing naval bases and other military facilities. China's building of port infrastructure in Gwadar, Hambantota, Coco, and Djibouti has given Beijing greater access to Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and East Africa respectively, inciting India to initiate dialogue with several other IOR partners. These have included Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Iran, Oman, and most recently, Agalega in Mauritius.

China's strategic manoeuvring in Maldives

Despite Male's recent warmth signal to New Delhi as a part of Indian PM Modi's visit it's true that Maldives has got closer to China in recent times.⁷

Maldives President Muizzu on his first state visit as a President was welcomed by Chinese President Xi Jinping, during the talks at the Great Hall of the People, referred to President Muizzu as an "old friend,"

Further, it's true that China and Maldives were moving closer strategically in last decade. One of the new developments was represented by the September 16, 2014, visit of Chinese President Xi Jinping, who along with 200 representatives of China's top corporations, met with Maldivian officials to discuss infrastructure projects.

Topping the list was a proposed plan to build a bridge connecting the island capital city of Malé to the airport. It seems that for the moment China wants a strategic partnership with the Maldives before moving forward with its 'New Silk Road' trade initiative.

The above initiative will involve support to include new shipping lanes connecting China to Africa's East Coast which pass through waters just south of the Maldives. The current regime welcomes Chinese investment but most of all desires secure access to more tourism dollars.

While Chinese investments contribute significantly to the Maldives' economic success, concerns have been raised by the World Bank. A development report from October last year warned of a potential build-up of sovereign exposure during the pandemic, coupled with a lack of domestic investment opportunities.

President Xi expressed support for increasing direct flights between China and the Maldives, a move that could significantly benefit the Maldives' tourism sector. With tourism contributing 79% to economic growth in 2022, the country seeks to leverage Chinese connectivity to boost its travel industry. Additionally, China's commitment to infrastructure development aligns with the Maldives' aspirations for economic diversification.

The strategic partnership between China and the Maldives represents a geopolitical shift with far-reaching consequences. As the Maldives reorients its diplomatic and economic ties, the regional balance of power undergoes subtle transformations. The Maldives-China axis adds complexity to an already intricate geopolitical puzzle in the Indian Ocean, demanding close attention from international observers. The future trajectory of this partnership will likely shape the geopolitical dynamics of the region in the years to come.

China seems to be copying this strategy in the Indian Ocean and the South Pacific. In the former, it is seeking to contain India by forging alliances with island nations including the Maldives, Mauritius and the Seychelles and building a "string of pearls" of military bases from East Africa to Pakistan.

The strategy is designed to curtail Indian influence in the region so China, with the Americans distracted in the Middle East, can have a free run in other parts of Asia and across the Pacific Ocean but also to encroach upon African countries that welcome its yuan diplomacy — developmental and industrial support with no strings attached.

China has never announced the string of pearls strategy publicly. A recent statement from the Chinese military that it's considering an offer from the Seychelles to host a Chinese naval base confirms that the strategy exists, however.

Furthermore, the Chinese Foreign Ministry has stated that it isn't interested in building military bases in other places.

The Chinese “island hopping” strategy defies historical precedent and differs from the strategies of other and past great powers in that they were usually explicit about their intentions. China apparently believes that concealing its motives best serves its interests.

On the other hand, increased Chinese presence across the Indian Ocean poses a challenge to India as it is trying to project itself as a great power beyond South Asia. However, Muizzu's attendance at PM Modi's third-term swearing-in ceremony in June 2024 and Modi's recent visit signal a potential thaw. Diplomats see this as New Delhi regaining influence in Male, even as Beijing watches nervously from the sidelines.

The diplomatic landscape in the Indian Ocean region witnessed a significant development as China and the Maldives solidified their relationship through a comprehensive strategic cooperative partnership. President Mohamed Muizzu's state visit to Beijing marked a turning point in the geopolitical dynamics of the region, with the two nations signalling a commitment to enhanced collaboration across various sectors. This report delves into the implications, motivations, and potential consequences of this evolving partnership.

India's strategic expansion in the Lakshadweep and its impact in the Maldives and Indian Ocean

It's noted that as a part of power projection into the Indian Ocean India has started to improve its strategic infrastructure to the Eastern Indian Ocean.

As a part of the sea control strategy, India has started to operate a new naval base INS Jatayu which will be about 258 kms closer to the Maldives than the Indian Navy's existing base – INS Dweeprakshak – on the Lakshadweep Island.

The new base will augment India's “operational surveillance” of the region, according to a statement issued by the Indian Navy.⁸

A temporary base of the Indian Navy, known as Naval Detachment Minicoy, already exists at Minicoy near the 9 Degree Channel, a busy global shipping route.

The Indian Navy's surveillance missions received a shot in the arm with the opening of a Naval Detachment (NAVDET) at Androth Island, situated in the Lakshadweep archipelago. The NAVDET would extend the Indian Navy's presence at Androth by providing a communication network to connect with the mainland.' It is noted that India, Sri Lanka and the Maldives already have a trilateral maritime security co-operation. From Lakshadweep, India will work closely with the network of 26 radar emplacements deployed across the atolls of the Maldives, which will be linked to the Indian Southern Command.

INS Jatayu, therefore, is more than just a naval facility. It's a message to Beijing: India is prepared and positioned to counterbalance Chinese expansionism across multiple fronts.

Key capabilities planned or under development at INS Jatayu include 2.5 km airstrip capable of accommodating military transport aircraft. Deployment of a BrahMos land-based missile battery, strengthening deterrence capabilities.

A fully functional coastal radar station to monitor surface and submarine activity across a wide swathe of the Arabian Sea INS Jatayu: A Game-Changer in Maritime Strategy in the Western Indian Ocean.

Indian Navy officials have described INS Jatayu as a “maritime equaliser,” particularly as China’s commercial and naval vessels increase their presence in the Indian Ocean.

Beyond its symbolic importance, the base will play a critical role in Surveillance and monitoring of traffic in and around the Nine Degree Channel. Serving as a forward-operating base for naval and aerial missions as acting as a logistics hub for anti-piracy and humanitarian operations.

Further, as Beijing develops its own capabilities including building ports, airports, and bridges, India’s moves remain firm but focused on regional stability. The timing of Modi’s visit, coupled with the strategic build-up at INS Jatayu, serves as both an olive branch to the Maldives and a firm hand to China.⁹

With China expanding its economic and military influence in the region, India is responding with calculated strategic moves. The most significant of which is the recent operationalization of the Indian Navy’s INS Jatayu naval base on Minicoy Island, Lakshadweep.

Located just 250 kilometres from the Maldives, INS Jatayu is emerging as a key outpost in India’s naval strategy to monitor and, if required, choke Chinese maritime trade routes through the Indian Ocean. It is a corridor through which over 80% of China’s energy supplies and global shipping transit.

INS Jatayu is positioned north of the Nine Degree Channel, one of the busiest and most strategic shipping lanes in the world. Every day, more than 15,000 merchant vessels — roughly 10 to 12 every minute — pass through this route, which links the Middle East, Africa, and Russia to Southeast Asia and the Pacific Rim.

This channel is not just a global shipping lifeline — it’s also a strategic vulnerability for China, which depends heavily on these waters for its oil and trade imports. Until recently, India’s main point was the Andaman & Nicobar Command, guarding the Malacca Strait choke point. With the establishment of INS Jatayu, India has a second lever, which is located even closer to China’s logistical lifelines.

It’s understood that geographically, the Maldives lies between Lakshadweep and Diego Garcia, an important U.S. military base in the IOR. With the backing of Indian naval bases in Lakshadweep and Agalega, Diego Garcia would provide a more effective counterbalance against China’s rising footprint in the region, now further strengthened by the recent Male-Beijing defense pact. The two naval facilities would help India keep a close eye on the entire region while also facilitating India’s joint recce of the blue waters with the United States and other island nations.

Meanwhile, India’s increased Indian Ocean presence will also enable closer ties with other strategically significant island nations, such as Madagascar and Seychelles. While New Delhi already enjoys a strong defense partnership with these countries, these bases will extend security, humanitarian assistance, and cooperation between India and island nations in the IOR. If the Agalega project brings India success, it would further motivate New Delhi to establish its presence in the Seychelles Assumption Island, which has been in negotiation between the two governments since 2015

In recent years, India has also made a series of attempts to counter Chinese influence in the IOR, including SAGAR and Necklace of Diamonds. The tug-of-war between China and India has resulted in both countries establishing naval bases and other military facilities. China’s building of port infrastructure in Gwadar, Hambantota, Coco, and Djibouti has given Beijing greater access to Pakistan, Sri Lanka, Myanmar, and East Africa respectively, inciting India to initiate dialogue with several other IOR partners. These have included Indonesia, Sri Lanka, Singapore, Iran, Oman, and most recently, Agalega in Mauritius.

In conclusion, it’s expected that India and Maldives will continue their strategic partnership in the years to come with India providing necessary military assistance to the littoral state. Further, India will supposedly use Maldives as a springboard for effective power projection in the Indian Ocean.¹⁰

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About The Author:

Balaji Chandramohan is a research scholar with University of Madras and he was previously a visiting fellow with future directions international, Perth Australia.'

Analysing Status of Indo-USA Defence and Mutual National Security Agreements amidst the Tariff War

Abstract

The Indo-American strategic partnership, once labeled as the breakthrough relationship of the 21st century, faces new trajectories in 2025, particularly after the United States imposed tariffs on Indian exports and witnessed Prime Minister Modi's political exchanges with Presidents Putin and Xi Jinping. This analysis will reflect on the state of defence agreements and national security partnerships between India and the United States amid the growing geopolitical tensions; and if the institutional mechanisms will withstand the impact of economic coercion and changing diplomatic dispositions. It also provides pragmatic policy recommendations for government on how to maintain vital security cooperation while recognizing legitimate national interests.

Introduction

The path of defence cooperation between India-United States has significantly changed through the post-Cold War era, shifting from mutual suspicion to common strategic partner. The bilateral partnership has experienced many bumps along the way, nuclear tests and differences in regard to fighting global conflicts, yet it has been a story of resilience rooted in shared strategic interests of regional importance, especially as it relates to China's growing power in the Indo-Pacific region.¹ However, August 2025 could be the greatest stress test of this strategic partnership since it was created.

The imposition of cumulative 50% tariffs on a large portion of Indian exports, with India still buying discounted Russian oil and Prime Minister Modi hosting high profile meetings with Russian President Vladimir Putin and Chinese President Xi Jinping, has created a level of tension in bilateral relations that has simply not been witnessed before.² All these developments raise very serious issues about the survivability of defence agreements and national security partnership that have taken many years to develop.

This article reviews what has occurred in defence agreements in this uncertain geopolitical context, looking closely at the institutional resilience of the agreements and the political stresses that threaten to undermine it. The article also offers practical policy recommendations for both governments to use to try to work through this difficult period without endangering essential security cooperation that would jeopardize the wider Indo-Pacific stability.

1. The Architecture of Indo-U.S. Defence Cooperation: Institutional Foundations Under Stress The Evolution of Defence Agreements

The modern framework of defence cooperation between India and the U.S. is based on a number of foundational agreements that redefined what it means to operationally cooperate. The Logistics Exchange Memorandum of Agreement (LEMOA) in 2016, the Communications Compatibility and Security Agreement (COMCASA) in 2018, and as of 2020, the Basic Exchange and Cooperation Agreement (BECA) are now the institutional framework of defence cooperation.³

These agreements provide unprecedented levels of interoperability, from co-owned and secure communications systems; to the near real-time sharing of intelligence and logistics support during joint operations. The U.S. designation of India as a "Major Defense Partner" in 2016 further institutionalized the transfer of technology mechanisms and at the same time simplified export controls of defence specific items.⁴

Current Defence Industrial Collaboration

The iCET, or Initiative on Critical and Emerging Technology, which began in 2023, represents the most comprehensive attempt at defence industrial cooperation between the two countries. Consequently, an entire set of joint development projects covering fighter jet engines, land systems, intelligence, surveillance, and reconnaissance (ISR) platforms, and advanced materials have progressed from mere ideas to opportunities for collaboration between government agencies and private sector partners.⁵

The defence trade relationship has undergone a similar evolution, moving beyond a simple buyer-seller environment to a focus on co-development and co-production. Key platforms such as the P8I Poseidon maritime patrol aircraft, AH-64E Apache attack helicopters, and MH-60R maritime helicopters, embody not just transactions of procurement, but also complete logistics and maintenance ecosystems that create institutional dependencies.⁶

The Stress Test of August 2025

The imposition of 50% tariffs on Indian exports represents not only an economic shock but also a principled challenge to the compartmentalization principle on which it has relied to support the relationship. Historically, India and the United States have successfully compartmentalized trade disputes from security cooperation, continuing effective defence cooperation, defence trade, and defence investments, even when their economic relationship has been less stable.⁷ Yet, the scale and expressly punitive nature of the tariffs reflects a fundamentally new challenge, as they are transparently connected to India's choices in sourcing energy supplies, making it a qualitatively different challenge.

