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**GUARDRAILS  
WITHOUT  
GUARANTEES**

**INSIGHT**

INDIA'S DELICATE BALANCE  
IN WEST ASIA

**BIG STORY**

THE AGE OF MANAGED  
ESCALATION

**HI-TECH**

HYPERSONICS AND THE  
NEW STRATEGIC BALANCE

# THE POWER PANEL



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# || FOREWORD



## THE FADING AUTHORITY OF THE GLOBAL ORDER

The current scenario in the world has amply displayed that the existing global order is crumbling under its own weight of perceptions solidified after 1945. The bipolar order that dominated the world for the first forty-five years after WWII gave way to Pax Americana, which is now faltering thanks to the policies, or rather caprices and dogmas, of a few leaders. The sheer unpredictability of the policies of the current dispensation in the United States has compelled its allies and foes alike to recalibrate their policy paradigms and to look for more viable options to protect their national interests.

The world is now witnessing a situation where norms, alliances and institutions are increasingly unable to restrain tensions and guarantee stability. The post-1945 institutions, created to ensure stability and peace in the world, have miserably failed to carry out this responsibility. Attempts to topple, at whim, an unfriendly government by all possible means are far beyond the rulebook of global order.

If a regime is suspected of involvement in drug trafficking or sponsoring terrorist activities beyond its international borders, it should be investigated by, and tried before, the available agencies instead of kidnapping or killing its leaders or indiscriminate carpet bombing of residential complexes, hospitals and schools. No country in the world can self-assume the role of police or judge unless authorised through the due process of law.

Similarly, no country has the authority to wage a proxy war against any other country by assisting non-state actors on the basis of religion or sect. But the very nations that helped create the existing world order after WWII are brazenly flouting it, and the irony is that the entire world is behaving as mute spectators.

It is within this evolving strategic landscape that this edition of The News Analytics Herald attempts to explore the emerging contours of a world where restraint remains visible but stability can no longer be taken for granted.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "F. Tripathi".

(Ambassador Jeitendra Tripathi IFS (Retd),  
Former Ambassador to Zimbabwe)

# || 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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# EDITOR'S NOTE



## GUARDRAILS WITHOUT GUARANTEES

*The global system today still operates within a framework of rules, institutions and diplomatic mechanisms designed to prevent major conflict. These guardrails continue to guide state behaviour and help manage tensions between rival powers. Yet the strategic environment increasingly suggests that these safeguards no longer provide the certainty they once did. Crises are rarely resolved quickly. Instead, they are often prolonged, carefully managed and kept within certain limits. Stability still exists, but it appears more fragile than before.*

*This edition reflects a moment when geopolitical tensions are unfolding within this uncertain framework. In several regions, political instability and power vacuums are intersecting with long-standing rivalries. Countries are trying to protect their strategic interests while also exercising caution to avoid wider conflict. Confrontation is not always expressed through direct war. Increasingly, it appears through calibrated escalation, signalling and indirect pressure.*

*At the same time, the consequences of earlier strategic choices are becoming more visible. Policies once designed to strengthen national security are now producing new challenges. Regional actors are therefore adjusting their positions as political and security conditions continue to shift.*

*Another important change lies in the nature of conflict itself. Competition between states is increasingly directed towards the systems that sustain modern life, energy networks, digital infrastructure, financial platforms and communication systems. These areas are emerging as important arenas of strategic contestation.*

*Technology is also becoming a central element of global influence. Scientific research, innovation ecosystems and technological partnerships are now closely linked to national power.*

*Taken together, these developments describe a world that still operates within guardrails, but without any guarantee that those guardrails will always hold.*

*Jai Hind!*

**Sandhya Srivastava**  
Editor-in-Chief &  
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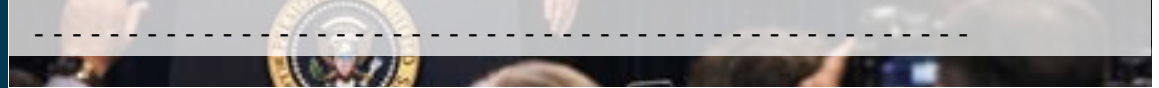
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# IRAN IN A POWER VACUUM

