

THE
NEWS ANALYTICS
HERALD

February 2026 | Vol 1 | Issue 8 ₹ 450/-



**A
WORLD IN
RECALIBRATION**

IN FOCUS

ASIA'S STRATEGIC TRIANGLE
TAKES SHAPE

BIG STORY

WASHINGTON'S NEW RULES
OF ALLIANCE

HI-TECH

THE RISE OF AUTONOMOUS
AI WORKERS

THE POWER PANEL



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|| FOREWORD



A MAD MAD WORLD

Every possible award should be given to the producers of *It's a Mad, Mad, Mad, Mad World*, a 1963 epic about the madcap search for a suitcase full of stolen cash by a colourful group of strangers.

In 2026, our world has truly gone mad, driven by a style of leadership marked by extreme personalisation of power, where the President of the richest nation on earth appears to view himself as the central arbiter of global outcomes. In practice, his influence is immense—and few are willing to challenge it openly. He does what he wants.

President Donald Trump, often described by critics as a geopolitical disruptor, has upended established global norms. He has used America's formidable military power to detain a sitting Latin American leader and to attack a Middle Eastern nation that refuses to align fully with his administration's expectations. At the same time, he steers clear of India, Russia, and China. He imposes huge tariffs on Bharat, and when these measures fail to provoke the desired response, he becomes even more strident. Senior figures within his administration make contentious claims about India; we respond by politely setting the record straight.

As I write this piece, I am on standby to comment on TV channels on the possibility of renewed military action involving Iran. *The Ugly American* is a 1958 novel that depicts American insensitivity to local language, culture, and customs, and a refusal to integrate in the lands they occupy. I am a Cold Warrior, unused to a Hot Peace.

Europe offers muted protests over the detention of the Venezuelan President. Few appear willing to confront this highly personalised exercise of power directly. We invent clever phrases like “the world is at war”, but it is not—yet—a world war. The distinction between reality and fantasy begins to blur.

Welcome to 2026. Read this issue of *The News Analytics Herald* carefully, with comments by some of the finest minds in the Universe. If you can make sense of what is happening, please educate me.

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Deepak Vohra'.

Ambassador Deepak Vohra IFS (R),
Former Ambassador to Armenia,
Sudan and Poland. He was also a special
Advisor to the Government of South Sudan.

|| ABOUT US

The News Analytics Herald is a premier national news magazine dedicated to analysing global developments that shape India's geostrategic landscape. From shifting currents in international relations and geoeconomics to emerging security challenges and transformative military technologies, we provide sharp, contextual insights into the issues that matter most. Guided by a commitment to factual depth and clarity, our analyses offer fresh perspectives on complex debates authored by an esteemed panel of global scholars, diplomats, armed forces veterans, international correspondents, and leading academics. Covering critical domains of diplomacy, defence, and military technology, the magazine brings a distinctly global and scholarly perspective to complex events. Each article is crafted to engage decision-makers, industry leaders, and globally aware readers alike.


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Title – The News Analytics Herald.
(Certified by Press Registrar General of India. PRGI Regn No: UPENG/25/A1463)

Publication Frequency – Monthly.

Year of Commencement – 2025.

Subjects – Multidisciplinary Subjects. Focus on Diplomacy, Defence & Military Technology.

Language – English.

Format – Print.

EDITOR'S NOTE



A WORLD IN RECALIBRATION

The power matrix is shifting, alliances are being reassessed, and long-held assumptions about security, stability and governance are under quiet but relentless pressure. The global order is not collapsing; it is recalibrating! This edition of The News Analytics Herald is anchored in that reality. Our cover theme reflects a moment where states, institutions, and societies are adjusting to new constraints rather than grand visions.

Across regions, this recalibration is evident

in different forms. In Asia, evolving alignments among Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines signal a search for strategic balance amid intensifying great-power rivalry. South Asia faces its own tests, as Bangladesh's charged electoral environment raises questions about internal legitimacy and regional spillovers. In West Asia, the proposed Gaza Stabilisation Force and renewed debates over Hezbollah's disarmament underscore Washington's attempt to manage conflict without open-ended intervention. Meanwhile, the Red Sea crisis reminds us how non-state actors can disrupt global trade and force maritime powers, including India, to rethink security beyond their immediate neighbourhoods.

At the strategic level, the impending expiration of the New START treaty marks a troubling return of nuclear uncertainty, while Africa's push for "strategic consolidation" highlights the challenges of building collective agency in a fragmented international system. Overlaying all of this is a quieter but transformative shift: the rise of agentic artificial intelligence, where autonomy, not assistance, becomes the defining feature, reshaping work, governance, and accountability.

Taken together, these developments point to a world adjusting under strain rather than moving toward clarity. Recalibration is rarely elegant; it is contested, uneven, and often uncomfortable. This edition seeks not to offer easy answers, but to map the fault lines, trade-offs, and emerging patterns shaping global affairs. Understanding this moment is the first step toward navigating what comes next.

Jai Hind!

Sandhya Srivastava
Editor-in-Chief &
Publisher

THE
NEWS ANALYTICS
HERALD

PRGI Regn No: UPENG/25/A1463
ISSN 3107-782X

Vol I* Issue 8* February 2026

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Edited & Published By

Sandhya Srivastava on behalf of
Geostrat Media Ventures

Published At

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Mahanagar, Izzat Nagar, Bareilly
Uttar Pradesh – 243122
+91-9557597977

Printed At

New Delhi

Printed By

Viba Press Pvt Ltd
C-66/3, Okhla Industrial Area, Ph-2
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+91- 98100 49515

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ASIA'S STRATEGIC TRIANGLE TAKES SHAPE

IN FOCUS

In late 2025, Asia's strategic balance began quietly but decisively shifting. Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines, which once operated on parallel tracks, are increasingly converging in response to China's assertiveness and uncertainties in U.S. policy. This emerging alignment signals a new power geometry shaping security, diplomacy, and economic strategy across the Indo-Pacific.



AMBASSADOR ANIL WADHWA, IFS (R)
FOR NEWS ANALYTICS

In the waning weeks of 2025, a subtle but unmistakable shift in Asia's strategic architecture had crystallised. Across the vast expanse of the Western Pacific—from the calm waters off Tokyo Bay to the contested reefs of the South China Sea—three capitals once seen as disparate actors are finding a shared geopolitical rhythm. Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines—countries with very different histories and domestic pressures—are increasingly synchronised in their responses to China's growing assertiveness and the broader U.S.–China rivalry. This convergence, marked by new defence ties, diplomatic outreach, and shared economic interests, signals a new power geometry in Asia that could redefine regional dynamics well into the next decade.



STRATEGIC CONVERGENCE

For years, the security landscape of East and Southeast Asia was anchored on the formidable U.S.–Japan alliance and the U.S.–Philippines Mutual Defence Treaty. But recent events have accelerated a more layered network of relationships that blends bilateral pacts with pragmatic cooperation. Tokyo and Manila, once linked largely by economic ties and post-war reconciliation, have now woven defence into the core of their partnership. In 2025, Japan and the Philippines concluded a historic military pact, the Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA), which entered into force on 11 September 2025. This pact allows forces from both countries to operate on each other's territory—a profound departure from their traditionally restrained defence postures. The RAA reflects how dwindling faith in the United States and deepening trust

amongst Asian countries have translated into operational cooperation in the face of common strategic concerns over China's rise and its growing and demonstrated maritime dominance.

The Japan–Philippines Reciprocal Access Agreement marks a decisive break from restraint, signalling that middle powers are translating shared anxieties into operational military cooperation.

ALLIANCE REWIRING

Beyond treaties, the three nations have engaged in tangible military cooperation. Through a series of Multilateral Maritime

Cooperative Activities (MMCA) in 2025, the Philippines, Japan, and the United States conducted joint exercises within the Philippines' Exclusive Economic Zone. Anti-submarine exercises, maritime domain awareness, and interoperability appear to be directed at countering the threat perceived from China's expanding naval and military capabilities. Japan has also been exporting critical military technology to the Philippines. In late 2025, Japan agreed to provide the Philippines with a Japanese-made command and control system designed to improve radar integration and situational awareness. This transfer reflects a shift from Japan's traditional emphasis on capacity-building to more assertive moves towards strengthening regional networks.



Unlike Japan and the Philippines, Vietnam has long pursued a careful balancing act with China. Vietnam shares a long land border with Beijing and has historically prioritised peaceful coexistence even as it contests overlapping maritime claims in the South China Sea. But Vietnam's strategy is evolving. While not an American treaty ally, Vietnam has steadily expanded pragmatic security ties with both the United States and Japan, strengthening its capabilities while ensuring that such actions do not provoke a Chinese reaction.

The United States, recognising Vietnam's geopolitical importance, elevated ties by designating Vietnam as a "comprehensive strategic partner" in 2023. Defence cooperation has been discussed, but arms sales have remained constrained and limited. Although Vietnam and the Philippines have historically navigated overlapping claims in the South China Sea, they have nonetheless sought practical cooperation on maritime security and incident prevention, in which China is also a participant.

CHINA FACTOR

China's posture in the South China Sea remains the central pivot around which this new alignment rotates. From orchestrated naval drills to enhanced coast guard operations, China has intensified its presence in contested waters. China's recent live-fire exercises and night manoeuvres in the South China Sea are part of a strategic policy decision to strengthen its maritime claims while demonstrating its capabilities. These actions occur against the backdrop of China's expansive claims through the "nine-dash line", a

sweeping assertion of maritime rights that overlaps with the exclusive economic zones of several ASEAN claimants. In 2016, an arbitral tribunal rejected these Chinese claims, but China continues to assert rights over the waters encompassed by the nine-dash line on the basis of historical claims that have no place in modern international law. In 2025, a collision between a PLA Navy warship and a Philippine vessel occurred near Scarborough Shoal, raising tensions. The incident underscored the risks inherent in a crowded security environment where routine patrols can turn volatile. China has criticised Japan's expanding role in Southeast Asian security, framing it as meddling in waters where Japan has no territorial claims.

China's actions in the South China Sea are no longer isolated provocations but catalysts accelerating regional alignment against unilateral dominance.

No discussion of Asia's shifting power geometry is complete without accounting for the broader U.S.–China rivalry. In 2025, Washington actively reassured partners in the region of its commitment to a "free and open Indo-Pacific", even as policy nuances were discernible under the Trump administration. The most glaring change has been the calibrated U.S. approach to South China Sea incidents. U.S. initiatives, such as the new joint task force with the



Philippines to deter coercion in disputed waters, strengthen deterrence and reassure smaller states of continued U.S. engagement. However, much of the U.S. approach is shaped by domestic political dynamics and a broader strategic calculus that weighs the risk of direct confrontation with China. Consequently, Japan and the Philippines have leveraged U.S. security guarantees while also hedging. The Philippines, for instance, has acknowledged that it might need to defend itself unilaterally in the initial stages of a crisis. This reflects concerns about the speed and reliability of allied reinforcements from partners like the United States in a high-intensity, fast-moving conflict.

ASEAN DILEMMA

Meanwhile, Japan's own security identity has undergone a profound transformation. In late December 2025, Tokyo approved a record-high defence budget exceeding ¥9 trillion



(approximately \$58 billion). It has spoken of accelerating modernisation and expanding strike and coastal defence capabilities. This reflects growing concern vis-à-vis China's aggressive actions in the region. ASEAN finds itself at a crossroads in this new geometry. On paper, ASEAN champions neutrality and dialogue. Yet the bloc's inability to agree on a firm stance towards China's maritime claims highlights its internal divisions.

The Philippines assumes the ASEAN chairmanship in 2026. This could offer an incentive for the Philippines to push for a legally binding Code of Conduct with China that would stabilise the region, but ASEAN's capacity to harness this moment effectively and in its favour remains doubtful. Strategic convergence is not limited to security. Japan and the Philippines have advanced economic cooperation through initiatives such as the Luzon Economic Corridor, aimed at boosting connectivity and resilience. These projects signal that the emerging power geometry blends military readiness with concerted economic planning. Hanoi, too, is anchoring part of its strategy in economic diversification and defence modernisation.

FLEXIBLE ALIGNMENTS

Vietnam's comprehensive strategic partnerships span not only Western capitals but also regional neighbours. Vietnam appears to have mastered the art of nuanced balancing, ensuring it is not overly reliant on any single country. Indeed, as power competition intensifies, countries such as Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines are carving out strategic space that emphasises flexible alignment and practical cooperation over rigid blocs.

This convergence is not a formal alliance but a flexible strategic mosaic, redefining Asian security beyond rigid blocs and singular power centres.

In the near term, further deepening of cooperation among Tokyo, Hanoi, and Manila is likely. This may occur through defence dialogues, interoperability exercises, and joint maritime surveillance efforts. Japan is expected to continue enhancing its strategic footprint in Southeast Asia. It will neither provoke China nor challenge China's core interests, but it has already emerged as a hedge against unilateral dominance. For Vietnam, the balance will remain delicate. It

will continue to expand external partnerships to mitigate risk while avoiding overt alignment that China could construe as containment. This calibrated approach reflects Vietnam's longstanding emphasis on strategic autonomy, or bamboo diplomacy, while safeguarding its sovereign interests. The Philippines, driven by growing public and political sensitivity to Chinese incursions, is likely to sustain its defence partnerships and press ASEAN for concrete mechanisms to regulate conduct in disputed waters. Philippine naval capabilities and defence doctrine will evolve alongside these relationships.