The tariffs target labour intensive manufacturing sectors such as textiles, gems and jewellery, leather goods, etc., as well as some agricultural products, which collectively employ millions of Indian workers and represent significant foreign exchange earnings.⁸ The economic impacts will not only include immediate losses from exports but also create a more systemic question about the reliability of the American market for Indian businesses, and the willingness of U.S. policymakers to weaponize trade relations through tariffs and trade restrictions.

2. Geopolitical Signaling and Strategic Realignment Concerns: The Modi-Putin-Xi Trilateral Dynamic

Prime Minister Modi's consecutive meetings with Presidents Putin and Xi Jinping on the sidelines of the Shanghai Cooperation Organization (SCO) summit have both profound symbolic and substantive significance. India has consistently stated that its foreign policy is a function of national interest, not alignment pressures, but the optics of these engagements offer clear signals regarding India's strategic choices.⁹

The meeting with President Putin reasserts India's commitment to its historic partnership with Russia especially in defence and energy sectors. Despite pressure from the West, India has maintained the premise that energy security is a legitimate national interest and that buying discounted oil from Russia serves both economic and strategic interests.¹⁰ While the engagement with President Xi Jinping is less substantive given the ongoing tensions at the border, it reflects India's willingness to engage with all major powers irrespective of American preferences.

Strategic Autonomy versus Alliance Pressures

The concept of strategic autonomy that got articulated over the decades by the various governments after independence affirms India's ability to take foreign policy positions according to its national interest, and not according to the dictates of bloc politics.¹¹ In practical terms, strategic autonomy has allowed India to maintain relationship across a variety of partnerships, from the Quad (with the US, Japan, and Australia) to BRICS (with Brazil, Russia, China, and South Africa) to the SCO (with Russia and China).

This prevailing crisis seeks to determine whether this approach of multialignment will remain sustainable with increased American pressure. Specifically, by linking trade sanctions and India's approach to energy procurement, this represents an attempt to push India to choose between economic integration with the US, or to exercise its strategic autonomy with other great power relationships.¹²

3. The China Factor: Enduring Strategic Logic Amid Political Friction Shared Threat Perceptions

The basic strategic rationale for India-U.S. defence cooperation has not changed despite the current animus. The strong conduct of China in the South China Sea, the increased assertiveness in its military modernization programme, and its unreconciled boundary disputes with India provide their own set of worries that are unaffected by the India-U.S. bilateral trade disputes.¹³

The growth of the People's Liberation Army's (PLA) presence in the Indian Ocean region, the military bases now set up in the Horn of Africa (HOA) and Pakistan, and its only limited but evolving naval capacity for anti-access/area denial (A2/AD) already threaten Indian and U.S. strategic interests.¹⁴ Given these structural realities, the case for defence cooperation remains strong, even in the face of political disputes.

The Quad Framework Under Pressure

The Quadrilateral Security Dialogue has become the main multilateral vehicle for India-U.S. cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. Nevertheless, the tensions that currently engulf the Quad generate considerable strain on this framework, as Australia and Japan find themselves caught between their alliance commitments to the United States and their important economic and strategic ties to India.¹⁵

The Quad was intended to be more focused on non-military cooperation (infrastructure development, vaccine distribution, climate initiatives, and maritime domain awareness) partly in response to India's comfort level with security cooperation. Nevertheless, ongoing bilateral tensions between India and the United States will always impact the coherence and effectiveness of multilateral frameworks.¹⁶

4. Economic Coercion and Security Cooperation: The Limits of Compartmentalization: Historical Precedents and Compartmentalization

Traditionally, the India-U.S. relationship has demonstrated remarkable resilience in separating economic issues from security collaboration. In the 1990s and 2000s, while concerns over intellectual property, services, and access to agriculture sparked significant trade friction, we nonetheless strengthened our defence ties.¹⁷ Both the stated tariffs on trade and the more explicit political messaging constitute a qualitative change in the relationship, in both size and scope.

The 50% tariff represents the most significant trade measure taken by the United States against India in the post-Cold War period. In addition, the explicit linkage to India's choices of energy procurement makes what would be considered regular trade policy, a more overt threat to India's choice in foreign policy.¹⁸

Technology Transfer and Trust Deficits

Defence cooperation more and more relies on technology transfer and joint development programs as well as the integrated supply chains that sustain them and which all require continued political trust and an assured policy landscape. The current crisis adds an enormous amount of uncertainty to these long-term cooperative arrangements.¹⁹

There are new political risks for American defence contractors who are in technology transfer and co-production arrangements with Indian partners. Congressional scrutiny of defence exports to India could increase, and what might have been relatively independent bureaucratic processes for approvals of technology transfer may now see political interference.²⁰

On the other hand, Indian policymakers and defence planners will also have to rethink how reliable American partnerships are for the military capabilities that India regards as critical. New political risk alongside coercive actions in the future related to foreign policy choices will now be additional factors in defence procurement choices and decisions about how, when, and where to develop technology.²¹

5. Russia as a Structural Constraint: Defence Industrial Dependencies

India is still dependent on systems of defense from Russia, and that dependence is one of the most important structural constraints on deeper U.S.-India defense integration. In fact, 60-70% of India's military inventory is of Russian origin, and those inventories create dependencies for spare parts, maintenance, upgrades, and operational support that cannot be replaced quickly.²²

India's continued reliance on Russian defence capabilities is the most significant structural constraint on deeper U.S.-India defence integration. The S-400 air defence system acquisition was completed despite American pressures and potential CAATSA (Countering America's Adversaries Through Sanctions Act) sanctions.

That system was integrated with India's air defence systems and represents a dependency that binds India's future air defence procurement choices.²³

Energy Security Imperatives

India's ongoing purchase of Russian oil, sufficient enough, has both economic logic and energy security logic. India remains one of the largest oil importers and their economy can still be affected by price surges and disruptions in supply. Purchasing Russian oil at significant discount prices below par value with market prices represents some clear economic benefits, which can also assist in diversifying supply.²⁴

The U.S. position that this indirectly supports Russia's war effort in Ukraine creates a fundamental contradiction with India's energy security requirements. This is unlikely to resolve itself with economic coercion alone and new arrangements will need to be established that deal with India's valid energy requirements.²⁵

6. Domestic Political Economy and Strategic Flexibility Sectoral Vulnerabilities and Political Constituencies

The 50% tariffs hurt labour intensive export sectors with many workers, and powerful political constituencies. In India, the textile sector employs over 45 million people. The gems and jewelry sector also supports millions of livelihoods.²⁶

The political implications of these job losses and decreased export earnings can also drive domestic political calculations regarding foreign policy orientation. Public resentment against what is perceived as bullying by the US may continue to bind future governments, limiting the influence of any strategic logic in defence cooperating arrangements.²⁷

Government Response Capabilities

The Indian government's ability to cushion affected exporters through fiscal assistance, credit options, and assistance with diversifying markets is critical to broader strategic flexibility. If the government can provide significant domestic support for the affected sectors, it may be able to stay on the same foreign policy course; if it cannot, it will have to adjust policy to relieve some of the economic burden.²⁸

7. Multilateral Context and Regional Dynamics: SCO Engagement and Regional Balance

India's active membership in the Shanghai Cooperation Organization, even while it simultaneously engages with the Quad, is another example of India's intent to engage with multiple regional architectures. SCO is an important vehicle for India to engage in dialogue with both Russia and China on topics of shared interest, from counter-terrorism to economic cooperation.²⁹

The Modi-Putin-Xi meetings should not be viewed solely through the lens of U.S.-India relations, but also as part of India's broader effort to maintain dialogue with all major powers while holding onto its strategic autonomy.³⁰

ASEAN Centrality and Indo-Pacific Architecture

India's focus on Indo-Pacific security emphasizes ASEAN centrality and inclusive regionalism. This creates natural tensions, as the U.S. prefers coalition building around treaty allies and close partners.³¹ The existing crisis is testing whether these separate approaches to regional security can coexist under a larger framework of cooperation or represent fundamentally rival regional order visions.³²

8. Pragmatic Policy Prescriptions for the Indian Government: Immediate Economic Damage Control

First and foremost, India needs to minimize the immediate economic cost of the tariffs while preserving room for diplomatic exchanges in the future. This requires a multi-track approach, a cohesive blend of structural domestic intervention, while aggressively diversifying sources of imports.³³

At once, the government should mobilize targeted export relief packages, which included expanded lines of credit, temporary duty rebates, and fast tracked refunds for those exporters affected. Similarly, trade promotion, should include hastening towards alternative markets in the European Union, in ASEAN countries, in Africa, and in Latin America, using up deliveries and shipments in the short-term, and cutting limits to the American Market.³⁴

Strategic Communication and Diplomatic Engagement

India should engage with the United States diplomatically, urgently through high-level diplomatic channels, but carefully. It is one thing to ask for high-level discussions publicly, but a senior-level channel, for example, that includes conversations between the commerce or trade, and foreign affairs ministries is particularly important to obtain either the narrow sectoral exemptions for products that matter to people's and Indian livelihoods or the negotiated time horizons for tariffs that were rolled back conditionally.³⁵

India's public diplomacy needs to put forward its legitimate energy security requirements, its compliance with existing price cap regimes, where there is compliance, and argue its historic commitment to strategic autonomy with respect to foreign policy choices. This messaging should take care to not put more incendiary rhetoric in play which might cause American domestic political views to harden.³⁶

Confidence Building in Security Domains

India can communicate ongoing commitment to security cooperation and assurances to American policymakers by proposing concrete, verifiable initiatives that signal India is taking steps toward closer security cooperation in the defence and intelligence domains. These proposals could involve, for example, enhanced sharing of intelligence to address threats to maritime security in the Indo-Pacific; agreeing to upgrade or expand participation in multilateral exercises; hastening the implementation of several already negotiated foundational agreements; and more focused cooperation in areas of shared technology interests.³⁷

With such confidence building measures, India is taking steps not only to reassure ongoing American commitment to India's strategic orientation but also raise the domestic political costs for Washington by further entwining security cooperation in the context of trade tensions.³⁸

Accelerated Defence Industrial Diversification

The present crisis serves as motivation for promoting long term defence industrial resilience through domestic development and supplier diversification. India should prioritize Make in India incentives for vital defence components, use technology transfer clauses in future contracts, and use public-private partnerships to develop alternative supply chains.³⁹

This strategy not only decreases future leverage that external actors may have through supply dependencies but also builds domestic capabilities that increase India's strategic autonomy and defence industrial base.⁴⁰

Multilateral Leverage and Legal Remedies

India should work with European Union partners, Japan, South Korea, and ASEAN countries to create alternative economic partnerships and political support for its position. Utilizing World Trade Organization dispute mechanisms, while slow and uncertain in outcomes, can demonstrate India's commitment to rules-based international order and buy diplomatic time for bilateral negotiations.⁴¹

Calibrated Engagement with Russia and China

India should partner with European Union nations, Japan, South Korea, and ASEAN nations to form an alternative partnership for economic and political support of its position. While desperately slow and skimpy on outcome, if India used some of the dispute mechanisms provided by the World Trade Organization, it would not only reaffirm India's intention to stay within the rules-based international order but also buy time for bilateral negotiations.⁴²

The key is portraying such engagements as independent diplomatic initiatives aimed at regional stability rather than strategic reorientation away from American partnership.⁴³

9. Pragmatic Policy Recommendations for the Trump Administration: Recalibration from Broad Tariffs to Targeted Measures

With the existing policy of imposing broad 50% tariffs, a substantial amount of collateral damage to bilateral relations may occur while India actively seeks out alternative partners.