## BATTLEFIELD

*Iran now faces a defining strategic rupture. The assassination of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei has exposed the structural vulnerabilities of a system built upon centralised authority, while intensifying domestic unrest and external confrontation. As institutional fragility meets geopolitical pressure, the Islamic Republic enters a volatile transition where internal power struggles, security imperatives, and regional calculations will determine the future trajectory of the Iranian state.*



**NADIA HALLAK | BEIRUT, LEBANON |  
ARAB CORRESPONDENT, NEWS ANALYTICS**

The political system in Iran has never been ordinary or assessable by conventional measures of power succession. Since the founding of the Islamic Republic in 1979 under its architect, the political structure has been built around a central idea: the Supreme Leader, who combines religious legitimacy and political authority, serving as the ultimate reference in strategic matters and representing the apex of a hierarchy in which all executive, military, and religious powers are concentrated.

Yet even before the assassination of the current Supreme Leader, Iran was experiencing an unprecedented internal crisis. Tehran and several major cities witnessed widespread protests, reflecting growing public frustration with economic, social, and political conditions, including rising unemployment, inflation, deteriorating basic services, and the lack of political freedoms. These protests were more than mere expressions of anger; they began to resemble an attempted popular uprising against the government, revealing the fragility of



the internal structure and the extent to which the state relied on a single central authority—the Supreme Leader—to manage all internal and external conflicts.

With the assassination of Supreme Leader Ali Khamenei through precise Israeli missile strikes in Tehran, the Iranian regime faced a dual test unlike any before: confronting a direct external threat while managing a vast internal power vacuum that threatens the stability of state institutions. A state that centralised decision-making in a single figure and linked its stability to the Supreme Leader now faces a void exposing the absence of genuine mechanisms for power

apex. Therefore, Khamenei's assassination represents a dual shock: internally, where the vacuum creates potential power struggles within the regime, and externally, where Iran becomes less capable of confronting regional challenges with its previous effectiveness.

*The concentration of executive, military, and religious authority in a single apex figure created a system resilient in control but inherently vulnerable to a single decisive strike.*

## THE DUAL CRISIS

Popular protests prior to the assassination reflected the magnitude of social anger at failing economic policies, high unemployment, inflation, and crises in energy and water provision. These internal pressures were continuous and expected to escalate into a direct threat to regime stability.

The direct Israeli strike on Tehran further intensified the crisis. It was not merely a symbolic act but a direct targeting of the regime's apex. This combination of escalating internal unrest and a direct external threat makes the upcoming phase extremely complex, placing the new leadership before an

transfer, placing its institutions under unprecedented strain. Concentrating executive, military, and religious powers in a single hand has not produced a balanced system but a regime heavily dependent on its apex, making any targeted attack a direct blow to the entire governing structure.

## POWER VACUUM

The absence of the Supreme Leader has clearly exposed the internal fragility of the system. There are no genuine mechanisms for power rotation that allow the state to function normally in the absence of centralised leadership. The constitution designates the Assembly of Experts with the responsibility of electing a new Supreme Leader, with the possibility of forming an interim leadership body composed of the president, the head of the judiciary, and one jurist from the Guardian Council. However, these provisions are insufficient to cover the void created by the loss of a pivotal figure who controls all aspects of state affairs.

The regime, built on centralised authority, relies almost entirely on a single individual to manage internal conflicts among various currents—conservative, pragmatic, or reformist. Without this figure, state institutions face an unprecedented test, as determining strategic policies, protecting borders, and managing domestic protests now falls to bodies unaccustomed to functioning in a leadership vacuum.

The excessive concentration of power in the Supreme Leader made the system highly vulnerable to any direct strike on its



unprecedented test: managing domestic protests, protecting state institutions, and maintaining strategic deterrence against Israel and the United States.