For India, the convergence of Tokyo, Hanoi, and Manila reinforces the strategic logic of the Indo-Pacific as a connected maritime theatre. It complements India's partnerships with Japan, Vietnam, and ASEAN, strengthens norms against coercion in the South China Sea, and supports India's pursuit of strategic autonomy and regional stability.

Finally, the U.S.–China rivalry will shape, but not wholly define, this convergence. The U.S. presence provides reassurance, but in light of recent U.S. actions, regional states are crafting their own agency, forming overlapping networks that seek not merely to balance China but to uphold a rules-based order in Asia. In this new power geometry, Tokyo, Hanoi, and Manila are not formal allies in the traditional sense. Rather, they represent a mosaic of strategic, diplomatic, and economic convergences that together signal a rebalancing of influence in Asia. As China watches closely, and as countries in Southeast Asia chart their own trajectories, the contours of the 21st-century regional order are being drawn—not by a single power, but by a constellation responding to changing tides.

*(Ambassador Anil Wadhwa, IFS (R) is a former Secretary (East) in the Indian Ministry of External Affairs and has served as Ambassador to Italy, Thailand, Oman and Poland. The views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of **The News Analytics Herald**.)*

QUICK INSIGHTS

- Japan, Vietnam, and the Philippines are aligning in response to China's growing maritime assertiveness.
- Defence cooperation is deepening through new treaties, joint exercises, and technology transfers.
- China's South China Sea actions are accelerating regional strategic convergence.
- ASEAN's internal divisions limit its ability to shape collective regional security responses.
- The Indo-Pacific balance is shifting towards flexible alignments rather than formal alliances.

WASHINGTON'S NEW RULES OF ALLIANCE

BIG STORY



The United States' 2025 National Security Strategy signals a decisive recalibration of alliance politics in the Indo-Pacific. Rather than retreat, Washington is redefining leadership, shifting from unconditional assurances to contribution-based partnerships. This evolution compels regional states to rethink alliance value, moving from reassurance-seeking towards strategic leverage, differentiated roles, and shared responsibility in managing China-centric competition.



**DR. LAUREN DAGAN AMOS, TEL-AVIV, ISRAEL
SENIOR FELLOW AT THE BEGIN-SADAT CENTER
FOR STRATEGIC STUDIES
FOR NEWS ANALYTICS**

The United States National Security Strategy for 2025 marks a profound shift in how Washington perceives its role in the international system, particularly in the Indo-Pacific region. Contrary to interpretations that portray the document as a sign of American withdrawal or an inward turn, the new strategy reflects a more nuanced transformation: a move from automatic security assurances to alliance management grounded in contribution, strategic utility, and resilience.

The era in which regional states could assume that mere “ally” status guaranteed deep, stable, and unconditional American commitment is drawing to a close. In its place emerges a model of business-oriented strategic realism. The United States is not relinquishing regional leadership; instead, it is redefining its terms, placing less emphasis on ideology and reassurance and greater emphasis on performance and deliverables.

It is perceived that NSS 2025 does not reduce U.S. involvement in the Indo-Pacific but fundamentally reframes it. The key change is not the extent of American commitment, but to whom, under what conditions, and based on which strategic returns. This shift requires regional actors to rethink their approach: not how to rely on the United States, but how to leverage it.

WHAT'S NEW IN NSS 2025

Three structural changes stand out in the new strategy.

First, there is a shift from alliances anchored in shared values to alliances assessed through measurable contribution. While the language of democracy, human rights, and a “rules-based international order” has not disappeared, it no longer functions as a primary strategic filter. It has been supplanted by a vocabulary of resilience, stability, capability, and tangible benefit.

Second, partners are increasingly viewed as force multipliers rather than protected dependents. States are no longer evaluated primarily on political alignment or rhetorical loyalty, but on their capacity to extend U.S. influence without necessitating expanded American forward presence.

Third, the strategy reflects a clear preference for small,

flexible, and purpose-driven arrangements (minilateralism) over large, institutionalised alliance frameworks. The United States seeks to manage risk rather than absorb it alone.

Under NSS 2025, alliances are no longer promises of protection, but performance-based arrangements where contribution, resilience, and strategic utility determine American commitment.

ALLIANCE AS A STRATEGIC RESOURCE

One of the most significant implications of NSS 2025 is the shift in the starting assumptions governing regional relationships with the United States. For decades, the dominant logic revolved around securing American commitment through political alignment, value-based discourse, and avoidance of friction with Washington. The new strategy reverses this logic. An alliance with the United States is no longer a built-in insurance policy, but a strategic bargaining asset. American commitment is not granted ex ante; it is derived from what the partnership delivers: tangible contributions, operational capabilities, and the creation of domains in which the United States has a clear interest in sustained involvement.



Such leverage is generated through reverse dependency areas where it is difficult, costly, or risky for the United States to operate independently. These include defence production, critical geographic access, infrastructure, intelligence, and regional logistics. What anchors American engagement is not moral obligation, but strategic interest.

A SMART DIVISION OF ROLES

The American discourse on burden-sharing should not be interpreted as a purely quantitative demand for increased defence spending or expanded armament. Rather, it reflects a qualitative expectation for a more deliberate and differentiated division of labour among regional partners. The key metric is not how much a country spends, but how it integrates into the regional security architecture and whether its contribution is distinctive, scalable, and difficult to substitute.

Japan: Significant structural constraints accompany Japan's growing centrality within the U.S.-led security architecture in the Indo-Pacific. While recent reforms and increased defence spending have expanded Japan's operational latitude, constitutional limitations continue to shape both its force posture and escalation calculus. Reinterpretations of Article 9 have enhanced flexibility, yet domestic legal ambiguity and coalition politics still impose caution on the scope, visibility, and sustainability of Japanese military engagement.



Public opinion further conditions Japan's strategic role. Despite heightened threat perceptions vis-à-vis China, Japanese society remains sensitive to entanglement risks and escalation dynamics, particularly in scenarios linked to Taiwan. As a result, Japan's comparative advantage lies less in frontline combat functions and more in logistics, sustainment, rear-area defence, and system survivability. These roles allow Tokyo to contribute decisively to regional deterrence while maintaining escalation control and domestic legitimacy, an approach closely aligned with U.S. expectations under NSS 2025.

South Korea: South Korea's potential evolution from a deterrence-centric ally into a regional defence-industrial hub carries substantial strategic value for the United States. Seoul's advanced manufacturing base, export-oriented defence industry, and technological sophistication position

it as a critical node for the production, maintenance, and upgrading of weapons systems across the Indo-Pacific.

At the same time, this role is constrained by South Korea's deep economic exposure to China. As one of Seoul's largest trading partners, Beijing represents both a financial anchor and a source of potential coercive leverage. South Korean policymakers, therefore, face a persistent tension between industrial alignment with U.S. strategic objectives and vulnerability to Chinese economic retaliation. This dual exposure complicates Seoul's leverage strategy: while deeper integration with U.S. defence supply chains enhances strategic relevance, it also raises the political and economic costs of overt alignment during periods of crisis. Managing this balance will be central to South Korea's ability to capitalise on the contribution-based alliance logic embedded in NSS 2025.

India: India's value to the United States derives from its geographic position, naval reach, and capacity to constrain China's strategic mobility in the Indian Ocean. Yet New Delhi's contribution is shaped by a persistent tension between external expectations and its long-standing commitment to strategic autonomy.

While NSS 2025 implicitly elevates India as a key regional balancer, Indian policymakers remain wary of being perceived domestically or internationally as a U.S. proxy. This reluctance circumscribes India's willingness to formalise alliance commitments or align explicitly with U.S.-led containment strategies. Instead, India seeks to leverage its role selectively: providing maritime presence, intelligence cooperation, and denial capabilities without binding security guarantees. The challenge for both sides lies in translating India's autonomous posture into reliable strategic leverage without undermining the autonomy that underpins its regional credibility and diplomatic flexibility.

The Philippines: The Philippines occupies a strategically critical position along the first island chain, making it a valuable contributor to U.S. deterrence strategy through denial rather than offensive power. Investments in coastal defence systems, missile capabilities, and maritime domain awareness align closely with NSS 2025's emphasis on cost-effective, partner-led security provision.

However, the credibility of this role is contingent on domestic political stability. Sharp shifts in leadership orientation, fluctuating public support for U.S. military presence, and institutional capacity constraints raise questions regarding long-term reliability. Moreover, denial strategies require sustained investment, interoperability, and political commitment—elements that remain vulnerable to domestic reversal. For Washington, the Philippines thus exemplifies

The Indo-Pacific's security architecture is evolving from ideological alignment to functional specialisation, with allies valued for what they enable, not what they proclaim.

both the promise and fragility of contribution-based alliances: offering high strategic payoff, yet dependent on internal continuity and governance resilience.

In this broader context, the Indo-Pacific is no longer merely a “key region”, but the central arena of contemporary geo-economic and security competition with China—one in which alliance value is increasingly measured by differentiated contribution rather than formal alignment.



One of the more provocative propositions advanced here is the need to develop small regional frameworks without direct U.S. participation—not as a substitute for American involvement, but as a complement to it.

Such arrangements reduce political dependence on Washington, signal maturity and responsibility, and limit China’s ability to exploit regional fragmentation. Potential examples include maritime cooperation among Japan, Australia, and the Philippines; security coordination between India, Indonesia, and Vietnam; and even industrial collaboration between Japan and South Korea, despite enduring historical sensitivities.

NSS 2025 signals clearly that the old diplomatic vocabulary has lost much of its traction. States that continue to frame their engagement primarily in terms of a “rules-based order” or “shared values” risk speaking past the core of contemporary American decision-making. The emerging language is one of contribution, stability, and resilience. This shift should not be mistaken for cynicism; it reflects strategic adaptation. Those states capable of translating their interests into terms Washington recognises as strategically relevant will retain influence and attention.

POLICY IMPLICATIONS

For policymakers across the Indo-Pacific, NSS 2025 demands a recalibration of alliance strategy from reassurance-seeking to leverage-building. Three implications stand out.

First, regional partners should move away from generic demonstrations of alignment and instead define clearly differentiated contributions that create tangible strategic value for the United States. Political rhetoric and symbolic commitments are no longer sufficient; Washington increasingly rewards partners that offer capabilities it cannot easily substitute or replicate.

Strategic leverage, not loyalty, now defines alliance credibility in an Indo-Pacific shaped by selective engagement and interest-driven American leadership.

Second, states should proactively shape their burden-sharing role rather than absorb externally imposed expectations. This requires identifying niche advantages—logistical, industrial, geographic, or operational—and institutionalising them within regional security architectures. Countries that fail to do so risk strategic overstretch or misalignment with their own domestic constraints.

Third, regional actors should invest in U.S.-enabled but not U.S.-dependent minilateral frameworks. Such arrangements reduce the risk of escalation, signal strategic maturity, and align with Washington’s interest in risk diffusion without abandonment. Significantly, autonomous regional cooperation strengthens, not weakens, long-term U.S. engagement by lowering the political and operational costs of American involvement.

In this environment, alliance credibility will be measured less by declarations of loyalty and more by sustained, differentiated contribution. Policymakers who internalise this shift will be better positioned to navigate a more selective, interest-driven American security posture.

*(Dr. Lauren Dagan Amos is a researcher specialising in India’s foreign and security policy, with a regional focus on the Indo-Pacific. She is a Senior Fellow at the Begin-Sadat Center for Strategic Studies (BESA) and a lecturer at Bar-Ilan University, Tel Aviv, Israel. The views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of **The News Analytics Herald**.)*

QUICK INSIGHTS

- *NSS 2025 reframes U.S. alliances around contribution, performance, and strategic returns.*
- *Indo-Pacific partners must shift from assurance-seeking to leverage-building strategies.*
- *Differentiated national roles now anchor alliance value more than ideological alignment.*
- *Minilateral frameworks complement, rather than replace, U.S. regional engagement.*
- *Alliance credibility increasingly depends on sustained, non-substitutable contributions.*

GLOBAL INFLUENCER

MARK RUTTE: NATO SECRETARY GENERAL

NEWS ANALYTICS | SPECIAL COVERAGE

At a moment when the international security order is undergoing profound recalibration, Mark Rutte stands at the centre of one of the world's most consequential alliance systems. His transition from long-serving Prime Minister of the Netherlands to Secretary General of NATO coincides with a period marked by nuclear uncertainty, alliance fatigue, shifting U.S. security doctrines, and the expanding geography of strategic competition—from Eastern Europe to the Indo-Pacific.

Rutte inherits NATO at a time when the certainties that underpinned Euro-Atlantic security for decades are eroding. The war in Ukraine has reintroduced high-intensity conflict to Europe, the erosion of arms-control frameworks such as New START



has revived nuclear anxieties, and the United States is increasingly signalling that alliances must be sustained by contribution rather than assumption. Against this backdrop, Rutte's influence lies not in grand ideological declarations, but in his ability to preserve cohesion, discipline expectations, and manage divergence within a 30-plus member alliance.