A better strategy would be to impose a narrowly targeted remedy against specific entities or commodities in policies expressly relating to policy concern and outlining certain conditions for withdrawal.⁴⁴

Targeted sanctions against specific energy intermediaries/entities participating in sanctioned transactions would allow the pressure to remain without the full collateral damage to the wider bilateral trust and commercial relationships. Such an approach would preserve leverage while creating a pathway for de-escalation.⁴⁵

Incentives Alongside Pressure

In order for coercive diplomacy to be effective, pressure must be coupled with viable alternatives. The administration should offer a time limited opportunity for tariff rollback in exchange for Senator Ron Wyden's provisions which are similar to verifiable steps including increased transparency on energy purchasing, joint monitoring arrangements, or participating in alternative supply arrangements.⁴⁶

Supporting pressure with assistance, whether that be technical assistance to diversify energy, collaboration on the strategic petroleum reserves, or facilitating trilateral cooperation, conveys constructive engagement rather than singularly punitive action.⁴⁷

Protection of Defence and Security Cooperation

The government should formally commit to insulating defence cooperation and technology transfers from run-of-the-mill trade disputes. This should include commitments that tariffs will never be used to halt export licenses or technology cooperation that is essential to mutual objectives in security.⁴⁸

Such commitments are essential to build confidence in deepening long-term defence industrial cooperation while maintaining operational co-production pipelines. Since defence projects will often have years-long project timelines, it is critical to protect the space for policymakers to provide predictable policies that can maintain momentum for partnerships during the culmination of joint development programs.⁴⁹

Multilateral Coordination on Russia Policy

Instead of utilizing bilateral pressure on India exclusively, the United States should coordinate with G7 and European partners to collectively increase the costs on Russia for its Ukraine operations, while also offering India a coordinated package of energy cooperation alternatives. If market incentives drive India's purchases of Russian oil, addressing those incentives through multilateral coordinated action on Russia together with support for alternatives is more effective than pressuring India directly.⁵⁰

Engagement with American Business Community

The administration should organize business summits and offer specific incentives to American companies for investing in India's manufacturing and defence industrial base. By showing that the United States values long-term commercial partnerships, it creates domestic constituencies with an interest in cooperation rather than persistent protectionism.⁵¹

More engagement by the U.S. private sector, particularly defence contractors who are engaged in co-production agreements creates political pressure in Washington for more judicious approaches to trade disputes that would create economic conflicts with profitable defence partnerships.⁵²

Structured Negotiation Framework

Instead of implementing open-ended tariffs, the Administration could develop a mutually agreed negotiation timetable with measurable benchmarks around energy procurement transparency, verification of re-exports and other specific concerns. Independent monitoring mechanisms or third-party verification could demonstrate commitment and develop confidence around expected commitments, while making reversal of policies politically feasible.⁵³

Recognition of Strategic Autonomy

The U.S must recalibrate expectations to understand that India is not going to be a client state or treaty ally. Coercive measures will only push New Delhi closer to deeper accommodation with Moscow or enhanced commercial engagement with Beijing.⁵⁴

A more nuanced approach from the U.S. sees India as a strategic partner that engages with multiple powers based on national interest considerations. This requires recognizing India as a partner to be persuaded through incentives and shared interests rather than compelled through economic coercion.⁵⁵

10. Assessment of Current Defence Agreement Status: Institutional Resilience versus Political Pressure

The baselines defence agreements remain technically functional no matter the political difficulties. LEMOA foments logistics cooperation, COMCASA provides secure communications, and BECA provides the capability for intelligence sharing. The political situation continues to make the practical application of these agreements more difficult.⁵⁶

Joint exercises continue however they might encounter reductions in timing and scope should the political environment in question become problematic. For example, the annual MALABAR exercise, which in 2020 expanded to include Australia as a permanent participant, could have further reductions in Indian participation or training scenarios if the situation deteriorates even further.⁵⁷

Technology Transfer and Co-Development Programs

The most tenuous component of defence cooperation is dependent on technology transfer and joint development programs, which are susceptible to diminished political trust and bureaucratic cooperation. Export licenses for sensitive technologies may increasingly be subject to scrutiny, and Indian participation in co-development programs may face political filtering.⁵⁸

The iCET framework, while it will have institutional momentum, is likely particularly at risk, as it involves cutting-edge technologies with potential dual-use applications. Any American worries about continuing to share technology with a country that has close ties with Russia may halt or complicate projects in process.⁵⁹

Military-to-Military Relations

Professional military interactions between Indian and American forces are also significant, tending to be insulated from the political frictions between their countries. Engagements, partnerships, training programs, and operational cooperation are all continuing due primarily to a desire to operate in common professional interests shaped by decades of institutional relations.⁶⁰

However, an enduring political friction adds to the broader context for military engagement which may limit the breadth and depth of future forms of engagement while allowing for professional relationships to continue in their most basic form.⁶¹

11. Broader Implications for Indo-Pacific Security: Impact on Regional Security Architecture

The immediate challenges in India-United States relations have meaningful and direct implications for Indo-Pacific security cooperation. The Quad, while not a purely military cooperation, relies heavily on political coherency among its member states in order to be taken seriously as a regional security framework.⁶²

Continued U.S.-India friction limits the basic effectiveness of the Quad and gives China the window to exploit divisions between the four countries. China's long-standing stance of opposing the Quad as a "NATO-like" alliance against China becomes more credible to all member states if those states are undergoing serious bilateral tensions.⁶³

Maritime Security Cooperation

The Indian Ocean continues to be an important area of both countries' security interests, from sea lanes of communication to evaluating China's increasing naval assertiveness. It is necessary to have a robust maritime domain awareness which relies on sharing intelligence, conducting coordinated patrols, and effectively joint responses to security risks.⁶⁴

While there are now institutionalized mechanisms for maritime cooperation, their effectiveness will be dependant on political will and trust between the respective governments, as economic coercion, which undermines political trust, will not create an environment where the two countries can collaborate operationally in the maritime security domain.⁶⁵

12. Economic Dimensions of Security Cooperation: Defence Trade and Industrial Cooperation

The political trade of defence between India and the United States has expanded dramatically, to several tens of hundreds of billions of dollars and with the possibility of heading further above. Between the commercial relationship and the various stakeholder constituencies that are created in both economies, there are various aspects of interest to maintain bilateral cooperation.⁶⁶

The large American defence contractors for Indian work (Boeing, Lockheed Martin, General Electric, Raytheon, etc.) provide significant domestic lobbyist interests for both countries to maintain their interconnected defence trade activities, even beyond broader political tensions. In addition, Indian companies that are in joint-ventures and/or contribute to a supply chain have made significant investments in American partnerships.⁶⁷

Supply Chain Integration and Dependencies

The move towards co-production and supply chain integrations fosters symbiotic relationships that impose challenges to weaponizing trade relationships. Importantly, American defence systems use Indian suppliers for a growing number of critical components, while Indian military platforms rely on American suppliers and support.⁶⁸

Difficulties surrounding weaponized trade will be mitigated because of interdependencies, as they stand between a notion of complete breakdown, while similarly creating constituencies for remediation, but these dependencies certainly represent vulnerabilities that, during times of tension, both sides may exploit, as they have some leverage in these critical supply chains.⁶⁹

13. Alternative Partnership Models and Hedging Strategies: India's Diversification Options

The current crisis amplifies India's ongoing moves toward diversifying defence relationships and reducing dependence on one supplier. Increasing cooperation with France on submarine technology, increased cooperation with Israel on aerospace and cyber capabilities, and increasing cooperation with South Korea and Japan on various platforms can all provide alternative pathways for capability development.⁷⁰

Russia also continues to be a partner of importance, and although pressure from the West may limit support for legacy systems; there are also some capabilities where Russian technology has advantages. The BrahMos cruise missile program is a prime example of an area of India-Russia cooperation that India is likely to retain, despite whatever pressure is applied by the Americans.⁷¹

American Alternatives and Opportunity Costs

The currently pursued, American-oriented approach could achieve the very outcomes that it seeks to prevent. Pressing India into more accommodation with Russia and China does not advance American strategic interests and undermines broader Indo-regional stability goals.⁷²

More constructive alternatives could have produced far better outcomes for U.S. interests and maintain the viability of American influence concurrently with respecting Indian strategic autonomy. These alternative approaches include more robust technology transfers, increased collaboration in defence industrial partnership, and coordinated approaches to regional security issues that recognize India's position and constraints.⁷³

14. Short, Medium, and Long-term Projections: Short-term Outlook (Weeks to Months)

The next phase will see economic pain for impacted Indian exporters, increased diplomatic activity, and careful signalling from both governments. India will want to show that it is doing all of this autonomously through continued engagement with Russia and China, without making moves that break the American connection.⁷⁴

American domestic political audiences will get the story of tough action against partners who facilitate adversary financing, while strategic communities will privately worry about the bigger picture of Indo-Pacific partnerships.⁷⁵

Medium-term Scenarios (6-24 Months)

Two feasible scenarios present themselves over the medium term. The first scenario is one in which negotiated de-escalation occurs, with sector-specific exemptions, rollbacks contingent on energy procurement transparency, and renewed security cooperation in a way that recognizes the legitimate concerns of both sides. This scenario can chart an important path for further defence cooperation, maintaining the positive trajectory established by the partnership.⁷⁶

The second scenario allows for protracted friction, one that continues to cool: cooperation on technology transfer, move to a slowed implementation of co-production programs, speed up India hedging with other partners, while India is making a commitment as to this path of alternative partners by tripling down on a diversification away from the United States.⁷⁷

The likelihood of either scenario emerges from the ability of diplomats to be creative and whether the United States can provide credible offramps away from the current punitive approach.⁷⁸

Long-term Structural Forces (2+ Years)

Structural forces such as China's persistent rise, India's defence modernization needs, and enduring commercial ties suggest that security cooperation can persist through episodic political disturbances. However, repeated punishing actions without serious negotiations will have long-term political costs, slow down to iCET co-development programs, and make complete interoperability increasingly difficult to achieve.⁷⁹

The more fundamental long-term question is whether the institutional architecture of defence cooperation, through foundational agreements, joint exercises, technology transfer, and co-production; will be able to carry on despite political headwinds, or whether sustained political tensions will undermine the foundations of the strategic partnership over time.⁸⁰

15. Recommendations for Preserving Strategic Partnership: For the Indian Government: A Multi-Track Approach

India must engage in a bold strategy that protects national interests all the while stabilizing the bilateral relationship and mitigating escalation risks. This approach will simultaneously provide urgent economic assistance to the impacted sectors, act decisively on expanding its market diversification strategy, pursue high-level diplomatic engagement that seeks to negotiate solutions, take confidence building actions in strategic space, and hasten the diversification of defence industrial capacity.⁸¹

The government should stick to its principled position on strategic autonomy, but at the same time clearly express its commitment to security cooperation with the United States. Clarity on the strategic choices made and the rationale for those policy decisions will be important to sway public opinion and maintain political support for a balanced international policy.⁸²

Clarify Position on China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC)

India could use its longstanding opposition to the China-Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC) as a confidence-building measure with the US and a broader international audience. New Delhi's principled opposition to the CPEC based on sovereignty concerns regarding projects traversing Pakistan-occupied Kashmir is consistent with US strategic interest in curbing China's Belt and Road Initiative.⁸³ India should express this position more explicitly in multilateral forums and international debate, and should emphasize how its opposition to CPEC reflects its concerns about territorial integrity and the upholding of international law, sentiments American decision-makers strongly empathize with. This would provide some countervailing logic to American concerns about India's relationship with Russia by indicating that India's strategic autonomy and stature includes the willingness to challenge Chinese initiatives that may endanger its most important national interests. This could bolster categorical statements made about CPEC and show that India's multialignment strategy does not extend to accepting Chinese projects that repudiate the principle of sovereignty, thus allaying any fears Washington may have about the limits to India's acceptance of Beijing.⁸⁴

Address International Perception on Ukraine Crisis Response

India needs to actively respond to mounting global criticism of its perceived neutrality in the Ukraine conflict, which is seen by some as callousness towards civilian deaths and breaches of international humanitarian law. In keeping with its policy of strategic autonomy, India should increase its humanitarian aid to Ukraine and be more engaged in global efforts to document war crimes and extend civilian relief.⁸⁵ The administration can highlight India's steady support for territorial integrity and sovereignty while clarifying the operational limitations that restrict it from imposing sanctions on Russia. India can exert moral leadership by raising humanitarian assistance, endorsing UN probes into civilian deaths, and campaigning for mechanisms of peaceful resolution without sacrificing its energy security imperatives.⁸⁶ This is achieved while India keeps its strategic autonomy intact and responds to legitimate concerns about seeming complacent over human rights abuses. These steps would counter propaganda that India is more interested in economic interests than humanitarian issues, thus maintaining its global image as a credible global player devoted to rules-based international relations.⁸⁷