The regime must now address both dimensions simultaneously; domestic problems cannot be handled independently of external threats, and vice versa. Any weakness in either domain jeopardises the entire structure and deepens the crisis beyond any previous challenge.

## THE REVOLUTIONARY GUARD

The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps (IRGC), serves as the fundamental pillar for the regime's continuity both domestically and regionally. Since the Iran–Iraq War, the

Guard, which has evolved from an ideological military force into a multidimensional institution with extensive economic and political influence, as well as the ability to direct regional military operations.

After the Supreme Leader's assassination, and amid ongoing domestic protests, the IRGC is the actor best equipped to absorb shocks and organise responses to the dual crisis,



whether by controlling internal dissent or maintaining military deterrence. Nevertheless, repeated targeting of its bases and leadership by regional and international actors places it under unprecedented pressure, which may impact the regime's capacity to manage internal and external affairs effectively.

The IRGC's growing influence has intensified the state's security-oriented approach at the expense of civil institutions, weakening their ability to absorb internal crises and increasing the regime's reliance on military and security forces to counter threats.

*In the absence of a Supreme Leader, the Revolutionary Guard emerges as the only institution capable of absorbing shocks, managing unrest, and sustaining deterrence.*

## POLITICAL CURRENTS

The vacuum left by the Supreme Leader's assassination has revived internal struggles among competing political currents within the regime:

**Hardline Conservatives:** They argue for a dual response—internal and external—tightening control over protests while escalating military deterrence. Any domestic or foreign openness is viewed as a weakness, emphasising the continuation of revolutionary rhetoric to maintain internal control.

**Pragmatic Faction:** They advocate cautious management of the crisis, balancing the handling of domestic protests with mitigating external tensions through discreet diplomatic

channels and tactical policies that preserve minimal stability without provoking direct confrontation.

**Reformist Voices:** They call for redistributing power within the regime, reducing the Supreme Leader's centrality, and improving governance. However, they face a dual challenge; mounting popular pressure and external threats, which place security priorities above reformist agendas.

Three primary scenarios can be envisaged for the next phase. The first involves a strategy of military deterrence, centred on strengthening defensive capabilities, deploying missile deterrence against Israel, and intensifying internal control to ensure that external threats cannot exploit the internal vacuum. A second scenario would pursue a tactical balance, combining efforts to calm domestic unrest with recalibrating external relations through discreet diplomacy, thereby maintaining regime stability without provoking direct confrontation. The third scenario would prioritise a domestic focus, reordering national priorities towards economic and social stability while strengthening civil institutions and maintaining minimal defensive capabilities to safeguard internal stability.



## CRITICAL CHALLENGES

Recent protests have highlighted the regime's vulnerability to economic and social pressures. High unemployment, rising inflation, inadequate basic services, and the aspirations of educated and globally aware youth demand urgent reformist policies from the incoming leadership.

Failure to address these issues will exacerbate protests and potentially push the regime towards larger crises, especially if external escalations coincide. The regime must strike a delicate balance between military deterrence and implementing economic and social reforms to ensure continued stability.

Israeli strikes and U.S. threats have exposed Iran's diminished regional influence. Its policies in the Middle East, including relationships with its affiliates in Lebanon, Yemen, and Iraq, have become limited in effect. Any internal vacuum or partial



with rising domestic protests and a direct external threat from Israel and the United States. A state that tied its stability to the Supreme Leader and concentrated executive, military, and religious powers in a single figure now confronts an unprecedented test that places its future on the line.

Now that Mojtaba Khamenei has been chosen as successor of Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, the challenge is not just leadership change, but managing power between security, economy, and politics while maintaining regional influence and deterrence. The regime may survive, but it will not be the same as before, and Iran's domestic landscape and foreign relations are poised to undergo profound changes that could reshape the Middle East and redefine the distribution of regional influence.