FROM CONSENSUS POLITICS TO ALLIANCE MANAGEMENT

Rutte's political career was defined by longevity, pragmatism, and coalition-building. As the Netherlands' longest-serving prime minister, he developed a reputation for navigating ideological differences without paralysing governance. This experience is particularly relevant to NATO's current condition. The alliance today is not divided over purpose—deterrence against revisionist powers remains broadly accepted—but over burden-sharing, escalation thresholds, and the scope of NATO's future role.

Rutte approaches NATO leadership with a managerial rather than missionary mindset. His style reflects a belief that alliances endure not through rhetoric, but through functional credibility: defence spending commitments honoured, capabilities delivered, and political promises aligned with military realities. This ethos resonates strongly with the evolving American approach to alliances, which increasingly values performance, resilience, and risk-sharing over declaratory solidarity.

OF THE MONTH

NATO AFTER NEW START

One of the defining strategic challenges of Rutte's tenure is the return of nuclear uncertainty. The erosion of bilateral arms-control regimes, particularly the collapse of New START, has removed stabilising guardrails that shaped strategic behaviour for decades. For NATO, this raises uncomfortable questions: deterrence credibility, escalation control, and the balance between reassurance and restraint.

Rutte's influence here lies in preserving NATO's nuclear consensus without accelerating arms races or deepening internal fractures. He must manage divergent threat perceptions among allies—those bordering Russia prioritising hard deterrence, while others remain cautious about nuclear signalling. His emphasis on discipline, consultation, and alliance unity seeks to prevent nuclear policy from becoming a source of internal instability.

UKRAINE, ENDURANCE, AND THE LIMITS OF UNITY

Ukraine remains the central test of NATO's credibility and cohesion. Rutte's leadership reflects a careful balance between sustaining long-term support and managing alliance exhaustion. While NATO continues to reinforce Ukraine militarily and politically, Rutte has consistently emphasised the need to align commitments with sustainable capacity.

This approach marks a shift from early-war urgency to strategic endurance. Under Rutte, NATO is less focused on dramatic announcements and more on institutionalising support—through training, defence-industrial coordination, and long-term funding mechanisms. The objective is not symbolic unity, but durable involvement.

NATO IN A WORLD BEYOND EUROPE

Perhaps the most consequential aspect of Rutte's influence is how he manages NATO's role in an increasingly globalised security environment. While NATO remains geographically Euro-Atlantic, its strategic interests are no longer confined to Europe. China's rise, instability in the Middle East, and disruptions in maritime chokepoints such as the Red Sea have expanded the alliance's indirect exposure.

Under Rutte, NATO's engagement with the Indo-Pacific is framed as awareness-building and resilience-sharing rather than alliance replication. This approach aligns with the emerging U.S. preference for minilateralism and partner-led security architectures, avoiding the perception of NATO as a global intervention force.

IMPLICATIONS FOR INDIA AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH

For India and other Global South actors, Rutte's NATO represents neither a Cold War relic nor an expansionist bloc, but a disciplined security institution adapting to limits. His leadership signals that Western alliances are becoming more selective, performance-driven, and cautious about overreach.

This has implications for India's engagement with NATO states. Rather than ideological alignment, cooperation increasingly revolves around functional areas—maritime security, defence technology, cyber resilience, and crisis management. Rutte's pragmatic approach creates space for issue-based cooperation without formal alignment, aligning well with India's strategic autonomy.

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RED SEA ON FIRE: INDIA'S STRATEGIC TEST

INSIGHT

The Red Sea crisis has evolved from a regional security concern into a global maritime disruption with direct consequences for India. Escalating Houthi attacks, great-power naval deployments, and rerouted trade flows are reshaping this critical sea lane. For India, the turmoil tests maritime resilience, energy security, and naval posture across an increasingly contested Indian Ocean region.



**LT CDR NITIKA RAI (R),
FORMER INDIAN NAVY OFFICER | FOR NEWS ANALYTICS**

The Red Sea connects the Indian Ocean South to the Mediterranean Sea North through the Suez Canal, which is one of the world's most important shipping routes. Nearly 12–14% of global trade and approximately 30% of container shipping pass through it. The Red Sea now faces serious disruptions to navigation and trade due to escalating hostilities, primarily driven by Yemen's Houthi rebels. These attacks pose significant challenges not only for global commerce but also for countries like India, whose economic and strategic interests hinge on the stability of these sea lanes.

the Bab-el-Mandeb Strait and the southern Red Sea using drones, anti-ship missiles, and fast attack craft. These actions are publicly justified as retaliation against Israel and its

What began as a regional proxy conflict has transformed the Red Sea into a frontline where non-state actors now shape global trade and maritime security.



allies in the wake of the Gaza conflict, but their operational impact extends far beyond Israel-linked shipping.

The attacks represent a classic case of regional conflict spillover, where land-based hostilities manifest in the maritime domain. Yemen's prolonged civil war, unresolved political fragmentation, and external interference have turned the Red Sea littoral into fertile ground for asymmetric warfare at sea.

PROXY WARFARE

The crisis cannot be divorced from the wider geopolitical contest in West Asia. The Houthis are widely perceived as part of Iran's broader "axis of resistance", alongside Hezbollah and allied militias

At the heart of the current crisis lies the intensification of maritime attacks by Yemen's Houthi movement. Since late 2023, the Houthis have targeted commercial vessels transiting

in Iraq and Syria. Through relatively low-cost maritime attacks, Iran and its proxies can impose disproportionate economic and strategic costs on global trade while avoiding

direct confrontation with major powers.

For regional states such as Saudi Arabia, the UAE, and Egypt, the instability threatens economic interests, coastal security, and long-term development plans. Egypt, in particular, faces declining Suez Canal revenues as shipping traffic diverts away from the Red Sea.

In response, the United States and its allies launched



multinational naval initiatives, most notably Operation Prosperity Guardian, aimed at safeguarding freedom of navigation. European navies, regional partners, and independent deployers have increased patrols, escort missions, and air defence coverage in the Red Sea.

However, these responses have not fully restored confidence among commercial shipping companies, many of which continue to avoid the region due to insurance costs and risk assessments.

SHIPPING AND INSURANCE INDUSTRY

An often overlooked but critical actor is the global shipping and insurance industry. Decisions by major shipping lines to reroute vessels around the Cape of Good Hope have reshaped trade flows, increased costs, and amplified the crisis's economic impact—effects felt acutely by trading nations like India.

Militarisation of a Commercial Sea Lane: The Red Sea has witnessed rapid militarisation, with warships, drones, and missile systems operating alongside commercial traffic. This convergence of civilian and military maritime activity increases the risk of miscalculation, escalation, and accidental incidents.

Rerouting and Supply Chain Disruption: Faced with persistent threats, many shipping companies have opted to bypass the Red Sea entirely. The alternative route around southern Africa adds 10–14 days to voyages, increases fuel consumption, and strains global supply chains already weakened by geopolitical shocks and post-pandemic adjustments.

Freight rates and insurance premiums have surged, creating inflationary pressures that ripple across global markets.

The militarisation of a commercial sea lane has blurred the line between civilian trade and warfare, increasing miscalculation risks and global economic vulnerability.

STRATEGIC FALLOUT FOR INDIA

India's external trade is heavily dependent on maritime routes, with a significant share of exports and imports to Europe, North Africa, and the eastern seaboard of the Americas transiting the Red Sea. Disruptions have resulted in:

- Longer transit times for Indian exports, reducing competitiveness in time-sensitive sectors such as pharmaceuticals, textiles, and perishables.
- Higher freight and insurance costs, squeezing profit margins for exporters and increasing import bills.
- Logistical uncertainty for Indian companies integrated into global value chains.

For an economy seeking to expand manufacturing and exports under initiatives like Make in India, sustained instability in a key trade corridor poses serious challenges.



India imports over 80 per cent of its crude oil requirements, much of which originates from West Asia and Africa, with a substantial volume traditionally transiting the Red Sea and the Suez Canal. While India has diversified its energy suppliers in recent years, disruptions in the Red Sea increase transportation costs for oil and LNG shipments, heighten exposure to price volatility in global energy markets, and complicate long-term energy planning and strategic reserve management.

In a worst-case scenario, prolonged instability could force India to rely more heavily on longer, costlier routes, undermining energy affordability and economic stability.

The Red Sea crisis has underscored the growing expectations placed on the Indian Navy as a net security provider in the Indian Ocean Region. While India is not a direct participant in Western-led operations in the Red Sea, it has:

- Increased naval deployments in the Arabian Sea and the Gulf of Aden.
- Conducted escort missions for Indian-flagged vessels.
- Enhanced maritime domain awareness through surveillance and intelligence sharing.

These actions reflect India's cautious but proactive approach—protecting national interests without becoming entangled in extra-regional conflicts. However, sustained instability raises questions about resource allocation, operational overstretch, and the balance between regional commitments and blue-water ambitions.



The crisis highlights the vulnerability of India's Sea Lines of Communication (SLOCs), not only in the Red Sea but across interconnected chokepoints such as the Strait of Hormuz and the Malacca Strait. It reinforces several strategic realities:

- Maritime chokepoints remain the Achilles' heel of globalisation.
- Non-state actors can exert strategic leverage disproportionate to their conventional power.
- India's economic rise is inseparable from maritime security beyond its immediate neighbourhood.

For India, the Red Sea turmoil serves as a reminder that security in the Western Indian Ocean is as critical as developments closer to home.

India's response reflects cautious assertiveness—protecting maritime interests while avoiding entanglement in extra-regional conflicts that could erode strategic autonomy.

STRENGTHENING MARITIME DIPLOMACY

India must continue engaging with regional states, extra-regional powers, and multilateral forums to promote de-escalation and cooperative maritime security. Diplomatic outreach to the Gulf, East Africa, and key stakeholders in West Asia remains essential.

Rather than ad hoc responses, India could invest in sustained forward presence, interoperability with partner navies, and capacity-building initiatives for littoral states. This would reinforce India's credibility as a stabilising force without direct military entanglement.

Reducing over-dependence on single routes is critical. Initiatives such as the International North–South Transport Corridor (INSTC), diversified sourcing, and strategic stockpiling can cushion the economic impact of maritime disruptions.

The “fire” in the Red Sea is not an isolated blaze but part of a broader pattern of geopolitical volatility reshaping the global maritime order. For India, the crisis is both a warning and an opportunity—a warning about the fragility of the maritime foundations underpinning economic growth, and an opportunity to refine its role as a responsible maritime power.

Safeguarding trade, ensuring energy security, and maintaining strategic autonomy will require India to blend naval capability with diplomacy, resilience with adaptability. As the Red Sea continues to simmer, India's response will offer valuable insights into how emerging powers navigate an increasingly contested maritime world.

(Lt Cdr Nitika Rai (R), former Indian Navy Officer and Senior Consultant, Ernst & Young. The views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The News Analytics Herald.)

QUICK INSIGHTS

- Sustained Houthi maritime attacks have disrupted a vital global trade corridor linking Asia, Europe, and Africa.
- Shipping reroutes via longer passages are driving up costs, transit times, and pressure on global supply chains.
- India's trade flows and energy imports face heightened vulnerability due to prolonged instability in the Red Sea.
- The crisis raises expectations of India's role as a stabilising maritime security provider in the Indian Ocean region.
- Enduring resilience will depend on calibrated diplomacy, enhanced naval preparedness, and diversified trade and energy routes.

A DANGEROUS GAMBLE IN GAZA

BATTLEGROUND

Amid renewed Middle East turmoil, the United States is advancing a strategy that links post-war stabilisation in Gaza with efforts to disarm armed militias, particularly Hezbollah. Seeking to reassert regional influence, Washington is backing an international stabilisation force in Gaza while pressuring Lebanon to curb Hezbollah's capabilities, an approach fraught with political, security, and diplomatic risks at home and abroad.



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After years of devastating war in the Gaza Strip, which left widespread destruction of infrastructure and hundreds of civilian casualties, a fragile ceasefire has been in place since October 2025. Despite this progress, the truce is temporary at best amid ongoing fears of renewed violence between armed factions and Israel. In this context, the UN Security Council adopted a resolution allowing the establishment of

a temporary international stabilisation force in Gaza as part of the U.S. plan. The resolution received support from 13 countries after previous, stricter initiatives failed to pass in the Security Council. This step reflects international recognition that Gaza requires direct international oversight, with the United States remaining the central mediator among the parties.

CORE FRAMEWORK

According to the international resolution, a Board of Peace will be established to oversee political and security operations in Gaza, alongside the deployment of a temporary International Stabilisation Force (ISF) under a unified command approved by all relevant parties. The

force will be tasked with supporting the fragile ceasefire, preventing renewed military escalation, coordinating humanitarian assistance and reconstruction efforts, gradually dismantling non-governmental military structures within defined legal frameworks, and supporting the training of a Palestinian police force to ensure a sustainable local security

presence after the international forces withdraw.

The plan also envisions a gradual Israeli withdrawal from the Strip, based on specific milestones tied to progress in the disarmament of armed factions. This places Washington in the position of mediator linking security and politics, carrying major responsibility in balancing the interests of



all parties, including Israel, Palestinian factions, and international stakeholders.