For the Trump Administration: Strategic Recalibration

The government ought to substitute across-the-board punitive tariffs with precise, reversible measures that deal with particular policy issues while providing transparent channels of de-escalation. These involve decoupling defence cooperation from trade tensions, specifying tangible incentives for Indian energy diversification, and involving multilateral stakeholders to work on underlying Russian behavior instead of singling out India.⁸⁸

Appreciation of India's strategic independence and the limits of coercive diplomacy will allow more productive partnership policies that attain American goals through persuasion and mutual interests, not economic coercion.⁸⁹

Conclusion

India-U.S. defence relations face their most severe test since the beginning of the modern partnership. The combination of heavy economic pressure and high-visibility Indian diplomatic outreach to Russia and China puts unprecedented pressure on institutionalised structures built up over decades.⁹⁰

Yet, the underlying strategic rationale of the alliance related common anxieties regarding China's ascent, complementary strengths in the Indo-Pacific, and reciprocal gains from technology collaboration provides powerful incentives for both nations to locate tractable solutions to present tensions.⁹²

The future of the partnership hangs on the capacity of both governments to compartmentalize differences, provide face-saving solutions to short-term conflicts, and stay focused on higher-level strategic convergence to both countries' long-term advantage. Resolution of the present crisis might even enhance the partnership by proving it resilient and flexible. Collapse will jeopardize one of the most significant strategic partnerships of this era with serious consequences for Indo-Pacific stability and world security architecture.⁹³

The way ahead needs pragmatic leadership, innovative diplomacy, and acknowledgment that successful coalitions among great powers need to allow for decent differences while maintaining necessary cooperation on common challenges. The game is much bigger than bilateral relationships and involves the ultimate question of whether democratic powers can sustain successful cooperation in a rapidly multipolar and contested global order.

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About The Author:

Shri. Vipul Tamhane is an anti-money Laundering and combating terrorist financing specialist and provides legal and commercial advice to businesses, governments, and law enforcement organisations. He is a visiting faculty member at Pune University's Department of Defence and Strategic Studies. He is the Founder and Editor-in-Chief of Diplomacy Direct, a public interest Think Tank (and YouTube Channel) based in India that deals with topics on counter terrorism, international relations and geopolitics.

The National Emergency in India (1975–1977): Constitutional Breakdown, Authoritarianism, and Democratic Redemption

Abstract

Every nation is obligated to protect its own existence, and governments possess the right to employ extraordinary measures when ordinary powers prove insufficient. Threats such as war, armed rebellion, and economic crises cannot always be addressed within the framework of normal governance, which is why constitutional provisions for emergencies exist. The Constitution of India provides such powers under Part XVIII (Articles 352–360).

In 1975, India declared a national emergency on grounds of “internal disturbance.” This decision fundamentally altered the democratic framework of the country, ushering in nineteen months of authoritarian rule. A compliant President invoked emergency provisions at the insistence of the Prime Minister, not to safeguard the nation, but to protect the political position of one individual. During this period, over 100,000 political opponents, journalists, and dissenters were imprisoned; fundamental rights were suspended; and the judiciary was stripped of its authority to hear habeas corpus petitions. The 1975 Emergency thus represented not the preservation, but the murder of constitutional democracy.

Key Words: Emergency, Constitution, Proclamation, Fundamental Rights, Democracy.

Introduction

Every state possesses an inherent right to preserve its own existence (Rousseau, 1948). Self-preservation is the foremost law of any nation, requiring sufficient authority to meet unforeseen crises (Gosnell, Lancaster, & Rankin, 1955). Governments are therefore justified in exercising extraordinary powers when necessary for national survival (Strum, 1949).

Political theorists and constitutional scholars have long debated the necessity of granting executives emergency powers during times of war, armed rebellion, or severe internal disorder. At the same time, democratic systems have sought safeguards to prevent the abuse or misuse of such powers. In India, these provisions are enshrined in Part XVIII of the Constitution (Articles 352–360) (Nakade, 1990).

Methodology of Research

This conceptual paper critically examines the 1975 Emergency in India, declared on grounds of “internal disturbance.” It explores the constitutional provisions invoked and their misuse by the then Prime Minister, who sought to safeguard her personal political office while publicly justifying the Emergency as necessary for social revolution and the preservation of democracy. The paper also highlights the excesses and oppressions experienced by the people of India during this period.

The research is grounded in existing literature, employs systematic reasoning from established premises, and translates these into action-oriented analysis. This process of theorizing with a practical orientation is developed in the subsequent sections.

Meaning of Emergency

According to Webster’s Third New International Dictionary (1961), “emergency” refers to the powers granted to, exercised by, or acquired by public authority to meet the exigencies of a particular crisis, whether within or outside a constitutional framework.

The term connotes “a sudden occurrence or exigency, implying danger which leaves no time for deliberations, or a sudden or unexpected necessity requiring speedy action. However, it does not always imply suddenness or temporariness; it may also encompass a pressing necessity or exigency not wholly unexpected” (Mack & Kiser, 1941).

Minattur (1982) expands the meaning of emergency to include any situation deemed dangerous to public welfare. Such crises may stem not only from war, external aggression, or internal disorder, but also from economic instability threatening peace and security. These abnormal situations cannot be managed through ordinary governance; rather, they require the exercise of extraordinary, reserved powers designed for exceptional circumstances (Nakade, 1990).

Emergency seen through the lens of political thinkers

The concept of emergency is as old as political authority itself. Tribal chiefs and monarchs historically exercised extraordinary powers in times of grave threat to their legitimacy and survival. With the expansion of governmental functions, the scope of emergency powers also widened (Nakade, 1990).

The necessity of special powers during crises has been recognized throughout history (Wade & Phillips, 1971). Rousseau (1948) acknowledged the need for a temporary suspension of democratic processes in times of crisis. Machiavelli similarly advocated for the constitutional incorporation of a regularized system of standby emergency powers, equipped with checks and balances, to be invoked during national danger (Smith & Cotter, 1950).

Types of Emergency in Indian Constitution

Part XVIII of Constitution of India provides for three different types of extraordinary situations which call for departure from normal governmental machinery set up by Constitution: - viz. (i) An emergency due to war, external aggression or armed rebellion [Article 352]; this may be referred to as ‘national emergency’ to distinguish it from next category. (ii) failure of constitutional machinery in states [Article 356]; and financial emergency [Article 360]. In Indian constitution, words “internal disturbance” is substituted by words “armed rebellion” by Constitution (Forty-Fourth Amendment) Act 1978 (Art. 352 of Constitution). An ‘armed rebellion’ poses threat to security of state as distinguished from ‘internal disturbance’ contemplated under Article 355 (Naga People’s Movement of Human Rights v. Union of India, 1988 2 SCC 109; AIR 1998 SC 431). Emergency provisions in Part XVIII of Constitution (Articles 352 to 360) have been extensively amended by 42nd Amendment (1976) and 44th Amendment (1978) Acts (Basu, 2024).

Proclamation of Emergency

‘Proclamation of Emergency’ may be made by President at any time he is satisfied that security of India or any part has been threatened by war, external aggression or armed rebellion [Article 352]. But no such proclamation can be made unless Union cabinet headed by Prime Minister recommend to him in writing, that such a proclamation should be issued [Article 352 (3)]. While 42nd Amendment made declaration immune from judicial review, that has been removed by 44th Amendment, so that constitutionality of Proclamation can be questioned in a Court on grounds of mala fides (State of Rajasthan v. Union of India, AIR 1977 SC 1361; (1977) 3 SCC 592; Minerva Mills v. Union of India, AIR 1980 SC 1789; S.R. Bommai v. Union of India, 1994 3 SCC 1). Every such Proclamation must be laid before both Houses of Parliament and shall cease to be in operation unless it is approved by resolution of both Houses of Parliament within one month from date of its issue (Basu, 2024).

The First Two Emergencies

1962 Emergency

Declared on 26th October 1962 during the Sino-Indian War, this emergency responded to external aggression on India’s northern frontiers. The Defence of India Ordinance (later replaced by the Defence of India Act, 1962) introduced 156 rules that regulated almost every aspect of life—trade, communication, travel, assembly, publication, business, and finance—granting the executive unprecedented control (Khanna & Wadhwan, 1963; Koppell, 1966).

When Pakistan attacked India in 1965, no fresh proclamation was issued, as 1962 Emergency was still in effect.

1971 Emergency

On 3rd December 1971, India proclaimed a second emergency in response to the Indo-Pak War and the Bangladesh Liberation struggle. Although justified initially by external aggression, it continued well after military success, exemplifying how emergency powers began to outlast genuine crises.

Toward 1975

These early emergencies set a dangerous precedent: emergency provisions became political instruments rather than tools of last resort. By 1975, the emergency power was invoked not for war or external aggression, but for internal political survival—marking a decisive rupture in India’s democratic framework.

Safeguards for the Invocation and Exercise of Emergency Powers

The Constitution hedges the invocation and exercise of emergency powers with several safeguards:

1. The President may not issue or amend a proclamation unless directed in writing by the Union Cabinet [Article 352(3)].
2. A proclamation shall not remain in force beyond one month unless confirmed by both Houses of Parliament [Articles 352(4), 352(6)].
3. Once approved, a proclamation must be reconfirmed by Parliament every six months [Article 352(5)].
4. If one-tenth of the members of the Lok Sabha submit a written notice to the President or the Speaker expressing their intention to move a resolution of disapproval, a special session of the Lok Sabha must be convened within fourteen days. A simple majority vote in favour of revocation is binding [Articles 352(7), 352(8)].
5. Any law or executive action curtailing rights and remedies under Part III during an emergency must explicitly state that it is “in relation to the Proclamation of Emergency” [Articles 358(2), 359(1B), 359(3)] (Basu, 2024).

Impact of a Proclamation of Emergency

Once proclaimed, an emergency significantly alters the federal structure. Parliament gains authority to legislate for any state [Articles 353(a), 353(b)], including powers over the distribution of revenues [Article 354(1)]. The President may suspend Article 19 (freedoms of speech, assembly, association, and movement) and restrict citizens’ ability to approach the courts for enforcement of fundamental rights, except for Articles 20 and 21 [Article 359(1)].

The effects may be grouped under four heads: Executive, Legislative, Financial, and Fundamental Rights.

Executive

During an emergency, the executive power of the Union extends to giving directions to states on any matter [Article 353(a)]. Ordinarily, this power is limited to Articles 256–257. While state governments continue to function, they do so under the direct control of the Union. In effect, India operates as a unitary state with states reduced to administrative sub-divisions.

Legislative

Parliament acquires broad legislative powers. It may extend the normal tenure of the Lok Sabha by up to one year at a time (but not beyond six months after the emergency ends). This provision was used in 1976 (Act 109 of 1976).

Emergency proclamations automatically expand Parliament’s competence, suspending the federal division of powers. Parliament may legislate on subjects in the State List [Article 250(1)] and impose duties or confer powers on the Union Executive even in areas normally reserved for the states [Article 353(b)]. Though state legislatures are not dissolved, their powers are effectively overridden, producing a unitary constitutional order.

Financial

The President may modify the constitutional allocation of financial resources between the Union and the states [Articles 268–279] through an executive order [Article 354]. Such an order must be approved by Parliament and ceases with the end of the financial year in which the emergency is lifted.

Fundamental Rights

Articles 358 and 359 govern the suspension of rights during an emergency:

- **Article 358:** Automatically suspends the freedoms under Article 19 during emergencies declared on grounds of war or external aggression. These rights remain unenforceable against the state for the duration of the emergency.
- **Article 359:** Allows the President to suspend the right to move courts for enforcement of specified fundamental rights (except Articles 20 and 21), in any emergency under Article 352.

The Forty-Fourth Amendment (1978) ensured that rights under Articles 20 and 21 cannot be suspended, reversing the controversial *ADM Jabalpur v. Shivkant Shukla* (AIR 1976 SC 1207), in which the Supreme Court had held that detainees lost all legal recourse during an emergency.