*(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 by the author and any guest experts do not necessarily reflect the views of **The News Analytics Herald.**)*

collapse would immediately weaken Iran's regional influence, opening space for a reconfiguration of the Middle East free from Iranian control.

The new leadership faces the challenge of balancing military deterrence with maintaining regional influence without being drawn into costly conflicts that could exacerbate domestic crises.

***Iran's crisis is not merely about succession; it represents a structural test of whether a centralised revolutionary state can survive simultaneous domestic upheaval and external confrontation.***

## EXISTENTIAL TEST

Today, Iran faces a dual existential crisis: the power vacuum following the Supreme Leader's assassination, combined

## QUICK INSIGHTS

- *Assassination reveals Iran's reliance on centralised power and fragile succession structures.*
- *Rising domestic protests and economic pressures have already strained regime legitimacy before the leadership vacuum emerged.*
- *The regime now faces a dual crisis: internal instability alongside escalating confrontation with Israel and the United States.*
- *The Islamic Revolutionary Guard Corps remains the regime's main stabilising force but faces growing operational pressures.*
- *Iran's trajectory depends on balancing reforms, stability, and regional deterrence amid shifting dynamics.*

# THE AGE OF MANAGED ESCALATION

**BIG STORY**



*The international system is entering a phase where crises are no longer resolved but carefully managed. Major powers increasingly rely on calibrated escalation, limited retaliation, and economic coercion to sustain strategic competition without triggering catastrophic war. From Ukraine to the Indo-Pacific, confrontation persists within implicit limits, creating a paradoxical order where stability survives even as strategic certainty steadily erodes.*



**AMBASSADOR SUSHIL KUMAR SINGHAL, IFS (R)  
FOR NEWS ANALYTICS**

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The present international system is entering a strategic phase best described as the age of managed escalation. Across multiple theatres, from the war in Ukraine to the confrontation in Iran, and strategic rivalry in the Indo-Pacific, major powers are increasingly calibrating crises rather than resolving them. Military actions rarely aim at decisive victory or political settlement. Instead, they function as instruments of signalling, coercion, and deterrence management.

Limited retaliation, controlled risk-taking, and carefully measured responses have become dominant methods of strategic competition. Even states with expanding geopolitical ambitions are cautious about crossing thresholds that could trigger uncontrollable escalation. China, for instance, despite its strategic partnerships with Russia and Iran, has shown reluctance to engage militarily on their behalf. Rather than direct intervention, China prefers economic engagement, diplomatic support, and strategic ambiguity.

At the same time, economic coercion has become an important instrument within this escalation matrix. Under the leadership of President Donald Trump 2.0, tariffs and trade restrictions have been deployed as economic policy tools and as instruments of geopolitical pressure. Economic statecraft now functions alongside military signalling as part of a strategy for managing confrontation without triggering full-scale war. The resulting global environment reflects a paradox: deterrence survives, yet strategic certainty steadily erodes, leaving the international system locked in cycles of persistent but controlled crises.

*Modern great-power rivalry is increasingly defined not by decisive wars but by carefully managed crises, where signalling, limited retaliation, and economic coercion sustain strategic competition.*

## CRISIS AS STRATEGY

A defining characteristic of the present international order is the transformation of crises from anomalies into structured arenas of strategic competition. Rather than seeking rapid conflict termination, major powers are operating within prolonged crises that allow them to apply pressure on adversaries while avoiding catastrophic escalation. Three mechanisms underpin this approach.

First, signalling replaces decisive escalation. Military deployments, missile strikes, naval patrols, and cyber operations are designed not only for operational purposes but also to communicate political intent.

Second, retaliation is limited; responses to provocation are calibrated to impose costs without triggering broader war. Such retaliation may involve precision strikes, cyber operations, proxy warfare, or economic sanctions.

Third, risk-taking is controlled. States deliberately test the boundaries of escalation to maintain credibility and influence strategic calculations. Yet decision-makers remain acutely aware of escalation thresholds, particularly when nuclear-armed powers are involved.