According to the latest U.S. estimates, the first deployment of the international force is expected by mid-January 2026, with a clear timeline established for this phase. The first

stage focuses on securing vital areas, followed by logistical support and public infrastructure reconstruction, while the final stage evaluates the international force's effectiveness in maintaining security and preventing renewed military operations.



The proposed Gaza framework seeks to replace ad hoc crisis management with structured international oversight linking security, governance, and reconstruction.

OPERATIONAL CHALLENGES

Despite theoretical progress, the international force plan faces major challenges that could hinder its success:

- **Lack of clear mechanisms to address Hamas's weapons:** Although disarmament is repeatedly mentioned, no concrete operational mechanisms exist for handling Hamas's military capabilities, raising fears that the international force may be largely symbolic without sufficient authority to enforce real stability.
- **Declining commitments from participating countries:** Reports indicate some countries are reconsidering their participation due to concerns about long-term involvement or domestic backlash.
- **Disputes over rules of engagement:** While some countries want the force to play an active role in "dismantling military arsenals", others favour leaving primary security responsibilities to the Palestinian police, creating potential operational conflicts between international and local forces.

Hamas firmly rejects any role for the international force that involves forcibly disarming factions, viewing such involvement as siding with the occupying forces rather than serving as a

neutral mediator. Other Palestinian groups, such as Islamic Jihad, hold similar positions. This puts Washington and the UN to the test in balancing genuine neutrality with the need to maintain stability.

Given these variables, what was once seen as a comprehensive solution has now become hostage to delicate technical and political details that could determine the plan's success or failure in the coming months. The debate continues over whether disarmament can be achieved without triggering violent backlash.

DISARMING HAMAS

While the UN resolution and the push for an international force indicate the need to disarm armed factions, this remains one of the most complex elements of the U.S. plan. The



United States, through senior officials such as the Secretary of State, emphasises that lasting stability in Gaza requires reducing the capabilities of armed groups, especially Hamas. However, implementation requires:

- A calm political environment encouraging voluntary disarmament by factions.
- International and regional consensus on incentive mechanisms to ensure cooperation.
- Security guarantees preventing weapons from returning to factions after partial disarmament.

U.S. statements avoid direct threatening language towards Hamas, framing disarmament as a long-term horizon rather than an immediately enforceable measure, reflecting awareness of the risks of sudden military escalation.

Hamas's weapons remain a source of political and operational power, seen as a safeguard if political processes fail or occupation policies persist. Local opposition to forcible disarmament is inevitable without a comprehensive political solution guaranteeing Palestinian rights. Analysts note that

forced disarmament could reignite violence, possibly sparking a broader war if factions perceive a direct threat to their existence without real political guarantees.

Parallel to efforts in Gaza, the U.S. is advancing an ambitious plan for Lebanon to disarm Hezbollah, a highly sensitive issue that raises fears of potential clashes along the Israeli–Lebanese border.

The international force is designed not as an occupying presence, but as a transitional mechanism bridging ceasefire enforcement and local security capacity.



U.S. STRATEGY

The U.S. approach links Lebanon’s security and stability to weakening the capabilities of non-state armed militias, particularly Hezbollah, considered by Washington to be a major source of regional instability and a persistent threat to Israeli borders.

The American plan includes:

- Political pressure on Lebanese authorities to gradually adopt disarmament measures.
- Potential international monitoring along the border to prevent arms smuggling and reduce Hezbollah’s military influence.
- Linking any Israeli withdrawal from southern Lebanon to a security framework that strengthens the Lebanese state’s sovereignty.

Lebanon’s government has previously agreed on initial goals of the U.S. paper to stabilise the ceasefire, although Hezbollah

and Amal ministers walked out in protest, highlighting deep domestic political divisions regarding disarmament.

Hezbollah continues to reject any attempt to reduce its arsenal, arguing it affects Lebanon’s sovereignty and defensive capabilities, especially amid perceived Israeli threats. The debate between the government and Hezbollah remains complicated, with disagreements over the definition and implementation of disarmament posing the biggest obstacle. Alternative initiatives, such as “freezing weapons” instead of full disarmament, have emerged as compromise solutions aimed at preventing weapon use without complete confiscation.

The Gaza and Lebanon files impact not only Washington and local actors but also international politics. In the U.S., voices such as Republican Senator Lindsey Graham have called for giving Hamas a timeline to disarm and have even considered potential military action against Hezbollah if it does not relinquish its weapons, reflecting domestic tensions over these issues.

Regionally, U.S. policy reflects a desire to maintain influence in the Middle East after years of relative decline, amid challenges from competing powers such as Iran and Turkey, as well as differing Gulf interests.

Some international analysts criticise the U.S. plans for lacking clarity in objectives and implementation mechanisms, which could lead to gaps and violations, potentially igniting renewed violence.



BETWEEN SUCCESS AND DANGERS

The U.S. vision for stabilising Gaza and disarming Hezbollah represents a major strategic gamble in international politics, carrying the potential for significant security reforms in the Middle East, but also surrounded by multiple risks:

- Failure of the international force to establish real security in Gaza could push factions back into violence, threatening broader regional stability.
- Hezbollah’s insistence on retaining its arsenal complicates



efforts to convert Lebanon into a state with a monopoly on force.

- Retreating commitments from participating countries weaken the credibility of U.S. plans on the ground, increasing the likelihood of security gaps exploited by armed factions.

The U.S. gamble is not merely a test of the current administration's Middle East policy but a crossroads that could redraw the regional security map or deepen

the cycle of conflict. Every future step will measure Washington's ability to reconcile the interests of different parties and create a political and security environment conducive to achieving its goals without triggering new conflicts.

(Nadia Hallak, senior correspondent and distinguished journalist from Beirut, Lebanon. She has extensively worked in the Arab region and covers major developments in the Arab world for News Analytics. The views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The News Analytics Herald.)

QUICK INSIGHTS

- *An international resolution outlines a structured framework to oversee Gaza's post-war stabilisation and governance.*
- *A Board of Peace is proposed to coordinate political authority and security management in Gaza.*
- *A temporary international force will support ceasefire enforcement while facilitating humanitarian assistance and reconstruction.*
- *Disarmament of non-governmental armed groups is envisaged through phased, legally defined operational mechanisms.*
- *Training a capable Palestinian police force is central to ensuring a sustainable transition to local security control.*

CURTAIN RAISER

INTERNATIONAL FLEET REVIEW 2026

Visakhapatnam hosts a historic maritime convergence, 15–25 February 2026

NEWS ANALYTICS | SPECIAL COVERAGE

In February 2026, India will reaffirm its growing stature as a maritime power and a trusted convenor of international naval cooperation when Visakhapatnam hosts the International Fleet Review (IFR) 2026. What makes this edition truly exceptional is that it will be conducted alongside Exercise MILAN 2026 and the Indian Ocean Naval Symposium (IONS) Conclave of Chiefs, in a carefully sequenced window from 15 to 25 February 2026. The scale, ambition, and simultaneity of these engagements mark a first for India and reflect the Indian Navy's confidence, organisational maturity, and strategic clarity.

Bringing together three of the most significant maritime engagements in one continuous framework is not merely an operational feat. It signals India's intent to shape regional and extra-regional maritime narratives through presence, professionalism, and partnership. For the Indian Navy, IFR 2026 represents a culmination of years of steady capability development, diplomatic outreach, and doctrinal evolution—placing maritime diplomacy firmly at the heart of India's external engagement.

PRESIDENTIAL FLEET REVIEW

At the centre of this convergence lies the Presidential Fleet Review at Sea, the ceremonial and symbolic core of IFR 2026. Rooted in naval tradition, a fleet review has always served as a moment of reflection and reassurance—

demonstrating readiness, cohesion, and unity of purpose. In the contemporary strategic environment, however, its significance has expanded. Reviewing the fleet today is also a declaration of commitment to cooperative maritime security, freedom of navigation, and a rules-based order at sea.

Official communications present IFR 2026 as a key platform for advancing the Prime Minister's MAHASAGAR vision—Mutual and Holistic Advancement for Security and Growth Across Regions. Building on the earlier SAGAR framework,



MAHASAGAR expands India's maritime outlook beyond the Indian Ocean to a wider regional and global canvas. It emphasises sustainability, resilience, and shared responsibility for the maritime commons at a time of rising pressure on sea lanes and strategic chokepoints. Hosted at Visakhapatnam, headquarters of the Eastern Naval Command, IFR 2026 draws on the city's naval heritage and strategic location. With wide international participation, the event reinforces India's commitment to collective, inclusive maritime security aligned with Act East, IPOI, and IONS frameworks.

INDIGENOUS NAVAL CAPABILITY

A key feature of IFR 2026 is its emphasis on indigenous naval capability. Showcasing platforms such as INS Vikrant, modern destroyers, frigates and ASW corvettes, the event reflects India's evolution into a "Builder's

Navy,” signalling technological maturity, self-reliance, and a strong domestic shipbuilding ecosystem supporting credible maritime partnerships.

IFR 2026 also carries a strong public dimension. The Fleet Review by the Hon’ble President of India, scheduled for 18 February 2026, will be followed by an International City Parade on 19 February 2026 along Visakhapatnam’s iconic RK Beach. Featuring multinational contingents, aerial displays, and cultural elements, the parade will bring maritime diplomacy ashore, allowing citizens to connect directly with the Navy’s global engagements. This outreach reinforces the idea that maritime security is not an abstract concept but a shared national and international endeavour.

IFR EXPLAINED: WHAT A FLEET REVIEW SIGNALS IN NAVAL DIPLOMACY

An International Fleet Review (IFR) is a time-honoured naval tradition conducted by the Head of State, symbolising maritime capability, operational readiness, and unity of command. In modern practice, an IFR also serves a diplomatic function, bringing together global navies to affirm commitment to cooperative maritime security, freedom of navigation, and rules-based conduct at sea. Officially framed, it is not a display of force but a signal of partnership, interoperability, and shared responsibility for the maritime commons.



EXERCISE MILAN AND THE IONS CONCLAVE

While IFR 2026 delivers the visual centrepiece, Exercise MILAN and the IONS Conclave of Chiefs provide operational depth—strengthening interoperability, maritime awareness, warfighting and HADR capabilities—supported by an International Maritime Seminar advancing strategic dialogue and cooperation.

The IONS Conclave of Chiefs adds a crucial leadership layer, fostering trust, shared understanding, and coordination among senior naval leaders. Such professional networks quietly shape maritime outcomes through shared procedures and sustained engagement, often away from public view.

IFR 2026 arrives at a time when maritime stability is under pressure across multiple regions. Against this backdrop, India’s decision to convene the world’s navies is both timely and reassuring. It projects confidence, encourages collaboration, and reinforces the principle that the maritime commons should be governed by cooperation rather than coercion.

Ultimately, IFR 2026 is more than a review of ships. It is a review of relationships, a demonstration of India’s growing maritime leadership, and a statement of the kind of inclusive, stable maritime order the Indian Navy seeks to help shape in the years ahead.

NUCLEAR UNCERTAINTY RETURNS POST ‘NEW START’ ERA

WAR STRATEGY

As the last pillars of Cold War-era arms control erode, the global nuclear order is entering a phase of dangerous recalibration. The impending expiry of New START, accelerating arsenal modernisation, and China’s doctrinal shift are reviving arms-race dynamics. Amid rising uncertainty and weakening guardrails, strategic stability is giving way to competition, ambiguity, and renewed nuclear risk.



LT GEN RAJ SHUKLA (R)
FORMER ARMY COMMANDER | FOR NEWS ANALYTICS

As if only to add to a long list of woes, global peace and stability are beset by a new challenge—aggressive pursuits in the nuclear weapons domain, triggering what many fear may be the resumption of a nuclear arms race. The expiration of the New Strategic Arms Reduction Treaty (New START),

the last remaining bilateral arms control treaty between the United States and Russia, on 5 February 2026, may well be an added trigger. The treaty limits the number of long-range nuclear weapons that the USA and Russia could deploy; since a follow-on agreement does not appear to be in the offing, we may be entering a new era of nuclear arsenal expansion.

It is therefore a good time to audit the state of aggregate nuclear risk and uncertainty. New START has served as a guardrail of sorts against an unconstrained arms race. The treaty limits the deployment of long-range nuclear warheads to 1,550 each for

Russia and the United States. It also contains provisions for on-site verification, allowing inspectors access to nuclear sites in Russia and the USA, backed by mandatory notification of weapon movements and changes in status. After the US and Russia found themselves on opposite sides in the Ukraine conflict, President Vladimir Putin suspended

Russia’s participation in New START in February 2023, though it pledged to continue abiding by the treaty’s limits. The United States responded by terminating Russia’s ability to monitor US nuclear sites, revoking inspector visas, and denying clearance for Russian aircraft in US airspace. In



January 2025, the US State Department declared it could not certify that Russia was complying with New START, though it reported that if Russia had exceeded the treaty’s limits, it was only by a whisker. It stated with high confidence that Russia did not engage in any large-scale activity above the treaty limits in 2024.