Moreover, laws or executive actions curtailing rights lack immunity unless they expressly state that they are enacted “in relation to the Proclamation of Emergency” [Articles 358(2), 359(1B)] (Basu, 2024).

Article 352 and Historical Use of Emergency Powers

Since independence, Article 352 has been invoked three times:

1. **1962** – Sino-Indian War with China.
2. **1971** – Indo-Pak War and Bangladesh Liberation conflict.
3. **1975** – declared on grounds of “internal disturbances.”

In each case, states came under stricter central control, compelled to prioritize national defense and security over regional concerns. Parliament enacted extraordinary laws granting the Central Government sweeping powers over citizens’ lives and property.

Key legislations included:

- **Preventive Detention Act (1950)** – enacted as a temporary measure in peacetime, but renewed seven times until 1970.
- **Defence of India Act (1962) and Defence of India Rules (1962)** – introduced during the Sino-Indian conflict.
- **Defence of India Act (1971) and Rules** – enacted during the Indo-Pak conflict.
- **Maintenance of Internal Security Act (MISA, 1971)** – provided broad preventive detention powers.
- **COFEPOSA (1974)** – empowered preventive detention against smuggling and foreign exchange violations.

Reasons for the 1975 Emergency and Breakdown of Democracy

The Emergency of 1975 was proclaimed not to safeguard democracy, but to protect the political office of a single individual. Instead of enhancing national authority, it bred resentment against an over-centralized state (Austin, 1999). Though exceptional in its scope and repression, the Emergency was not an aberration; it represented the culmination of long-standing political tendencies (Shourie, 1980).

Indira Gandhi’s consolidation of power within government, aided by loyalists, marked the high point of centralization (Austin, 1999). According to B.K. Nehru, India’s High Commissioner in London, Gandhi promoted the idea of a “committed bureaucracy and committed judiciary” to secure her position (Noorani, 1993). Romesh Thapar, once part of Gandhi’s inner circle, described the Emergency as the “culmination of manipulative politics set in motion many years earlier” (Thapar, 1977).

P.N. Haksar, Gandhi's former Principal Secretary, acknowledged that the Emergency was the handiwork of a small coterie but also argued it reflected a broader structural crisis in India's social, economic, and political systems (Haksar, 1979). Scholars disagree on causes: some see the Emergency as the undoing of Nehru's democratic legacy by his daughter (Guha, 2007); others emphasize deeper historical forces (Prakash, 2018; Jaffrelot & Pratinav, 2021).

Economic and Political Pressures

Between 1973 and 1975, economic crises eroded Mrs. Indira Gandhi's popularity. The Arab-Israeli war triggered an oil shock, raising crude prices from \$2.06 to \$11.45 per barrel (Borooah, 1976). Inflation soared, food scarcity worsened, unemployment rose, and state grain-trading schemes failed.

In May 1974, a massive railway strike led by George Fernandes threatened to paralyze the nation. His promise to disrupt food transport risked famine. Thousands of workers were detained, deepening political animosity (Austin, 1999).

To combat instability, the government strengthened repressive laws. Preventive detention under MISA was expanded, and COFEPOSA (1974) allowed detention for smuggling and hoarding (Swaroop, 1990). Other ordinances imposed forced savings to fight inflation. Gandhi's increasingly authoritarian style, backed by a compliant Parliament and a small inner circle, provoked further criticism (Austin, 1999).

Student and Popular Movements

Student protests in Gujarat against food shortages and rising prices grew into a statewide movement. The central government imposed President's Rule in February 1974 and delayed elections twice. Morarji Desai began an indefinite fast, forcing Gandhi to call elections for June 1975.

In Bihar, Jayaprakash Narayan (JP) returned from retirement to lead a mass movement. Calling for dismissal of corrupt governments, electoral reforms, and even a "parallel government," he galvanized opposition against Gandhi (Narayan, 1978). By 1975, JP was seen as a national alternative. Gandhi accused him of provoking class struggle (Gandhi, 1974).

Congress leaders were divided: some urged confrontation with JP, while others—like Chandrashekhar, Mohan Dharia, and Ram Dhan—advocated compromise. Dharia was sacked in March 1975 for voicing dissent (Austin, 1999).

Historical Roots of Democratic Breakdown

The Emergency cannot be understood apart from India's constitutional inheritance. Emergency powers in India drew on colonial precedents, such as Regulation III of Bengal (1818), the Defence of India Acts, and wartime ordinances. Scholars note a continuity between colonial emergency jurisprudence and postcolonial practices (Hussain, 2003).

In the Constituent Assembly, B.R. Ambedkar described emergency provisions as a "necessary evil." Critics like H.V. Kamath warned of their misuse, citing Article 48 of the Weimar Constitution, which facilitated Hitler's rise (CAD, 2 August 1949). Sarat Chandra Bose denounced the provisions as "time-bombs," too closely resembling the Government of India Act, 1935 (Bose, 1968).

The inclusion of the vague term "internal disturbance" in Article 352—later replaced with "armed rebellion" by the Forty-Fourth Amendment—was particularly problematic. It enabled Gandhi's government to declare emergency without evidence of external aggression or armed revolt, providing the constitutional cover for authoritarianism in 1975.

The Trigger: A Chronicle of Constitutional Crisis

On 12th June 1975, two major blows struck Gandhi's government:

1. Congress lost the Gujarat Assembly election to the Janata Morcha.
2. The Allahabad High Court invalidated Gandhi's 1971 election victory from Raebareli.

Justice Jagmohan Lal Sinha found Gandhi guilty of electoral malpractice under Section 123(7) of the Representation of the People Act, 1951. She was disqualified from holding public office for six years.

The ruling cited:

- Use of state officials and police for her campaign.
- Appointment of Yashpal Kapur, a serving gazetted officer, as her election agent before his resignation took legal effect.

Although granted a 20-day stay, the judgment created a constitutional crisis. Gandhi, advised by N.A. Palkhivala and loyalists like her son Sanjay Gandhi, refused to resign (Malhotra, 1989). Party president D.K. Barooah declared, “Indira is India and India is Indira.”

Massive pro-Indira rallies, orchestrated by Sanjay Gandhi and supported by state machinery, sought to demonstrate her indispensability (Shah Commission Report, 1978).

On 24th June 1975, the Supreme Court (Justice Krishna Iyer) allowed Gandhi to remain Prime Minister but stripped her parliamentary privileges and voting rights. This “conditional relief” reduced her to a figurehead, increasing opposition demands for her resignation.

Decision to Declare Emergency

On 25th June 1975, West Bengal Chief Minister Siddhartha Shankar Ray advised Gandhi that she could impose an “internal emergency” under Article 352. Using Rule 12 of the Government of India (Transaction of Business) Rules, 1961, Gandhi bypassed her Cabinet and directly recommended the proclamation to President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed. That night, the President signed the proclamation. By morning, India had entered a period of authoritarian rule unprecedented in its constitutional history (Shah Commission Report, 1978; Austin, 1999).

The Proclamation

On the evening of 25th June 1975, Prime Minister Indira Gandhi, accompanied by R.K. Dhawan, met President Fakhruddin Ali Ahmed at Rashtrapati Bhavan to finalize the proclamation of emergency. The ordinance, drafted under her direction, cited “internal disturbance” as its justification. Before midnight, the President—widely seen as Gandhi’s nominee—signed the proclamation. The Union Cabinet was neither consulted beforehand nor aware of the move; it formally ratified the decision only the following morning.

In her address to the nation on 26th June 1975, Gandhi justified the emergency as a necessary step to combat disorder:

“A climate of violence and hatred had been created.... One of them [Opposition leaders] went to the extent of saying that armed forces should not carry out orders which they consider wrong.... I trust it will be possible to lift Emergency soon.... We actually saved democracy.”

Later, she compared the measure to medicine:

“If a person is ill, you have to give him medicine which the person may not like but is essential for him.”

Evidence suggests that preparations for mass arrests had begun months earlier. Journalist Coomi Kapoor (2015) records a handwritten note from Siddhartha Shankar Ray to Indira Gandhi in January 1975, advising state governments to prepare lists of RSS and Anand Marg members for potential detention. Although initially ignored, Gandhi returned to Ray for advice on the night of 25 June, after Jayaprakash Narayan’s electrifying rally at Delhi’s Ram Lila Maidan. His call—“Singhasan khaali karo, ki janata aati hai” (Vacate the throne, the people are coming)—and his appeal to police and armed forces not to obey unconstitutional orders convinced Gandhi that a mutiny might be imminent. This, combined with escalating unrest and economic strain, precipitated the proclamation (Chatterjee & Biswas, 2024).

Life Under the Emergency

At midnight, constitutional democracy was suspended. Gandhi’s unilateral action transformed India into an authoritarian state. Civil liberties were curtailed, opposition leaders detained, the press censored, and elections postponed. Federalism was weakened, and Parliament became a rubber stamp. The Shah Commission (1978) later described this period as one of systematic dismantling of democracy.

Detentions

Over 111,000 individuals—including opposition leaders, activists, journalists, and even dissident Congress members—were imprisoned without trial, primarily under MISA and the Defence of India Act. Of the 35,000 detained under MISA alone, nearly 13,000 were political activists. Detentions were often based on vague suspicion or for private criticisms of the Emergency. The Shah Commission concluded the purpose was to “silence all opposition” (Shah Commission, Interim Report III, 1978: 41–45).

Prominent leaders such as Jayaprakash Narayan and Morarji Desai were arrested on the night of 25 June. Within hours, 676 arrests had been made (Hart, 1976). Amnesty International reported over 110,000 arrests in the first year, with at least 22 deaths in custody (Chatterjee & Biswas, 2024).

Press Censorship

On 26 June 1975, pre-publication censorship was imposed. Electricity to major presses in Delhi was cut at 2 a.m. to prevent newspaper publication (Shah Commission, 1978). Editors were instructed to submit content for prior clearance. The Press Council was abolished, and punitive ordinances broadened the definition of “objectionable matter” to include criticism of government or its leaders.

By January 1976, the right to approach courts for enforcement of Article 19 freedoms was suspended. Independent newspapers such as *The Indian Express* and *The Statesman* resisted, but most media complied. As L.K. Advani later remarked: “They asked you to bend, and you crawled” (Thapar, 2015).

Judicial Capitulation

The judiciary largely upheld the executive’s stance. In the infamous *ADM Jabalpur v. Shivkant Shukla* case, the Supreme Court (by a 4–1 majority, with Justice H.R. Khanna dissenting) ruled that even the right to life (Article 21) could be suspended during an emergency (Pai, 2020). This decision epitomized the judiciary’s capitulation.

Constitutional amendments reinforced authoritarianism. The preamble was altered to describe India as “socialist” and “secular” (42nd Amendment, 1976). A presidential order of 27 June 1975 suspended access to courts for enforcement of Articles 14, 21, and 22. Ordinances further curtailed judicial review by classifying detention grounds as confidential and beyond judicial scrutiny (Austin, 1999; Tarkunde, 1976).

Forced Sterilizations and Demolitions

An extraconstitutional center of power emerged around Sanjay Gandhi. His “five-point programme” included aggressive family planning targets that led to coercive sterilizations, disproportionately affecting the poor and marginalized. Targets assigned to states produced widespread abuse. In Delhi’s Turkman Gate, slum clearances accompanied mass sterilizations, leaving thousands displaced (Shah Commission, 1978; Chatterjee & Biswas, 2024).

Denial of Civil Liberties

Beyond detentions and censorship, torture in prisons, forced labor, and mass displacements compounded the suffering. The demolition of shantytowns in Delhi devastated the urban poor, while dissent of every kind was criminalized (Austin, 1999).

Constitutional Subversion

The Emergency also transformed the constitutional framework through a series of amendments:

- 38th Amendment (1975): Insulated emergency proclamations from judicial review by adding clauses (4) and (5) to Article 352.
- 39th Amendment (1975): Inserted Article 329A, removing Supreme Court jurisdiction over disputes involving the Prime Minister, Speaker of the Lok Sabha, President, and Vice President. This was intended to nullify the Allahabad High Court verdict against Gandhi. In *Indira Nehru Gandhi v. Raj Narain* (1975), the Supreme Court struck down part of this amendment, invoking the basic structure doctrine (Sudharshan, 2002).

- 42nd Amendment (1976): Known as the “mini-Constitution,” it centralized power in the executive, broadened grounds for emergency to include “imminent danger,” curtailed judicial review, and extended Parliament’s term. It became the most controversial amendment in Indian history (Pylee, 2012).

These amendments, drafted by Indira Gandhi’s loyalists, shielded her regime from constitutional checks, reduced Parliament to a cipher, and marginalized the judiciary. The result was the near-total personalization of power.

A Constitutional Watershed

The Emergency of 1975–77 represented the most profound constitutional crisis in independent India. It combined:

- Suspension of fundamental rights,
- Jailing of political opponents,
- Censorship of press,
- Judicial capitulation,
- Extraconstitutional authority of Sanjay Gandhi, and
- Sweeping constitutional amendments.

It was, in effect, the transformation of constitutional safeguards into authoritarian tools. This nineteen-month spell of authoritarianism became a defining case in the tension between state power and civil liberties, and a permanent warning about the fragility of democracy.

Post-Emergency: The 1977 Elections

In January 1977, Indira Gandhi announced her decision to relax the Emergency and called for general elections in March. The reasons for this move remain debated. One plausible explanation is that intelligence reports suggested she would secure victory. Another is that Gandhi, increasingly viewed as an autocrat, craved democratic legitimacy for her authoritarian leadership.

Once opposition leaders were released from detention, they quickly united. Five political groups merged to form the Janata Party, while senior Congress leaders H.N. Bahuguna and Jagjivan Ram defected to form the Congress for Democracy, which allied with Janata. With Emergency regulations relaxed, parliamentary democracy resumed its course.

The Sixth General Elections proved transformative. The Congress suffered a humiliating rout in northern India; both Indira Gandhi and Sanjay Gandhi lost their seats in Uttar Pradesh. The Janata Party secured a majority and formed the first non-Congress government at the Centre. India’s electorate had delivered a clear verdict: authoritarianism had no place in the republic. The resort to overt authoritarianism had been emphatically repudiated by the ballot box (Pylee, 2012).

The Forty-Fourth Amendment: Democratic Redemption

In response to the abuses of the 1975–77 Emergency, the Janata government enacted the 44th Amendment (1978). Its reforms directly addressed the distortions introduced by the 42nd Amendment. Key features included:

- Replacing the vague phrase “internal disturbance” in Article 352 with “armed rebellion”, thereby narrowing grounds for emergency.
- Protecting Articles 20 and 21 (rights against retrospective criminal liability and right to life and liberty) from suspension, even during emergencies.
- Making Cabinet’s written advice mandatory before any presidential proclamation.
- Requiring parliamentary approval within one month and enabling easier revocation of emergency proclamations.

These safeguards made it far more difficult to declare and sustain an emergency, restoring balance between the executive, legislature, and judiciary (Pylee, 2012; Pai, 2020). The reforms ensured that a repeat of the 1975 Emergency—triggered by political instability rather than genuine crisis—would be far less likely.

Epilogue

The Emergency was a turning point in India's constitutional and political history. Its declaration, operation, and withdrawal profoundly shaped the nation's democratic trajectory.

For some, it confirmed their skepticism about the viability of Indian parliamentary democracy; for others, it was a rude shock, shattering faith in the sanctity of constitutional governance. The suspension of rights, mass detentions, censorship, and indefinite extension of legislatures revealed how fragile democratic institutions could be when concentrated in the hands of one leader.

The Emergency was less an aberration than the culmination of long-standing patterns:

- The slide from cooperative federalism to over-centralization.
- The degeneration of social revolution from creed to slogan.
- Transformation of public service from civic duty to personal enrichment.
- Decline of respect for political opposition, now treated as anti-national.
- Efforts not merely to criticize the judiciary, but to subvert it.

India's flirtation with dictatorship was mercifully brief. Ironically, the Emergency may have strengthened democracy by exposing its vulnerabilities. As Mrs. Indira Gandhi herself told Parliament, the Emergency was declared "to preserve and safeguard our democracy." In reality, it taught Indians that democracy's survival requires eternal vigilance.

Since 1975, no national emergency has been declared under Article 352. Contemporary challenges—terrorism, cyberattacks, pandemics—have been managed through targeted legislation rather than blanket suspension of constitutional order. This reflects a lasting preference for constitutional normalcy over authoritarian shortcuts.

The Emergency of 1975 was not merely a constitutional watershed; it was the murder of constitutional democracy in India. Yet, in the aftermath, democracy revived through the ballot box, and constitutional safeguards were restored. The Janata government's reforms and the resilience of India's electorate ensured that the republic endured—and that the Emergency remains a stark reminder of democracy's fragility, and of the vigilance required to preserve it.

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About the Authors:

Mr. Pradeep V. Kamat is a Management Educator, Versatile Trainer and Senior H.R. Professional. He is a frequent contributor in the field of Human Resource Management, Strategic Studies and Good Governance. Mr. Kamat has three decades of senior managerial corporate experience in the field of Human Resource Management. He is Visiting Faculty in Management in number of Management Institutes in Mumbai and was Visiting Faculty at Naval War College of Indian Navy at Karanja. Mr. Kamat is a graduate in Economics from University of Mumbai and has passed M.A. in Human Resource Management and Industrial Relations from Tata Institute of Social Sciences, Mumbai and LL.B. from University of Mumbai. Mr. Kamat was conferred Distinguished Services Award in 1995 for his contribution to Training and Development and Honorary Fellowship in 2016 for his contribution to Human Resource Development by Indian Society for Training and Development, New Delhi. He is Honorary Senior Fellow, Forum for Integrated National Security (FINS), Mumbai and Hon. Associate Editor, FINS Journal of Diplomacy & Strategy. He can be reached at pradeepvkamat@yahoo.co.in

Dr. Neela Kamat was Associate Professor with Gokhale Education Society's College of Education and Research, Parel, Mumbai. She has around 25 years of teaching experience. Dr. Kamat has passed M.Sc.in Geology, M.Ed. and Ph.D. (Education) from University of Mumbai, M.A. (Sociology), M.A. (Psychology) and PG Diploma in Higher Education from IGNOU, New Delhi and PG Diploma in Educational Management from NMIMS University, Mumbai. Her specialization is Educational Management, Teacher Education, Educational Quality Excellence and Educational Assessment. An avid researcher, she has presented papers in National and International Conferences and has also been involved in school improvement and training projects in Maharashtra and Chhattisgarh and is Visiting faculty with Department of Education, University of Mumbai for Post Graduate Diploma in Educational Management and Institute of Distance and Open Learning, University of Mumbai for M.A.(Education). She can be reached at kamatneelap@yahoo.co.in

Locating India and United States Relations: From Partners to Ally under the Dragon's Shadow

Abstract:

India and the USA might ally with limitless potential. The countries are big on democratic rights and values which are the pillars of a free society. In the current world order, both countries have put the past behind them and are working together though not at a great speed for preserving the current rules-based order under the Dragon's shadow. With India's potential to be a major military power and advantageous geographic location, the United States can keep China's aspirations in check in the modern world. India also gains from this alliance as it gets closer to the advanced economies of the West and can take advantage of the advanced technologies that come with that proximity. India's strategic autonomy may be preserved while the USA and India's relationship is strengthened from partnership to alliance.

Keywords: India, United States, Alliance, Partnership, Kritrima, Strategic Autonomy.

Introduction

Many leaders often claim that India and the United States are ideal allies. There is a tale that President Bush once interrupted then-Secretary of State Condoleezza Rice as she leaned over to ask the Indian PM when India would be placing an order for reactors from Westinghouse since the two were attending a small private dinner. President Bush responded by telling her that the matter was much more important than reactor sales [1]. Although there has been advancement in US-Indian relations since the 2005 nuclear deal, the relationship has not advanced as much as it could. As Dr. S. Jaishankar puts it "The era after the Indo-US nuclear deal of 2005 showed how excessive caution lost the chance to make more than incremental gains" [2]. It is in the interest of both India and the USA to put this partnership on a fast track and see it become more important than the relations the USA has with its 'major non-NATO allies' as they say this can be the defining partnership of the 21st Century. According to Dr. Shashi Tharoor's book [3], Ashley Tellis believes that the partnership benefits both sides and the present international order. Tellis says, citing Tharoor, "The United States own geopolitical vision of the future world order is enhanced by a successful India. Likewise, Tellis proposes that, in Tharoor's words, "India's vital interest is necessarily consistent with aide[ing] the preservation of the American-led global order in contrast to, say, acquiescing to the rise of a Chinese alternative [4]. India and the USA have a thing in common which all its leaders love to talk about that is democracy. One is the largest and the other is the oldest. If we look at the current world order then logic should dictate that India and the United States should have been aligned more closely right now than they are. Prime Minister Atal Bihari Vajpayee once proclaimed that India and the United States are natural allies but such a call of Vajpayee has often been pointed out as an art rather than a call for an alliance as it occurred against the backdrop of India's nuclear test [5].

India- United States Relations amidst Dragon's Shadow

The US-Indian relationship has been steadily improving. India was granted a unique position in 2016 when the United States of America named it a "major defense partner." The United Arab Emirates will follow India in 2024. When we explore the India-US partnership and pitch it to go beyond the major non-NATO ally status it is important to define both the terms that is 'Alliance' and 'Partnership'. According to the US Department of Defence website, "Alliances are formal agreements between two or more nations. In national defense, they are promises that each nation will support the other, particularly during war" and "Partnerships are less formal than alliances. They help build relationships between nations or organizations like militaries. Like alliances, they benefit the members of the partnership, but they can be short-term and don't involve a treaty" [6]. As the world is becoming increasingly multipolar, the era of great power competition calls for great power alliances. The United States' adversarial relationship in Asia and Eurasia calls for greater friendship from India. Therefore, it is prudent to seek a great power partnership.

India pursues its strategic autonomy in its foreign policy, stating that the country will not dictate the terms of any hegemon or external actors maintaining its bargaining power in international politics. Speaking in the Indian Parliament in March 1951, Pundit Nehru emphasized that "aligning ourselves with any one power, you surrender your opinion, give up the policy you would nominally pursue because somebody else wants you to pursue another policy". Similarly, former Prime Minister Manmohan Singh while defending the civilian-nuclear deal in Washington before parliament in 2008 clearly stated that India's strategic autonomy will never be compromised. In the backdrop of an assertive China with its economy 2.5 times more than India's, has been throwing its weight around Asia more forcefully. This has naturally been a cause of concern for both the USA which one can say is the hegemonic power of the world and India which is aspiring to be a dominant regional player. For India a war on the two fronts seems problematic, such possibilities have evolved over the period because of China and Pakistan's stronger ties. As India shares long borders with the China-Pakistan axis, things can go murky when possibilities like war appear in the region. India in the past would have been reluctant to choose the side but in the contemporary period when China's repeated encroachment in India's territory across the disputed Himalaya, and its killing of 20 Indian soldiers in June 2020 demanded a stern measure [7]. China shared India's concern of a two-front war, with its perception originating from both the east (along the Pacific front) and the southwest (along the Himalayan front). Such a perception was lessened in the 1970s as closer ties between the United States and China developed in response to the growing differences between the United States and India. However, in recent years, the United States and China's fictitious relations and the strengthening of their relationship with India have caused the threat of China's two fronts to resurface. After their partnerships diversified, China and India established friendly ties with their adversaries from the Cold War—Russia and the United States, respectively.

The relationship between India and Russia is considered special by academicians, politicians, scholars, and policymakers from both sides. Although changing geopolitics has led Russia's relationship with India to a different course. India has not received the same degree of top-level attention as China despite Russian crude oil making up about 36 percent of India's total imports, accounting for around 232.31 million tonnes or 1.70 billion barrels in 2023-24 [8]. Also, Russia which remains a major supplier of weapons to India, facing competition in the Indian market because of India's desire to diversify its supply. As India's position on Russia stems from material interest and is guided by the principles of autonomous foreign policy and the freedom to choose its friends [9]. Similarly, as India picked relations with the U.S., Russia's ties with China also have shown significant changes. President Putin described a "no limit" friendship with China. Moreover, the objective of the Russian President aligns with that of the Chinese President with its long border and adversarial relationship with the West [10]. It is difficult to predict Russia's position, much less how it would react to the tensions between China and India. Russia will assist its economic ally China, or it will serve as a counterbalance to its long-time friend India. India needs someone she can rely on in this kind of situation.