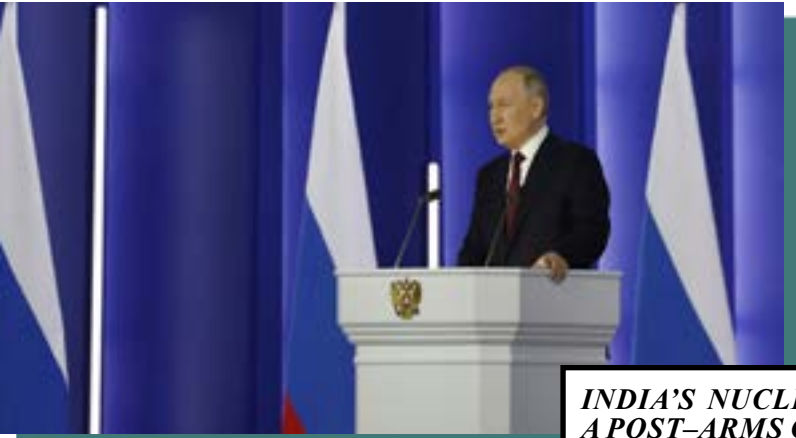
The expiration of New START removes the final guardrail against an unconstrained nuclear arms race between the world’s two largest arsenals.

ARMS-CONTROL BREAKDOWN

With the looming expiration of New START, we may witness an era of arsenal expansion in which both the United States and Russia will be free to increase the number of deployed nuclear weapons. Both countries have the capacity to do this rather quickly, simply by deploying additional

United States to expand its nuclear arsenal. Past efforts to draw China into trilateral negotiations have failed, since the United States maintains a nuclear arsenal more than four times the size of China's. The Chinese insist that, given the relative size of arsenals, there is little logic in expecting China to be bound by any version of START. In fact, if there is one country in recent times that has truly "broken out" in nuclear terms, it is China. In its policy orientation, primarily on account of a substantial upgradation of its space-based early warning capacities, China is moving away from No First Use (NFU) towards Launch on Warning (LOW).

China's shift towards Launch on Warning and rapid nuclear expansion is reshaping deterrence dynamics far beyond the traditional U.S.-Russia framework.



warheads on existing land-based or submarine-based missiles. Pressure to exceed the limits of New START has been growing—for example, in 2023, a congressionally appointed commission suggested that the United States increase its deployed strategic nuclear forces and recommended the building of new types of nuclear weapons and delivery vehicles.

We are also seeing a push in the United States to begin building new nuclear bomb cores, also known as plutonium pits, to arm new nuclear weapons. There are further urgings to ramp up the production of nuclear weapons. President Trump's declaration on the resumption of nuclear testing

INDIA'S NUCLEAR POSTURE IN A POST-ARMS CONTROL WORLD

The erosion of global arms-control regimes places new pressures on India's nuclear posture. As U.S.-Russia constraints weaken and China accelerates nuclear modernisation, India faces a more complex deterrence environment defined by ambiguity and asymmetry.

China's shift towards Launch-on-Warning and Pakistan's tightening civil-military control over nuclear forces compress India's decision-making timelines. At the same time, advances in missile defence, hypersonic systems, and space-based surveillance challenge long-held assumptions underpinning India's doctrine of credible minimum deterrence.

In this evolving landscape, India must reassess force readiness, signalling, and command resilience while preserving strategic autonomy and crisis stability.

complicates matters even more. The United States has conducted more than 1,000 explosive nuclear tests in its history—more than any other country—and has since developed sophisticated tools to ensure that the stockpile remains safe and reliable without explosive testing. If the United States were to resume explosive testing, it would shatter the global taboo against testing and encourage other countries, which possess far less experimental data, to follow suit. The United States, therefore, has the most to lose from a return to explosive nuclear testing.

CHINA FACTOR

The rise of China in geopolitical terms has intensified nuclear competition further. The estimated expansion of China's nuclear arsenal to 1,000 warheads by 2030, though still well below the Russian and American arsenals of 5,500 and 4,700 warheads, respectively, is a key factor for those pushing the

China is expanding its nuclear triad with the aim of developing both counter-value and counter-force capabilities. Missile silos and ranges are being expanded to target not only American deployments in the Pacific but also the American heartland. It has inducted tactical nuclear weapons into its inventory and practises "ambiguity", not "transparency", as an organising principle. The Chinese Western Theatre Command, for example, has in its inventory conventional, ballistic, cruise, hypersonic, and nuclear missiles, stitched together in an integrated framework. The PLA Rocket Force is a sophisticated and potent amalgam of conventional missiles, drones, and



nuclear capabilities. China has also crossed a major nuclear red line—it has begun loading its nuclear silo fields with solid-fuelled nuclear missiles, signalling higher levels of nuclear readiness

STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

The 27th Constitutional Amendment, whereby the head of Pakistan's Strategic Command (with nuclear forces under command) will always be from the Army and will report to the unified position of the Chief of Defence Force and the Chief of the Army Staff (Field Marshal Asim Munir), represents a move to strengthen the nuclear-terror complex in Pakistan.

Trump's perceived abandonment of allies and partners has not been helpful to the cause of nuclear stability either. Now that the North Korean nuclear arsenal has the American heartland in its crosshairs, South Korea is seeking fresh guarantees on American commitment to "extended nuclear deterrence". There are growing whispers in Japan regarding the need to weaponise its nuclear capabilities to deter Chinese aggression.



As arms control erodes, nuclear credibility is increasingly defined by readiness, ambiguity, and the capacity to expand arsenals rapidly.

The global nuclear framework, as we see it, is in a state of deep flux. Strategic uncertainties loom large even as new deterrence frameworks are redefining the power equilibrium.

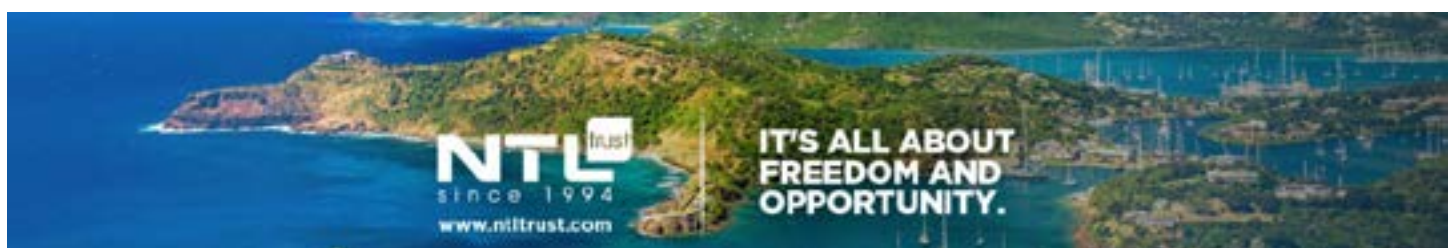
Amid the global nuclear shake-out, India's nuclear posture too merits a root-and-branch review—in terms of policy slant, questions of transparency and ambiguity, missile configurations, silos, interceptor topology, structural corrections, and readiness levels.

(Lt Gen Raj Shukla (R), former Army Commander and currently a Member of UPSC. The views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The News Analytics Herald.)



QUICK INSIGHTS

- *The expiry of New START removes the last major constraint on U.S.–Russia nuclear competition.*
- *Both Washington and Moscow can rapidly expand deployed nuclear arsenals without treaty limits.*
- *China's accelerating nuclear build-up and doctrinal shift are destabilising global deterrence balances.*
- *Regional nuclear dynamics, including Pakistan and North Korea, further compound strategic uncertainty.*
- *India must reassess its nuclear posture amid weakening arms-control regimes and rising global risks.*





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- Detection and tracking of marine aquatic life, ocean noise measurements



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AFRICA'S LONG ROAD TO STRATEGIC UNITY

DIPLOMACY

As African leaders meet at the African Union's February 2026 summit, the continent confronts a hardened global order marked by great-power rivalry, regional instability, and institutional strain. Amid these pressures, the AU's pursuit of "strategic consolidation" reflects Africa's attempt to transform fragmented sovereignty into collective leverage, testing whether selective unity can deliver security, economic resilience, and global influence.



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As African leaders gather for the African Union's (AU) February 2026 summit, they do so in a world that is no longer simply in flux but settling into harder lines. The war in Ukraine has overturned long-held European security assumptions. The conflict in Gaza has further shaken

confidence in the neutrality of international institutions. At the same time, rivalry between the United States and China is solidifying into competing economic, technological, and security blocs. In this more transactional international environment, Africa confronts a choice it has postponed for



decades. It can continue to function as a fragmented arena shaped by external power, or it can begin to act with enough coherence to influence outcomes on its own terms. The AU has come to describe this second path as “strategic consolidation”.

STRATEGIC CONSOLIDATION

The term has gained currency as external pressures intensify. At its core, strategic consolidation refers to the selective pooling of sovereignty to strengthen continental agency, security, and economic leverage. This ambition is clearly articulated in Agenda 2063, which imagines an integrated, prosperous, and peaceful Africa able to operate as a strategic actor in global affairs. In practice, however, progress has been uneven and politically selective. Consolidation has not marched steadily towards unity. Instead, it has moved cautiously around questions of sovereignty, advancing where political elites perceive immediate risks and stalling where national interests pull in different directions. The result is a persistent gap between institutional aspiration and political will. The February 2026 summit is therefore unlikely to signal unity achieved. Rather, it will test whether this delicate balancing act can still hold. The AU meeting in Addis Ababa reflects an organisation striving to reconcile ambition with constraint in an increasingly fractured world.



Institutional reform offers the clearest example of how far consolidation has gone. The reform agenda championed by Rwanda’s President Paul Kagame sought to remake the AU Commission into a leaner, more focused, and more self-reliant institution. A central pillar of this effort was the introduction of a 0.2 per cent levy on eligible imports, intended to reduce dependence on external donors and anchor African ownership of the continental project. By its own metrics, the reform has delivered tangible results. Today, member states finance most of the Union’s operational budget, a sharp shift from a decade ago when external partners covered even basic administrative costs. The Commission operates with clearer mandates and fewer internal overlaps. Compared to its predecessor, the AU is undeniably more capable.

Strategic consolidation is not a march towards unity but a cautious effort to pool sovereignty where survival, leverage, and continental agency are increasingly at risk.

These gains, however, reveal a deeper political paradox. While operational budgets are now largely African-funded, peace support operations remain heavily dependent on external partners, particularly the European Union and bilateral donors.



This imbalance constrains autonomy precisely where political authority matters most: decisions over the use of force. As administrative capacity in Addis Ababa has improved, the disconnect between continental policy and national implementation has become harder to ignore. Member states are comfortable empowering the Commission when it manages development finance, coordinates partnerships, or represents Africa in global forums. That comfort quickly fades when reforms touch core sovereign prerogatives. The stalled Candidacy Protocol illustrates this tension. Designed to limit external influence by promoting unified African candidates for senior international positions, it collapsed because it would have restricted governments’ freedom to pursue bilateral deals. Institutional reform has strengthened the AU’s capacity to coordinate, but not its authority to compel. What has been consolidated is managerial power, not political command.

SECURITY PRESSURES

If institutional reform exposes the political limits of consolidation, the security domain reveals what is at stake. Since 2020, Africa has witnessed more than a dozen unconstitutional changes of government, concentrated largely in the Sahel and parts of West and Central Africa. Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger alone account for a substantial share of jihadist-related fatalities, highlighting the severity of the crisis confronting continental institutions. In response, the AU’s Peace and Security Council has shifted from a largely declaratory body to a more active diplomatic and mediation platform, engaging conflicts from Sudan to eastern Democratic Republic of

Congo. The African Standby Force, envisioned more than two decades ago, remains unrealised. Its absence has been filled instead by ad hoc coalitions and sub-regional interventions. Increasingly, these efforts operate with AU endorsement rather than direct command, reflecting a pragmatic accommodation between continental ambition and operational reality.



This evolution marks a quiet but consequential change. Security, long treated as the core expression of state sovereignty, is gradually becoming a shared continental concern. This shift has not been driven by ideology, but by repeated national failure. Persistent instability has made unilateral responses increasingly untenable. Even so, security-led consolidation remains crisis-driven and politically fraught. It often takes the form of reluctant delegation rather than deliberate design, and it carries a pronounced democratic deficit. Decisions to intervene are typically negotiated among executives, with limited parliamentary oversight or public scrutiny. In effect, the AU is consolidating authority as a club of states managing one another's instability, rather than as a democratic security community grounded in popular consent. This arrangement may preserve a measure of order, but by sidelining consent, it remains inherently fragile.

Africa's security consolidation is driven less by ideology than by repeated national failure, turning sovereignty from a shield into a shared continental burden.

SOVEREIGNTY TENSIONS

The challenge is intensified by the changing character of conflict itself. Jihadist insurgencies, unconstitutional changes of government, and transnational criminal networks increasingly blur the line between internal and external threats. The AU's uneven responses to coups in Mali, Burkina Faso, Niger, and Guinea have exposed the limits of existing frameworks. Sanctions have been inconsistently applied, coordination with regional blocs has been strained, and enforcement mechanisms remain weak. Political realities on the ground

are moving faster than continental security doctrine. It is against this backdrop that the emergence of the Alliance of Sahel States Confederation (AES), bringing together Burkina Faso, Mali, and Niger, assumes strategic significance. Together, these states span much of the central Sahel and govern a population of more than seventy million. Their formation of the AES, following withdrawal from the Economic Community of West African States (ECOWAS), constitutes one of the most serious challenges to the post-Cold War architecture of African regional order.