An Ally with Strategic Autonomy

Scholars, policymakers, and academicians have diverse opinions regarding India being an ally of the United States. Those who favor an alliance between the U.S and India argue that the two countries' interests converge in the security of the Indo-Pacific, as the United States is looking for a strategic partner to contain China's current hegemonic ambition, India will become a vital ally that can decisively shift the balance of power towards the U.S and its allies [11]. The argument also suggests that aligning with the United States will help India add more meaning and purpose to its relations with NATO and G7 countries, due to America's influential position in these organizations. They further argue that India's strategic autonomy obsession has led to the complete neglect of crucial issues that are likely to determine whether the two countries would ally or not. Whereas the sceptics point out that South Korea is an American ally its citizens spend sleepless nights whenever tensions with North Korea escalate.

The realist Kautilya, who argues that friendship is based solely on the protection of wealth and life aspects, gave the concept of *Kritrima*. However, Kautilya preferred an ally who is traditional, enduring, disciplined, and enthusiastic and from whom there is little chance of opposition or rebellion. Since India has a strategic foreign policy, it will not do so, but what it can do is invite the United States to the table and offer the proposal of *Kritrima*. That might be seen as a strategically independent ally. Furthermore, the definition of an ally goes beyond simply providing security;

an ally also has a responsibility to correct a friend when they are mistaken, suggest ways to resolve the matter, and refuse to act mindlessly while under duress. India and the US can adopt a similar approach, whereby they cooperate and make amends for a brighter future rather than openly threatening one another with penalties and cut-offs.

Conclusion

Though the world had warmly welcomed China's peaceful ascent, it has now grown tired of the Dragon's shadow due to China's assertiveness on South China Sea territorial disputes and its persistent incursion into India's territory across the contested Himalayas. What the USA refers to as the pivot towards Indo-Pacific strategy has its roots in China's imperial ambitions. Under the Dragon's shadow, the relationship between the two democracies has been moving closer though at a slow pace. India is now a major defense partner of the USA and is enjoying the benefits that come from such a partnership but now with the dynamic nature of world affairs, the relationship needs to transform from partnership to alliance with both countries benefitting with closer ties. It is now common knowledge that the Indian-American relationship enjoys bipartisan support in both countries. The center of the world is shifting towards Asia and India, and going forward will be playing a major role in how the future is shaped. The United States and India would do well both from economic and strategic perspectives to upgrade the relationship and work with each other more closely.

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About the Authors:

Roshan Rai completed M. Phil from the department of International, Sikkim University. Currently working as an educator in Mayalyang Academy, a community-based school in Kalimpong District, West Bengal. His past contribution were India-Mongolia relations, Trashigang and Tawang Road: Opening region and geopolitical challenges and at present he is working in Lepcha community tribal history.

Shaswath Bharadwaj completed his post-graduation from department of International Relations Sikkim University. He worked as a research intern in Nepal Institute for International Cooperation and Engagement (NIICE) Kathmandu for 2 months.

Palestinian Refugees in the Trump World Order

As this is written, the contours of Trump administration's "solution" to the Palestinian refugee problem with particular focus on Gaza are not clear except for Israeli Prime Minister Benjamin Netanyahu's condescending remarks in Washington DC on 7 July that US and Israel are working with other countries "who would give Palestinians a better future" suggesting that the Gaza residents could move to neighbouring countries.

On 9 July 2025, the UN Office for Humanitarian Affairs (OCHA) estimated that the civilian deaths in Gaza due to Israeli operations since 20 October 2023 have reached 57,680, which includes 24,818 men, 17,121 children, 9126 women and 4137 elderly persons. In addition, 1,37, 409 were severely injured and are getting only basic medical treatment, since most of the Gaza hospitals are non-functional due to heavy Israeli bombing. In addition, OCHA has been warning of mass famine due to Israel's deliberate action of preventing food and medical aid from reaching Gaza.

The Office of the United Nations High Commissioner for Human Rights (OHCHR) revealed on 11 July that 798 Gaza residents who were struggling to get food aid were killed during the previous 6 weeks. Meanwhile, the US government "sanctioned" UN Human Rights Council's special rapporteur Francesca Albanese, who had listed Israel's excesses in the war, accusing US multinationals of exploiting Gaza for their commercial interests.

The sad part of the tragedy is that, except for the United Nations (UN), none, including Arab nations, seem to be concerned about this colossal human tragedy affecting Palestinian refugees, except for issuing bland statements.

Who are Palestinian Refugees?



United Nations Relief & Works Agency for Palestine Refugees in the Near East (UNRWA), which was set up in 1950, defines Palestine refugees as "persons whose normal place of residence was Palestine during the period 1 June 1946 to 15 May 1948, and who lost both home and means of livelihood as a result of the 1948 conflict." In 1950, there were about 750,000 Palestinian refugees. Currently, UNRWA caters to about 5.9 million Palestinian refugees who live in 58 recognised Palestinian refugee camps in Jordan, Lebanon, the Syrian Arab Republic, the Gaza Strip, the West Bank, and East Jerusalem.

In 1967, Israel waged the “6-Day War”, violating the UN Palestine Partition Plan and map of boundaries, which was adopted by the UN General Assembly on 29 November 1947 as Resolution 181 (II), creating the new Jewish State of Israel within the then existing Arab Palestinian State.

Israel also breached the 1949 Armistice Agreements for ending the 1948 Arab-Israel War with Egypt, Lebanon, Jordan and Syria, by forcibly wresting East Jerusalem, the West Bank and Gaza. Since then, Israel has been developing illegal Jewish settlements on Arab lands, forcibly evicting Palestinians who are rendered refugees. UNRWA established ten more Palestinian refugee camps to house those evicted.

Origins of this Problem

The end of the First World War is a watershed moment for the present Middle East crisis. The main actors involved were the Ottoman Empire, which lost its vast territory, and the British and French colonial powers, who seized lands and influence, sharing it with the Hashemite family, which traces its origins to Hashem Ibn Abd Manaf, the great-grandfather of Prophet Muhammad.

One of the best books describing the problem is “Paris-1919-Six Months that changed the world” by Oxford historian Margaret MacMillan. It explains how the “Big Four powers” (America, Britain, France and Italy) had met in Paris for 6 months after the First World War “that had started in 1914 over a squabble for power and influence in the Balkans and which had drawn all the great powers, from tsarist Russia in the east to Britain in the west, and most of the smaller ones”. Among the world’s most intractable problems, which could not be solved in 1919 or even by 2025, was the relationship between the Arab –Palestinian nations and the emerging Jewish homeland in the region.

Search for a Jewish Homeland

The Jewish “search” for a homeland started meekly and very submissively in 1897, unlike the present situation, when American support for Israel’s hegemony over the Middle East is strikingly evident.

The story starts in August 1897 when Theodor Herzl, a Viennese journalist, convened the first Zionist Congress in Basel, Switzerland. “Zion” is one of the Biblical names for Jerusalem. On 3 September, he wrote: “At Basel I founded the Jewish State. If I said this out loud today, I would be greeted by universal laughter. In five years perhaps, and certainly in fifty years, everyone will perceive it”. He was expressing his community’s dreams of establishing a homeland after their “exile” during the pre-Biblical days in the 8th Century BCE.

However, the march towards establishing the “homeland” was not easy. On 15 October 1898, Herzl visited Istanbul to plead with the visiting German Kaiser Wilhelm II to recommend to the Turkish Sultan to “seriously consider the proposals of the Zionists”. Jerusalem was then under Ottoman rule. Kaiser mentioned this twice to the Sultan, who would disagree.

Herzl would not give up. On 28 October, he followed the Kaiser to Jerusalem, having heard that he was visiting the Holy Land. He thought he would generate global publicity for the proposal to establish a Jewish homeland. He met Wilhelm twice. On both occasions, the Kaiser was non-committal.

Having failed to persuade the German emperor or Ottoman Sultan, Herzl turned to Britain. He met Lord Joseph Chamberlain, the Colonial Secretary, who suggested that East Africa (specifically Uganda) could be the Jewish homeland. On 13 August 1903, an MOU was issued by the British government to grant land to the “Jewish Colonial Trust Limited” in East Africa. Following this, the Zionist Congress on 26 August 1903, decided to send an investigatory commission to examine this proposal.

However, this led to a vertical split within the diaspora. The 1905 Zionist Congress rejected the “Ugandan” proposal. The leader of the opposing faction was Chaim Weizmann, a British research scientist of Russian origin who became the first President of Israel. It was he who started canvassing for Palestine, which was then “a small backwards province of the Ottoman Empire”.

Weizmann was considered the “father of industrial fermentation” using maize starch. He had developed the acetone-butanol-ethanol fermentation process to produce acetone, which was of great use for making cordite explosive propellants for the First World War. That was how he had met Lloyd George, who was Munitions Minister and later Prime Minister (1916-1922). He had already met Lord Arthur Balfour in 1906, who would become the Foreign Secretary.

In 1914, Britain was in desperate need of large amounts of acetone to “pre-treat” the gunpowder to prevent abrasions to the barrels, which usually released smoke after firing, thereby allowing enemies to identify the location of the guns. Additionally, during that time, Germany, Russia, and Finland held a near monopoly on acetone production, which Britain was unable to access due to the war.

Weizmann wanted nothing for himself as a reward, but merely British “support” for the Zionist homeland in Palestine. Margaret MacMillan quotes Lloyd George saying in his memoirs that this was “the fount and origin of the famous declaration about the National Home for the Jews in Palestine”. This was the “Balfour Declaration” 2 November 1917, which was a letter from Foreign Secretary Balfour to Lionel Walter, 2nd Lord Rothchild, doyen of the Jews, that Britain viewed “with favour the establishment in Palestine of a national home for the Jewish people and will use their best endeavours to facilitate the achievement of this object”.

In fairness to Balfour, the letter also contains the following conditionalities: “it being clearly understood that nothing shall be done which may prejudice the civil and religious rights of existing non-Jewish communities in Palestine”.

Strangely, the Rothchild Archives expose the Machiavellian motive behind this letter. According to this, Britain hoped, in exchange for their support of Zionism, that the Jews would help to finance the growing expenses of the First World War, “which was becoming increasingly burdensome”. Further, the British Foreign Office hoped that the Jews could be “prevailed upon to persuade the United States to join the War”. Lastly, the Declaration deliberately used vague language: “The term ‘national home’ was chosen to minimise the Zionist dream, to make Palestine a Jewish state”.

Additionally, Balfour’s letter was addressed to Lord Rothschild, not to Chaim Weizmann, who was the President of the British Zionist Federation in 1917. This was also a British ploy. To understand why, we should study a document in the Rothchild Archives, “Rothchild & Gold”, describing how many occasions the Rothchild family had financially rescued the British government from the public debt during the Napoleonic Wars and later. Additionally, in 1825, the Rothschilds advanced a loan of £ 4 million to the Disraeli government for purchasing shares in the Suez Canal.

Harry Collins and Dominique Lapierre wrote in “O Jerusalem”, an international best-seller, that Israeli rulers ignored Chaim Weizmann’s warning in 1925: “Palestine is not Rhodesia, and 600,000 Arabs live there who... have exactly the same rights to their homes as we have to our National Home”. After 1947, Israel ignored this, and the perennial Israel-Palestinian problem started then.

Now comes the role played by American politicians: The Harry Truman Library documents reveal how the Jews were aided by President Truman, who modified America’s traditional Israel-Palestinian policy in 1945 to favour his party in American elections by going against Roosevelt’s consensus with Britain on the multi-religious character of Palestine and Jewish presence there. In 1917, the Jewish presence there was only 18,000 (3%) out of 6,00,000.

This was the beginning of the American policy of favouring Jews over Arabs due to domestic political considerations, which exists even now under President Donald Trump. Ernest Bevin, then British foreign secretary, had lamented that the “Palestine issue has become the subject of local elections in the United States”.

The Arabs protested when Jewish migration increased their numbers to 83,790 by 1922. To this, Winston Churchill, then Colonial Secretary, gave an assurance that there was no intention to turn Palestine into a Jewish state. However, by 1939, the Jewish population had reached 445,457, which was one-third of Palestine’s population.

How Iran took the Palestinian Resistance Leadership?

Iran-Israel relations were friendly in 1948 when Israel was born. A 2019 Brookings paper states that historically, Persian-Judaic interactions were pleasant, as Iran was the only country that did not join the Muslim majority states in opposing its creation. Also, Iran fitted into Israel's first prime minister, David Ben Gurion's "Periphery Doctrine", which aimed at "a political-security goal of countering Arab hostility through relations with alternative regional powers and potential allies."