The AES casts itself as the vanguard of a revived Pan-Africanism that rejects foreign military presence, donor conditionality, and what it portrays as external domination of African security governance. This message resonates in parts of the continent, particularly among younger populations frustrated by persistent insecurity and economic stagnation under existing arrangements. Strategically, however, the bloc complicates continental consolidation. It exposes the limits of AU and regional enforcement while advancing a sovereignty-centred vision that claims pan-African legitimacy. Whether the AU can engage the AES constructively, without legitimising unconstitutional rule or accelerating institutional fragmentation, will be a critical test of its relevance.

ECONOMIC LEVERAGE

Economic consolidation reveals a different set of constraints. The African Continental Free Trade Area (AfCFTA) remains the flagship of the AU's long-term strategy. More than forty countries have ratified the agreement, and a growing number



are trading under its preferences. Initiatives such as the Pan-African Payment and Settlement System, now linking dozens of central banks, offer early signs of practical integration beyond rhetoric. Yet the gap between ambition and reality remains wide. Intra-African trade still accounts for a relatively small share of total trade, held back by persistent non-tariff barriers and uneven implementation. Beneath technical debates over rules of origin lies a deeper political struggle over industrial location and value capture. National

development strategies often collide with continental harmonisation, while protectionist instincts and fiscal dependence on import duties continue to slow progress. As a result, AfCFTA has strengthened Africa's external negotiating position faster than it has integrated the internal economy. Consolidation, in this sense, has functioned first as a tool of external leverage, with questions of internal equity postponed.



On the global diplomatic stage, fragmentation has paradoxically expanded Africa's room for manoeuvre. The continent's admission as a permanent member of the G20 reflects a growing recognition that global economic governance without Africa is no longer tenable. Coordinated engagement on climate finance, particularly around loss and damage, has demonstrated the benefits of collective action. This approach is not a revival of Cold War non-alignment, but a strategy of calculated multi-alignment. On polarising issues such as Ukraine or Gaza, Africa's relative cohesion has rested less on moral consensus than on shared assessments of risk and opportunity. Even this cohesion remains fragile. External powers continue to favour bilateral engagement that fractures collective positions on debt restructuring, security cooperation, and development finance. The absence of a strong continental media and narrative ecosystem further weakens Africa's ability to frame its interests on its own terms.

The AU convening in February 2026 thus stands as an incomplete architect of its own consolidation. The process is real, but uneven. It advances in security out of necessity, in economics in pursuit of future leverage, and in diplomacy as a strategic practice. It remains largely elite-driven and often detached from the citizens in whose name it is pursued. The summit will not mark the unity achieved. It will reaffirm

familiar patterns: ambitious economic visions, contested security debates, and incremental institutional reforms that improve efficiency without resolving the sovereignty dilemma. The central issue is not whether Africa will become a federal union. It will not.

The African Union's challenge is no longer unity versus fragmentation, but whether managed disunity can still generate power in a volatile global order.

The more pressing question is whether this imperfect pooling of sovereignty can deliver enough stability, bargaining power, and shared growth to safeguard Africa's interests in an increasingly volatile century. A disciplined embrace of variable geometry may offer the most workable path forward. Allowing willing states to move faster in specific areas, whether security coordination, monetary arrangements, or industrial policy, could preserve momentum without imposing artificial uniformity. This approach lacks rhetorical purity, but it aligns more closely with political reality. Strategic consolidation is more likely to endure through careful management of its limits than through declarations of unity.

The world is watching to see whether Africa emerges as a strategic actor or remains a strategic arena. That distinction will not be settled by summit declarations or carefully drafted communiqués. It will be decided by whether the AU can forge real leverage from selective and contested cooperation. Strategic consolidation will not come through grand gestures of unity, but through the difficult, incremental work of acting together when interests only partially align, sovereignty remains jealously guarded, and the costs of cooperation are immediate. The question facing the AU is no longer whether unity is desirable, but whether managed disunity can still generate power, or simply delay marginalisation.

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QUICK INSIGHTS

- Africa faces a hardened global order shaped by great-power rivalry and transactional diplomacy.
- Strategic consolidation seeks selective sovereignty pooling, not full political unity.
- Institutional reforms strengthened coordination but left political authority fragmented.
- Security cooperation is expanding under crisis, despite democratic and sovereignty tensions.
- Managed disunity may offer Africa leverage in an increasingly unstable world.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

U.S. CAPTURES VENEZUELA'S PRESIDENT IN SHOCK INTERVENTION



In one of the most dramatic geopolitical moves of the period, the United States carried out an operation in Venezuela that resulted in the capture of President Nicolás Maduro, triggering immediate global reactions and sharp debate over legality, precedent, and regional stability. The action revived long-running fears in Latin America about coercive regime-change tactics and raised questions about how other powers may interpret “might makes right” interventions. Markets also began repricing geopolitical risk, even as the wider consequences for Venezuela’s governance and regional order remain uncertain.

CHINA STAGES MAJOR TAIWAN SHOW OF FORCE



China began the year with large-scale military drills around Taiwan, deploying warships and aircraft and firing rockets in a stark warning to Taipei. Taiwan condemned the action and reiterated that it would defend its sovereignty, while Western partners voiced concern that the drills raised regional risk. The display underlines how quickly the Taiwan Strait can become a flashpoint—and how military signalling is now central to Beijing’s pressure campaign. For the Indo-Pacific, this kind of high-tempo exercise cycle increases the danger of miscalculation at sea and in the air, even without an intentional escalation.

TRUMP ORDERS EXIT FROM 66 INTERNATIONAL ORGANISATIONS



The United States announced a sweeping withdrawal from dozens of international organisations, many tied to the UN system and issues like climate, labour, and social programmes. The decision marks a major retreat from multilateral engagement and is likely to widen coordination gaps on global public goods—precisely when conflicts and economic fragmentation are already intensifying. Allies and partners worry this accelerates a shift towards transactional diplomacy, while rivals may test whether reduced U.S. participation weakens collective responses in crises.

GREENLAND BECOMES NATO'S UNTHINKABLE STRESS TEST



Trump’s renewed rhetoric about asserting U.S. control over Greenland—Denmark’s autonomous territory—triggered alarm across Europe and created an unprecedented NATO dilemma: what happens if a leading member pressures another member’s sovereign territory? European leaders publicly reaffirmed Denmark’s sovereignty, while analysts warned the episode could fracture alliance cohesion and hand adversaries a propaganda win. Beyond symbolism, Greenland’s strategic Arctic location and minerals make it a high-stakes prize, turning a political shock into a concrete security concern.

IRAN PROTESTS DEEPEN; U.S. WARNINGS RAISE ESCALATION FEARS



Iran faced its most serious unrest in years, with reports of deadly clashes and severe communications restrictions, including internet disruptions. Trump issued warnings tied to how authorities handle demonstrators, amplifying fears that domestic turmoil could spill into regional confrontation. Israel, meanwhile, moved to a higher state of alert amid concerns about possible U.S. action if violence escalates further. The combination—internal instability, external threats, and regional readiness—creates a volatile ladder where events can outrun diplomacy.

GAZA CEASEFIRE STRAINS AS VIOLENCE PERSISTS



Despite a ceasefire framework, fatalities and armed incidents continued in Gaza, highlighting how fragile the post-war stabilisation picture remains. Reports of killings in multiple locations added to tensions and underscored unresolved issues: areas of control, security arrangements, and accountability mechanisms. This persistence of violence keeps regional diplomacy on edge, complicates humanitarian operations, and sustains the risk of renewed escalation—especially if political pathways for governance and reconstruction do not move faster than battlefield dynamics.

RUSSIA FIRES NUCLEAR-CAPABLE HYPERSONIC MISSILE



Russia launched a hypersonic missile strike near Ukraine's Western regions, sending a deliberate signal to Kyiv and Western capitals. The use of such systems—paired with continued mass drone and missile attacks—heightens escalation risk and intensifies pressure on Europe's security architecture. Even when battlefield lines do not shift dramatically, these strikes have strategic effects: psychological impact, infrastructure damage, and political messaging designed to test allied resolve and deterrence credibility.

BRICS+ NAVAL EXERCISES IN SOUTH AFRICA



The BRICS+ naval exercise "Will for Peace 2026," hosted by South Africa on 10 Jan 2026, represents a coordinated maritime effort focused on safeguarding sea lanes and supporting global economic activity. Naval forces from BRICS Plus members, including China, Russia, Iran, and South Africa, are participating to strengthen interoperability and operational coordination. The drills come amid growing geopolitical uncertainty but are positioned as defensive rather than confrontational, with no intent to challenge Western powers. They align with South Africa's long-standing non-aligned foreign policy and highlight collective commitment within the BRICS framework. Emphasis is placed on countering non-traditional threats such as piracy and maritime terrorism while ensuring the security of critical global trade routes.

BANGLADESH VOTES AMID RISING TENSIONS

NEIGHBOURHOOD

Bangladesh is approaching an election that looks less like a democratic ritual and more like a national reckoning. Ballots, in theory, are meant to settle disputes. In Bangladesh today, they threaten to inflame them. The coming vote is unfolding against a backdrop of political exclusion, social fracture, economic stress, and rising regional anxiety. What happens next will not remain confined within Bangladesh's borders. It will shape regional stability, redefine India-Bangladesh relations, test border security arrangements, disrupt economic cooperation, and recalibrate the wider South Asian geopolitical balance.



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Elections in Bangladesh have rarely been tranquil affairs, but the current cycle is unusually fraught. Since the fall of Sheikh Hasina in August 2024, the country has been governed by an interim administration led by Muhammad Yunus, whose promise of moral authority and democratic renewal initially inspired hope. That hope has faded quickly. Disputes over election timing, accusations of broken commitments, and the exclusion of the Awami League from participation have created an atmosphere in which the

legitimacy of the process itself is under question.

Yunus's insistence on pushing forward with elections despite opposition demands for a different timetable has widened mistrust. The Awami League's ban, justified by supporters as necessary accountability for past abuses, is viewed by critics as a destabilising act that risks turning the election into a hollow exercise. Bangladesh has seen this movie before: boycotted polls, disputed mandates, and governments that struggle to

govern because their authority is contested from day one.

Bangladesh's history offers cautionary tales. Elections in 1996, 2006, and 2014 each produced not closure but crisis—boycotts, street violence, and governance paralysis. Each time, political leaders promised lessons had been learned. Yet the same pattern persists: elections treated as instruments of annihilation rather than competition, where losing is synonymous with political extinction.

Instead of serving as a reset, the election risks becoming another chapter in a cycle of political zero-sum warfare, where defeat is equated with extinction and victory with vengeance.



Bangladesh risks repeating a familiar cycle where elections meant to restore legitimacy instead deepen mistrust, exclusion, and political paralysis.

SOCIAL POLARISATION

Political polarisation in Bangladesh has spilled decisively into society. Communal tensions, long managed through a combination of state authority and social norms, have surged amid weakened governance. Violence against religious minorities—particularly Hindus and Christians—has increased, often justified through allegations of blasphemy that rapidly escalate into mob justice.



On 31 October 2024, Donald Trump posted on X (formerly Twitter), condemning violence against Hindus and other minorities in Bangladesh amid post-Sheikh Hasina unrest. In the post, Trump wrote: "I strongly condemn the barbaric violence against Hindus, Christians, and other minorities who are getting attacked and looted by mobs in Bangladesh, which remains in a total state of chaos..."

The lynching of Dipu Chandra Das in Mymensingh, following allegations of blasphemy, shocked the nation—and reverberated across the border into India; it became a symbol of institutional failure. When citizens believe the state cannot or will not protect them, fear replaces trust. Minority communities feel besieged, while majority communities are pulled into cycles of grievance, rumour, and radicalisation. This erosion of social cohesion is perhaps more dangerous than political rivalry, because it corrodes the foundations of nationhood itself.

History shows that once elections are fought along communal lines—explicitly or implicitly—they cease to be mechanisms of representation and become triggers for prolonged instability.

INTERNATIONAL PRESSURE

Bangladesh's internal crisis has drawn increasing international attention. The United Nations has expressed concern over

law and order and minority protection. Russia has urged restraint, invoking historical ties and warning against escalation with India. Western capitals, meanwhile, monitor the situation warily, balancing calls for democratic credibility against fears of being accused of interference.

This scrutiny is not accidental. Bangladesh occupies a critical geostrategic position in South Asia, bridging South and Southeast Asia and sitting astride key maritime routes in the Bay of Bengal. Elections that lack inclusivity, justice mechanisms perceived as politicised, and unchecked violence inevitably invite external concern. Sovereignty, in practice, is reinforced by credibility. When domestic legitimacy erodes, international patience thins.

Instability in Bangladesh rarely remains contained. Refugee flows into India's north-eastern states, cross-border protests, and ideological spillovers are real and recurring risks. Political unrest has already sparked demonstrations in India, underscoring how deeply intertwined the two societies remain.

South Asia's history offers sobering lessons: crises in one state tend to cascade across borders, whether through migration, militancy, or diplomatic confrontation. Bangladesh's current volatility arrives at a time when the region is already strained by great-power competition, economic uncertainty, and unresolved territorial disputes. Another flashpoint is the last thing South Asia needs.

INDO-BANGLA RELATIONS

Few bilateral relationships in South Asia are as consequential as that between India and Bangladesh. Under Sheikh Hasina, ties entered what many described as a "golden era", marked by security cooperation, expanding trade, and pragmatic diplomacy. That era is now over.



Recent street unrest on both sides of the border has starkly exposed how Bangladesh's internal turmoil is spilling into India-Bangladesh relations. Protests by Hindu groups outside Bangladeshi missions in New Delhi, Kolkata, Agartala, and Siliguri—triggered by the lynching of a Hindu youth in Mymensingh—escalated into clashes, vandalism, and reciprocal

diplomatic summons. Simultaneously, Bangladeshi ultra-nationalist groups vandalised the Indian consulate office in Chattogram and attempted to attack the Indian High Commission in Dhaka, forcing the suspension of visa services. Together, these incidents reflect a dangerous feedback loop of street nationalism, security anxieties, and diplomatic mistrust amid Bangladesh's fragile political transition.



Anti-India rhetoric has resurfaced as a populist tool in Bangladeshi politics. Threats against Indian investments, framed as nationalist defiance, may score points domestically but poison diplomatic trust. For New Delhi, the dilemma is acute: overt pressure risks fuelling nationalist backlash, while passivity risks allowing strategic setbacks.

A BNP-led government, should it emerge, would inherit this strained environment. Past experience suggests a cooler approach to India, raising concerns about border management, security cooperation, and unresolved issues such as water-sharing agreements. Repairing trust will require restraint on both sides—but restraint is often the first casualty of polarised politics.

Bangladesh's internal turmoil is no longer domestic; it is reshaping India-Bangladesh relations and unsettling South Asia's fragile regional balance.

THE SHADOW OF EXTREMISM

Border security is where domestic instability becomes a regional security threat. Bangladesh's porous borders have historically been exploited by militant groups, smugglers, and foreign intelligence agencies. The current environment, marked by political distraction and institutional fragility, creates fertile ground for a resurgence of extremist networks.

Reports of renewed interest by Pakistan's ISI and its proxies are particularly alarming. The sudden shutdown of suspected

radical institutions near Dhaka, coinciding with terror-related arrests in India, follows a familiar and troubling pattern. Extremist ecosystems thrive in moments of transition, especially when political authority is contested.

For India, the risk lies in infiltration into its north-eastern states. For Bangladesh, the danger is reputational as much as real: being seen as an unwilling host for cross-border militancy would undo years of counterterrorism progress and invite international isolation.

COOPERATION UNDER STRAIN

Economic cooperation is often the quiet casualty of political turmoil. Bangladesh's recent growth slowdown, rising inflation, and repeated shutdowns have already shaken investor confidence. Threatening foreign investments, Indian or otherwise, only compounds the damage.

Capital is allergic to uncertainty. Investors do not distinguish between rhetorical posturing and policy intent; they simply calculate risk. Bangladesh's hard-earned reputation as a stable manufacturing hub is at stake. Regional connectivity projects, energy cooperation, and cross-border trade all depend on predictability. Political theatrics that undermine that predictability carry real economic costs.



At the same time, China's expanding footprint through loans and infrastructure projects offers Bangladesh short-term relief but long-term dilemmas. Economic dependence forged in moments of weakness often translates into strategic leverage later.

Bangladesh's crisis unfolds within a shifting South Asian order. India seeks to consolidate its role as a regional stabiliser while countering China's influence in the Bay of Bengal. China, for its part, sees opportunity in uncertainty, quietly positioning itself as an indispensable partner regardless of domestic politics in Dhaka.

For smaller South Asian states, Bangladesh's trajectory sends a signal. If a relatively successful development story can slide into prolonged instability through polarised politics

and exclusionary elections, others are not immune. The region's balance depends not only on power but on example.

CHOICE WITH CONSEQUENCES

Bangladesh stands at a precarious juncture. The coming election could either begin the slow repair of legitimacy or deepen fractures that will take years to heal. The choice is not merely about who governs, but how governance is restored—through inclusion, restraint, and credible institutions, or through exclusion, vengeance, and perpetual crisis.

For the region, the stakes are clear. A stable Bangladesh

anchors Eastern South Asia. A fractured one destabilises it. The tense ballot ahead will therefore be judged not just by its outcome, but by its impact—on society, on neighbours, and on the fragile equilibrium of South Asia itself.

*(M. A. Hossain, senior journalist and international affairs analyst based in Bangladesh. He covers South Asia and the Southeast Asian region for News Analytics. The views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of **The News Analytics Herald**.)*

QUICK INSIGHTS

- *Bangladesh's election process faces legitimacy questions amid exclusion, mistrust, and unresolved political rivalries.*
- *Social polarisation and violence against minorities are eroding cohesion and weakening state authority.*
- *International scrutiny is intensifying as domestic credibility declines and instability threatens regional interests.*
- *Political turmoil is straining India–Bangladesh relations and heightening cross-border security concerns.*
- *Prolonged instability risks economic damage, extremist resurgence, and wider destabilisation across South Asia.*

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INSIDE THE AGE OF DIGITAL DECEPTION

ECOSYSTEM

Disinformation has emerged as one of the most powerful weapons of modern conflict, capable of destabilising societies without a single shot being fired. In an era where narratives travel faster than facts, falsehoods are deliberately engineered to erode trust, polarise communities, and weaken institutions. Securing the information space has therefore become a core challenge of national and democratic security.



NEWS ANALYTICS TECH DESK

In the 21st century, power is exercised not only through armies, sanctions, or economic leverage, but increasingly through narratives. Disinformation has emerged as one of the most potent instruments of modern conflict—cheap to deploy, difficult to attribute, and devastating in its cumulative effects. Unlike conventional weapons, disinformation does not destroy infrastructure or eliminate populations; instead, it corrodes trust, fragments societies, weakens institutions, and distorts democratic choice. In doing so, it reshapes the strategic environment without firing a single shot.

Disinformation security has therefore become a core component of national security. It sits at the intersection of cyber operations, psychological warfare, political influence, and information control. States, non-state actors, and even private networks now weaponise falsehoods to manipulate public

opinion, undermine adversaries, and shape geopolitical outcomes. The battlefield is cognitive, the targets are societies, and the casualties are truth, cohesion, and legitimacy.

Disinformation is a strategic weapon that erodes trust, fragments societies, and weakens institutions, reshaping power dynamics without physical destruction or conventional military force.

WEAPONISING DISINFORMATION

Propaganda is not new. States have long sought to influence perceptions, morale, and beliefs during war and peace. What is new is the scale, speed, and precision with which disinformation can now be disseminated. Digital platforms

allow false narratives to travel faster than verification, amplified by algorithms designed to reward engagement rather than accuracy.

Disinformation differs from misinformation in intent. While misinformation may spread unintentionally, disinformation is deliberately engineered. It blends partial truths, emotional triggers, fabricated evidence, and selective amplification to create plausible but misleading narratives. Its success does not depend on convincing everyone; it only needs to confuse enough people to weaken consensus and paralyse decision-making.



In contemporary conflict, the real battlefield is cognitive, where narratives target societies directly and the primary casualties are truth, cohesion, and democratic legitimacy.

Modern disinformation campaigns are rarely isolated. They are layered operations combining social media manipulation, cyber leaks, deepfakes, proxy media outlets, and coordinated influencer networks. These campaigns exploit existing social divisions—religious, ethnic, ideological, or economic—turning internal fault lines into strategic vulnerabilities.

THE STRATEGIC OBJECTIVES

Disinformation campaigns typically pursue one or more of four strategic objectives.

First, delegitimation. By questioning the credibility of elections, institutions, courts, or the media, disinformation erodes public confidence in governance itself. Once legitimacy is weakened, states become internally distracted and externally vulnerable.

Second, polarisation. Disinformation thrives on extremes. It amplifies anger, fear, and resentment, pushing societies into rigid camps where dialogue collapses. A polarised society becomes easier to destabilise and harder to mobilise coherently in times of crisis.

Third, deterrence through confusion. By flooding the

information space with contradictory narratives, adversaries create uncertainty. When citizens and policymakers cannot distinguish fact from fiction, response times slow and strategic clarity erodes.

Fourth, narrative dominance. In conflicts where direct military victory is costly or risky, shaping the narrative becomes the objective. Winning the story can matter as much as winning territory, particularly in prolonged or hybrid conflicts.

Social media platforms, encrypted messaging services, and video-sharing applications have become the primary theatres of disinformation warfare. Their architecture unintentionally favours manipulation: virality over verification, outrage over nuance, speed over reflection.

Algorithms amplify content that provokes emotional reactions, making sensational falsehoods more visible than sober facts. Bot networks and coordinated accounts artificially boost narratives, creating the illusion of popular consensus. Deepfake technologies further blur the line between reality and fabrication, enabling convincing audio-visual deception at low cost.

Crucially, disinformation does not always originate abroad. Domestic actors, political entrepreneurs, and ideological movements often act as force multipliers, either knowingly or unknowingly, advancing hostile narratives. This makes attribution difficult and countermeasures politically sensitive.

A TOOL OF HYBRID WARFARE

Disinformation rarely operates alone. It is most effective when integrated into broader hybrid strategies that combine cyber intrusions, economic pressure, diplomatic signalling, and military posturing. In such environments, disinformation prepares the ground—weakening resistance, shaping perceptions, and normalising aggression.



For example, during crises, disinformation can be used to justify coercive actions, sow doubt about victims' credibility, or portray aggressors as defenders. In peacetime, it can quietly reshape public attitudes toward alliances, security partnerships, or economic choices, influencing long-term strategic orientation without overt confrontation.

Hybrid warfare thrives in ambiguity, and disinformation is its most ambiguous weapon. It allows plausible deniability, complicates retaliation, and exploits legal grey zones where traditional rules of war offer little guidance.

Countering disinformation is far more complex than blocking malware or intercepting weapons. Democracies face inherent constraints. Free speech protections, political pluralism, and decentralised media ecosystems limit the state's ability to control information flows without undermining its own values.

Authoritarian responses—censorship, blanket bans, information monopolies—may suppress disinformation temporarily but often breed distrust and resistance. The challenge is to secure the information space without militarising it or sacrificing openness.

Moreover, truth alone is often insufficient. Fact-checking works slowly and reaches fewer people than viral falsehoods. Corrections rarely spread as widely as the original lie, and repeated exposure to false narratives can harden beliefs even when debunked.

Disinformation security, therefore, requires moving beyond reactive debunking toward proactive resilience.

The most effective defence against disinformation is not censorship, but resilient societies capable of questioning, verifying, and contextualising information.

COGNITIVE AND SOCIETAL RESILIENCE

At its core, disinformation security is about resilience rather than control. The most robust defence is a society capable of questioning, verifying, and contextualising information.

Media literacy is a strategic investment. Citizens who understand how algorithms work, how narratives are framed, and how emotions are manipulated are harder to deceive. Education systems, public broadcasters, and civil society play critical roles in cultivating critical thinking and information hygiene.

Institutional transparency is equally important. Governments that communicate clearly, consistently, and credibly reduce the space in which false narratives flourish. Silence, ambiguity,



and contradiction create vacuums that disinformation eagerly fills.

Independent journalism remains a frontline defence. Investigative reporting, editorial standards, and professional ethics provide ballast against information chaos. Supporting credible media ecosystems is therefore a security priority, not merely a cultural one.

Technology can be both a weapon and a shield. Artificial intelligence tools are increasingly used to detect coordinated inauthentic behaviour, identify bot networks, and flag manipulated content. However, technological solutions are not neutral; they reflect the priorities and biases of those who design them.

Regulatory frameworks are evolving, but they face difficult trade-offs. Over-regulation risks suppressing legitimate dissent; under-regulation leaves platforms unaccountable. The challenge lies in defining responsibility without turning private companies into arbiters of truth.

Transparency requirements—such as labelling automated accounts, disclosing political advertising sources, and auditing algorithmic amplification—offer a middle path. They do not decide what people should believe, but they expose how beliefs are being influenced.

QUICK INSIGHTS

- *Disinformation has evolved into a strategic weapon capable of undermining states without physical conflict.*
- *Digital platforms and algorithms amplify false narratives faster than verification or correction mechanisms.*
- *Disinformation campaigns aim to delegitimise institutions, polarise societies, and dominate strategic narratives.*
- *Effective disinformation security prioritises societal resilience over censorship or reactive fact-checking alone.*
- *Securing the information space is now central to national security and democratic stability.*

THE NEXT BIG

INTERNATIONAL FLEET REVIEW & MILAN



The International Fleet Review (IFR) and MILAN 2026 are historic maritime events showcasing naval diplomacy, interoperability, and collective maritime security cooperation. Hosted by the Indian Navy under India's MAHASAGAR vision, the programme features a Presidential Fleet Review, participation of global navies, maritime exhibitions, and high-level interactions. The events highlight indigenous naval platforms and strategic partnerships, emphasising sustainability, resilience,

and inclusive security across the Indo-Pacific. Senior military leadership, defence policymakers, maritime strategists, shipbuilders, and allied delegations attend to strengthen operational ties, demonstrate capabilities, and build confidence in shared maritime commons governance.