However, things changed when Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini assumed power in 1979. The first foreign leader to visit Iran was Yasser Arafat, the leader of al-Fatah, on 17 February 1979. Arafat, who had suffered a crushing defeat in 1970 while attempting to take over Jordan ("Black September"), was looking for a country to support him. However, Lebanon had allowed him to operate on its soil.

This arrangement was based on the 2 November 1969 Cairo agreement, supported by Egyptian President Gamal Abdel Nasser, through which Lebanon permitted the PLO, led by Arafat, to administer 16 official refugee camps under the United Nations Relief & Works Agency (UNRWA), where approximately 300,000 Palestinian refugees lived.

Gradually, these camps became the training ground for revolutionaries of all hues, including Iranian religious revolutionaries such as the Liberation Movement of Iran (LMI), also known as Islamic modernists, the Islamic-Marxist Mujahideen-e-Khalq (MEK), and Islamist followers of Ayatollah Khomeini.

Iran specialists during that era say that the creation of Iran's Islamic Revolutionary Guards Corps (IRGC) was a result of Arafat's suggestions through Lebanese PLO leader Anis Naccache, who had led the 1975 Vienna kidnapping of OPEC oil ministers through Carlos, the Jackal.

IRGC is Iran's leading fighting force now numbering nearly two lakhs with overseas responsibilities through their Quds Force. A Council on Foreign Relations paper updated on 17 April 2024, says that it has regional allies in Bahrain, Iraq, Lebanon (Hezbollah), Palestinian territories (Hamas & Islamic Jihad), Syria and Yemen. The paper quotes a 2020 assessment by the Centre for Strategic and International Studies (CSIS) that "the IRGC has become the most powerful controller of all important economic sectors across Iran" for funding covert activities.

A deeply researched paper dated December 2023 by the "Combating Terrorism Centre" (CTC) at the US Military Academy at West Point states that the IRGC crafts its overseas activities through umbrella groups and joint operations centres.

The first experiment occurred in 1991, when it created the "Ten Resistance Organisation" at the Tehran-sponsored "World Conference in Support of the Islamic Revolution in Palestine". In September 2023, Hamas and Palestinian Jihad started a joint operations room (JOR) in Beirut. Another joint operational centre of Hezbollah and Hamas has been functioning since 2021. CTC reports that this joint operations centre utilises Lebanese Hezbollah as a coordinator between Iran, other Iranian proxies in Iraq, Syria, and Yemen, and the Palestinian groups.

The CTC also paper quotes Yahya al-Sinwar, Hamas' Gaza lead military commander (who was killed by Israel in October 2024), proclaiming in November 2018 that the JOR would form the "nucleus of the Army of Liberation". Consequently, JOR undertook joint operations by firing rockets at Israel in November 2018 and 2019.

Surprisingly, CTC also reproduced highly impressive propaganda papers circulated through JOR Telegram Channels dated 29 December 2020, on the types of exercises that included launching rockets, simulating taking IDF hostage from a tank, raiding small structures, deploying an Iranian-made Misagh MANPADS, and using Iranian-made AM 50 rifles. The paper refers to the videos from the drill, on simulated combat divers raiding coastal targets and JOR fighters interdicting mock Israeli seaborne forces. It also quotes Joe Truzman, writing in 'Long Wars Journal' on December 27, 2020, on these exercises.

All these were found utilised by Hamas during the murderous 7 October 2023 attacks on Israel, killing 1139 Israelis and hostage taking of more than 200. How this escaped the notice of the legendary Israeli intelligence is still a mystery.

Rise of Hamas

On 1 January 2009, Daniel Barenboim, a famous Israeli pianist and conductor, wrote in *The Guardian* that Israel had encouraged Hamas as a tactic to weaken Yasser Arafat. On 26 October 2023, Ami Ayalon, former Shin Bet chief, told “Globes”: “We built Hamas... It didn’t work, because we didn’t understand what Hamas is... That’s why it blew up in our faces”

Linkage between Hamas and Iran’s Hezbollah

As stated above, the links originally came through Yasser Arafat, the high priest of secular Palestinian nationalism, who provided bodyguards to Ayatollah Ruhollah Khomeini while he lived in exile in Paris. He also facilitated the training of future Iranian Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC) in the PLO camps in Lebanon.

Israel’s action of pushing Palestinians out of the West Bank and Jerusalem into neighbouring countries in 1948 indirectly facilitated these contacts. Another factor which cemented these links was Israel’s mass expulsion of Islamic Jihad militants from Gaza in 1992 to Marj al-Zuhur (Lebanon) for abducting an Israeli soldier. Meanwhile, Yasser Arafat’s incremental journey towards peace talks with Israel, culminating with the 1993 Oslo Accords, disillusioned Iran.

Militants in Gaza disagreed with this and gravitated towards Iran for financial support. Gradually, Palestinian militants started receiving training in the Beqaa Valley in Lebanon, in camps run by the Iranian-backed Hezbollah.

Have such mass Palestinian killings ensured Israel’s Security?

The Israeli-Palestinian conflict is one of the bloodiest disputes in the history of mankind. According to the Palestinian Bureau of Statistics, the official organ of the State of Palestine, recognised by 145 of the 193 UN member states, nearly 1,34,000 Palestinians and Arabs have been killed since 1948 when the partition of Palestine came into force. As against this, Israeli casualties were almost 10,000.

Before the 2023-25 Gaza war, Israel had fought Hamas in 2008-2009, 2012, 2014 and 2021, which killed nearly 6,400 Palestinians against 300 Israeli deaths.

Rise and Kill First

In 2018 I reviewed Israeli journalist Ronen Bergman book “Rise and Kill First” for “Outlook” magazine, which claimed that Israel had “assassinated more people than any other country in the Western world — some 2,300 ‘targeted killing operations,’ most of them against Palestinians, but also aimed at Egyptians, Syrians, Iranians and others.

In his book he quotes a scene on March 14, 1988, when the then Israeli Finance Minister Moshe Nissim, son of the chief Rabbi of Israel persuaded the cabinet to kill PLO leader Khalil al-Wazir (Abu Jihad), who was Yasser Arafat’s closest ally, quoting a Talmudic precept: “If a man comes to kill you, rise early and kill him first.”

Bergman said that Abu Jihad’s killing had the opposite effect: It intensified the First Intifada, which lasted till 1993, killing 277 Israelis and 1962 Palestinians. It also proved Foreign Minister Shimon Peres’s earlier warning that Abu Jihad was a moderate who could have reined in Arafat.

The second wrong decision, according to Bergman, was the assassination of moderate Lebanese Shia leader Abbas al-Mussavi in Southern Lebanon. On 16 February 1992, Israel proudly described it as the first drone-guided “Hellfire” missile assassination in the world. It was to check the growing Iranian influence on Hezbollah. This also backfired as Mussavi’s successor, Sayyid Hassan Nasrallah, “was blacker than black”, more radical than Mussavi.

Now that Nasrallah has been assassinated on 27 September 2024, does Netanyahu feel that Israel would be safer? *The Times of Israel* (29 September 2024) said, quoting Channel 12, that the US was hoping for a pause in Israeli action through the efforts of Israel’s Strategic Affairs Minister Ron Dermer. “Once the hit on Nasrallah took place, the US was left with a feeling of having been misled”.

Palestinian Grievances

In brief, Palestinians' grievances are against forcible Jewish occupation of their lands, denying water rights and the "Permit Regime" for their movements. They also want the return of nearly 7,00,000 of their compatriots who were expelled by the Jewish militia during the 1948 "Nakba," which the UN keeps on demanding.

In addition, they want Israel to remove the West Bank Wall, which Israel calls the "Security Wall". Human rights organisations like B'Tselem (Israeli Information Centre for Human Rights in the Occupied Territories) call it as "Apartheid wall"- to put as much Palestinian land and as many Israeli settlements as possible on the western, or Israeli side, while placing as many Palestinians as possible on the eastern side, effectively annexing large areas of Palestinian land.

Palestinian demands are legal under the UN General Assembly (UNGA)'s resolution No. 181(ii) on 29 November 1947, defining the future government of Palestine, partitioning Palestine into two states, one Jewish and one Arab, with Jerusalem under UN rule. True, it was the Arab coalition which used force originally to prevent partition by invading Palestine. However, Jewish militias launched attacks on Palestinian villages, forcing thousands to flee. Although Israel won the 1948 war, the UN has been urging Israel to allow these Palestinian refugees to return.

How Israel flouts all UN resolutions on Palestine?

On the other hand, Israel has been attempting to push the remaining Palestinians into the neighbouring Arab countries. As a result, 5.6 million refugees, registered by the UN refugee organisation (UNRWA), are crammed in about 68 refugee camps. Israel bombed some of these during the present Hamas-Lebanon wars.

Every May 15, Palestinians all over the world observe "Nakba Day" as the sad anniversary of their displacement from their homeland. "Nakba" means catastrophe in Arabic. That was the process of ethnic cleansing of Palestinian Arabs from their homeland, whereby the majority of the present 14.8 million Palestinians live outside of what was once their Palestine.

On 26 September 2024, Palestinian President Mahmoud Abbas urged the UNGA to stop the Gaza war as "Israel had almost destroyed Gaza, and it was no longer fit for life". On October 3, the Emir of Qatar, Emir Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al-Thani, called the crisis a "collective genocide".

On 21 May 2025, the UN Committee on the Exercise of the Inalienable Rights of the Palestinian People (CEIRPP) conducted a seminar on the "Ongoing Palestinian Nakba".

The Itzhak Rabin Formula, which could have been a Solution

Midway in his acclaimed biography of Itzhak Rabin, former Israeli prime minister ("Rabin of Israel"), American journalist Robert Slater gives us details of the assassinated leader's views on dealing with Palestinians. This has relevance even today when we are discussing Israel's wars in Gaza and Lebanon.

Rabin, one of the greatest Israeli military heroes of the 1967 Six-Day War, who defeated the combined armies of Egypt, Jordan and Syria to wrest areas for "Eretz Yisrael", has an equal role in Israel's nation-building as the legendary David Ben-Gurion and Moshe Dayan. As Chief of Staff, he captured the Gaza Strip and the Sinai Desert from Egypt, the Golan Heights from Syria, and the West Bank and East Jerusalem from Jordan.

Yet he was prepared to negotiate with Palestinians even during the First Intifada. As Defence Minister, he told his Labour Party on 21 February 1988 that "you can't rule by force over one and a half million Palestinians".

However, extremists in his country did not take that kindly. They wanted the entire land to themselves. As The Guardian (UK) recalled on 31 October 2020: "the road to Yitzhak Rabin's assassination began in Oslo, sealed in September 1993 by a handshake on the White House lawn between Rabin and the Palestinian leader, Yasser Arafat".

The Oslo Accords were transitional agreements signed by Israel and the Palestinian Liberation Organisation (PLO) to establish a partnership for negotiating border disputes, creating Palestinian self-governance through the establishment of the Palestinian Authority, with the hope of resolving the conflict through a two-state solution.

The Guardian also said that the Opposition, led by Benjamin Netanyahu, spoke at two demonstrations where one of the slogans was “Death to Rabin”. “Israel’s head of internal security asked Netanyahu to dial down the rhetoric, warning that the prime minister’s life was in danger. Netanyahu declined”. Rabin was assassinated on 4 November 1995.

American Role in Restraining Israel

The only power that can restrain Israel is the United States. It is, however, true that American Presidents since Harry Truman have started using this issue for domestic political agenda, as the maximum number of Jews in the world reside in that country. The same trend was seen even during President Joe Biden’s era. It remains to be seen how far President Donald Trump would be able to restrain Prime Minister Netanyahu from causing further deaths of civilians in Gaza for rescuing hostages.

Many US presidents had also dealt with Israeli leaders sternly. In 1982, President Ronald Reagan firmly warned the then-Prime Minister Menachem Begin to desist from using cluster bombs on the civilian population in Beirut. He also stopped supplying cluster bombs to Israel. In 1989, Secretary of State James Baker, with full support from President H.W. Bush, gave “an unusually stern warning” to Israel to renounce its claims to territory seized in wars with neighbouring Arab nations.

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About the Authors:

Vappala Balachandran has served in the Cabinet Secretariat of India and is considered an authority on international security environment and espionage.

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