Official site: <https://indiannavy.gov.in/content/official-website-international-fleet-review-milan-2026-now-live-0>

AEROSPACE MEETINGS QUERÉTARO 2026



Aerospace Meetings Querétaro 2026 is Latin America's premier B2B aerospace supply-chain convention, taking place from 18–19 February 2026 in Querétaro, Mexico. Organised by BCI Aerospace, the event brings together OEMs, Tier-1 suppliers, manufacturers and service providers from around the globe for two days of pre-arranged business meetings, specialised conferences, workshops and networking. Hosted in one of Mexico's fastest-growing aerospace hubs, it offers strategic engagement opportunities for companies looking to connect with key decision-makers, showcase

capabilities, and explore development prospects within North and Latin America's expanding aerospace ecosystem. The event supports industry growth and global collaboration across supply, procurement, engineering, fabrication and R&D.

Official site: <https://www.mexico.bciaerospace.com/en-us/>

ENFORCE TAC 2026 — NUREMBERG, GERMANY (23–25 FEB 2026)



Enforce Tac, scheduled for 23–25 February 2026, is Germany's premier trade fair dedicated to law enforcement, security, and defence communities. Held under the patronage of the Federal Chancellor, the event emphasises networked security and operational innovation. It convenes government authorities, armed forces, police services, intelligence agencies, industry stakeholders, and research institutions to present advanced tactical solutions, secure communications, unmanned systems, protective technologies, and mission-critical capabilities. The programme includes expert-led conferences, live operational demonstrations, and high-level discussions on hybrid threats, resilience, and joint operational challenges. Enforce Tac also provides a discreet platform for exhibitors and decision-makers to network and explore emerging security technologies.

Official site: <https://www.enforcetac.com/en>

THING

SECURITY SHOW 2026 — TOKYO, JAPAN



Security Show 2026, scheduled for 3–6 March 2026, is Japan's largest integrated security and safety exhibition, held at Tokyo Big Sight. It showcases comprehensive security systems, surveillance solutions, access control and biometrics, cyber-physical security technologies, disaster countermeasures, and protective solutions. The event attracts security professionals, IT managers, policymakers, technology developers, and corporate decision-makers seeking the latest innovations in physical and information security. Participants engage with advanced technologies for public safety, critical infrastructure protection, cybersecurity, and smart city applications. Through expos,

product demonstrations, and expert exchanges, the show fosters cross-sector collaboration and practical solutions to evolving security challenges in both public and private domains across Asia and globally.

Official site: <https://messe.nikkei.co.jp/en/ss/>

AEROSPACE & DEFENCE, MRO SOUTH ASIA SUMMIT 2026



The ****Aerospace & Defence, MRO South Asia Summit 2026****, scheduled for ****11–12 March 2026****, convenes senior leaders from airlines, OEMs, MRO service providers, regulators, and defence stakeholders to address aviation maintenance, repair, and overhaul trends and strategic transformation. Participants explore digitalisation, predictive analytics, sustainability, workforce development, and policy reforms shaping South Asia's aerospace and defence ecosystem. The summit emphasises regional capacity building, innovation integration, and investment expansion within the MRO supply chain. Attendees engage in panel discussions, roundtables, and networking to foster collaboration across civil and military aviation sectors, aligning industry objectives with broader economic and defence goals.

Official site: <https://aerospacemediagroup.com/events/conference/>

SECUREX KAZAKHSTAN 2026, ALMATY, KAZAKHSTAN



Securex Kazakhstan, scheduled for MAR 2026, is Central Asia's leading exhibition for security, fire protection, information technologies, and communication systems. It brings together technology innovators, manufacturers, solution providers, emergency response agencies, and industry experts to explore integrated safety and defence technologies, including video surveillance, access control, drone technology, cybersecurity, and public safety systems. The event facilitates dialogue on emerging

security trends, risk-mitigation strategies, and cross-sector partnerships that strengthen national and organisational resilience. During ****MAR 2026****, exhibitors and professional visitors will participate in technology showcases, B2B meetings, and industry briefings, expanding networks and commercial opportunities in a region increasingly focused on security modernisation and critical infrastructure protection.

THE RISE OF AUTONOMOUS AI WORKERS

HI-TECH

Agentic AI is not a better version of large language models; it represents a fundamental shift. While LLMs displaced tasks, agentic systems are poised to absorb entire organisational functions. These autonomous digital workers operate continuously, execute multi-step workflows across domains from sales and logistics to contracts, and improve through experience. Working in coordinated swarms, they signal the arrival of a true silicon workforce.



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A tool such as generative AI behaves once you give it a task; it handles it with little issue. However, you constantly have to monitor performance, improve prompts, and keep working until you have completed one job correctly. What we need is a responsible team member who understands our needs. That is what sets agentic AI apart. It is aware of goals and is able to trace paths independently.

LLMs act like calculators—strong and exact, yet only working when someone triggers them. In contrast, agentic systems function more like accountants aware of what you want to achieve financially. They notice risky spending, highlight opportunities for savings, and organise findings ready for review long before being asked.

The distinction matters more than semantics suggest. Generative AI operates like an exceptionally talented assistant waiting for instructions. Ask GenAI to write an email and it writes an email. Ask it to analyse data and it

analyses data. But the moment you stop prompting it, it stops working. Agentic AI operates differently. It understands objectives and figures out the steps itself.

Agentic AI is not an upgrade of language models; it is a structural shift from task automation to autonomous organisational capability.

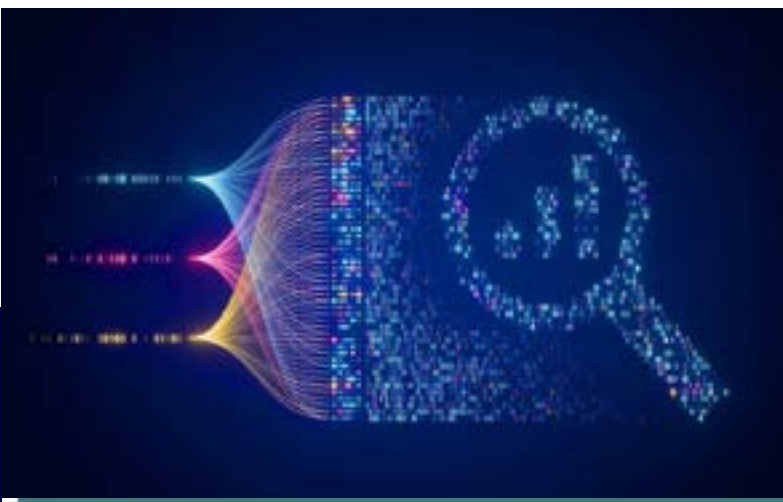


THE ARCHITECTURE

Let us understand the architecture of agentic AI in a little detail. We will first look at large language models (LLMs), followed by agentic AI and then multi-agent systems. LLMs operate through transformer architectures that process text as sequences of tokens and apply attention mechanisms to weigh contextual relationships across thousands of positions simultaneously. Training occurs on massive datasets,

optimising billions of parameters through gradient descent until the model learns statistical patterns. These learnings are robust enough to generate contextually appropriate responses. The result is a system that excels at pattern completion.

Technically, agentic AI involves four critical capabilities: sensing, planning, improving, and autonomy to take action. Agentic AI has the ability to break complex goals into logical sequences of subtasks. The most important part is planning, which determines how the desired subtasks will be carried out, given available resources and constraints. As these tasks are executed, agentic AI keeps sensing the environment for the impact of its actions and changing scenarios. It stores this information in memory and uses it to improve itself. Everything is done autonomously, without user interference.



A self-driving car agent, for example, has the capability to sense the environment through various sensors—cameras, infrared, 3D, and others—plan to reach the destination in the minimum time and at the least cost, without breaking rules or damaging the vehicle. The agent must make decisions quickly and, based on the consequences of previous decisions, continually improve itself.

Multi-agent systems extend this architecture horizontally. Here, specialised agents exist, each with distinct capabilities, knowledge bases, and objective functions. They communicate through structured protocols and defined subtasks, sharing intermediate results while coordinating actions. There are orchestration layers that manage agent instantiation, message routing, and conflict resolution. No single agent possesses complete capability, yet the collective accomplishes what individuals cannot. This is not merely an incremental improvement.

EMERGENCE OF SILICON WORKFORCE

Nowhere is change clearer than in how businesses handle support. Instead of merely replying, automated teams now solve problems end-to-end—checking stock, handling returns, arranging pickups, and confirming resolution. In financial operations, systems monitor activity closely, detect

anomalies, investigate suspicious patterns, and take corrective action autonomously.

What is reshaping work today does not come from job postings or office layouts; it is embedded in code changes. Software-driven shifts are quietly transforming organisations behind screens.

Teams of agents working together mark the next phase. Instead of one tool doing one job, organisations deploy multiple agents that collaborate, hand off tasks, and share workloads. One agent may engage customers, another manage logistics, while a third audits accuracy and flags issues for human review. Much like bee colonies, complex outcomes emerge from distributed problem-solving across specialised roles.

These systems do not assist humans—they replace workflows, coordinate decisions, and operate continuously as a scalable silicon workforce.

In factories, software now handles procurement and dynamically adjusts quantities when forecasts shift, suppliers falter, or inventories run low. In offices, legal teams use tools to review contracts, flag risks, suggest revisions, and log every change during negotiations.

Automation has crossed a threshold. Earlier, business-as-usual tasks were automated. Now, with agentic AI, even CxO-level functions are increasingly shaped by automation.



INDIA'S AGENTIC IMPERATIVE

India must consider how intelligent machines could change everything—not only because of risks, but because of new opportunities. Today, India's technology industry stands at roughly \$250 billion, driven largely by labour arbitrage and process excellence. But the ground is shifting. If autonomous coding tools take over tasks such as application development, testing, and user support, what happens to that model?

Yet opportunity remains. With a large pool of AI talent and a vibrant start-up ecosystem, India holds a competitive edge in building and deploying agentic systems—especially given its experience managing large, complex services. The question

is not whether change will occur, it already has, but whether India will shape it or be shaped by it.

Building indigenous capabilities matters. Developing home-grown systems, training models in local languages, and setting domestic rules could position India as a global hub for agentic AI deployment. In cities such as Bengaluru, Hyderabad, and Pune, teams are already creating platforms to orchestrate autonomous agents for global enterprises.



Strategic autonomy in AI is inseparable from infrastructure control. Dependence on external systems risks exposing sensitive processes to external oversight or manipulation. India's path forward requires simultaneous investment in research, deployable tools, and adaptive regulation.

GOVERNING THE UNGOVERNABLE

A profound governance dilemma emerges. If an agent denies a loan, rejects an appeal, or recommends medical care, who is accountable? The coder, the deploying firm, or the executive who authorised its use? Silicon-based workers operating at machine speed and scale render traditional oversight models ineffective.

Current regulations assume human decision-makers. Labour laws, accountability frameworks, and ethical codes all presuppose human judgement. When autonomous agents intervene, those assumptions collapse. Decisions emerge from vast training data, real-time inputs, and

layered objectives that are often opaque to humans.

Cross-border deployment compounds the problem. Systems built in one jurisdiction, deployed in another, and affecting users elsewhere stretch accountability beyond any single authority. The European Union's AI Act attempts to regulate based on risk, but enforcement across borders remains challenging. India's forthcoming Digital India Act must confront these global realities directly.

Possible responses include mandatory audit trails, human-in-the-loop requirements for high-risk decisions, insurance obligations for deployers, and cross-border governance norms. Yet technology continues to outpace the deliberative processes meant to contain its risks.

The real question is no longer whether agentic AI will transform work, but whether humans will retain strategic control over autonomous systems.

CHARTING THE AUTONOMOUS FUTURE

What survives in the age of agentic AI is not humanity's role, but its redefinition. Humans and machines will work differently—yet together. Moral judgment, creativity, empathy, and navigating ambiguity remain human strengths. Machines excel at repetition, speed, scale, and consistency.

A reallocation of work is underway. Organisations that adapt and integrate this division of labour effectively will gain durable advantages. Others may struggle as inertia compounds.

The unresolved question is whether humans will retain strategic control—or gradually relinquish it.

*(Dr Amit Dua is an Associate Professor at BITS, Pilani. He is a TEDx speaker and the author of multiple books on cutting-edge technologies. The views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of **The News Analytics Herald**.)*

QUICK INSIGHTS

- *Agentic AI marks a shift from task automation to fully autonomous, goal-driven digital workers.*
- *Multi-agent systems enable coordinated execution of complex organisational functions without continuous oversight.*
- *The rise of a silicon workforce challenges employment structures, management, and accountability frameworks.*
- *India holds strategic opportunity in developing, agentic systems through indigenous capabilities.*
- *Governance gaps around autonomy, accountability, and cross-border deployment remain the central unresolved risk.*

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