Together, these mechanisms produce a geopolitical environment where confrontation is sustained but bounded. Crises become enduring features of international politics rather than temporary disruptions.

## UKRAINE THEATRE

The war between Russia and Ukraine illustrates how managed escalation operates in a large-scale interstate conflict. From the beginning, European governments attempted to balance two objectives: supporting Ukraine's resistance while avoiding direct military confrontation with Russia. The United States and its allies gradually expanded their military assistance to Kyiv. Advanced artillery systems, intelligence sharing, and

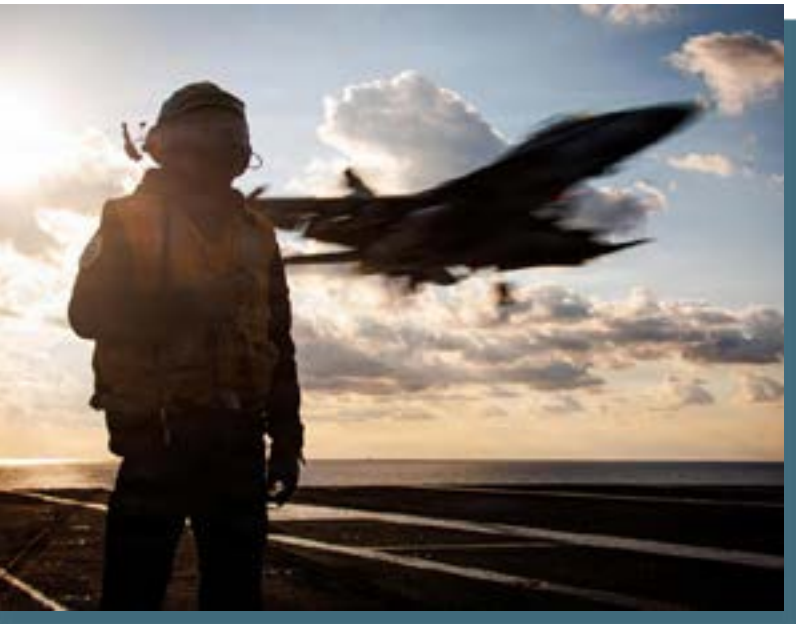
financial support were introduced incrementally. Each escalation step was carefully framed. Political leaders emphasised defensive objectives and imposed restrictions on certain weapons systems. This phased approach allowed Western governments to strengthen Ukraine's capabilities while signalling caution regarding escalation.

Russia has adopted its own strategy of calibrated pressure. Missile strikes on infrastructure, drone campaigns, and periodic references to nuclear deterrence have reinforced Moscow's strategic messaging. It demonstrates Russia's capacity to escalate while stopping short of actions that could trigger direct NATO involvement.



The Ukraine war is one of the best examples of the central logic of managed escalation: a high-intensity conflict fought within implicit limits.

*Managed escalation allows major powers to pursue confrontation while avoiding catastrophic war, sustaining pressure through calibrated military signalling, economic coercion, and carefully measured retaliation.*



## WEST ASIA CONFRONTATION

The current confrontation involving Iran, Israel, and the United States demonstrates how escalation management functions within a volatile regional environment. Israeli and American strikes targeting Iranian military infrastructure were designed to degrade the capabilities of Tehran while avoiding a full-scale invasion that could ignite a broader regional war. Precision air strikes and covert operations represent a strategy of controlled military pressure.

The response of Iran has so far followed a pattern of calibrated retaliation. Missile and drone attacks have targeted military facilities and regional assets linked to the United States and its partners. At the same time, Tehran has relied heavily on proxy networks and asymmetric warfare rather than attempting a direct conventional confrontation with American military power.

The conflict has generated regional spillover. Attacks near critical shipping routes around the Strait of Hormuz have heightened global economic anxiety, particularly regarding energy markets. Yet even these actions reflect calculated escalation rather than indiscriminate confrontation.

The Iran–Israel–United States crisis demonstrates that modern regional wars can be both destructive and strategically constrained.

## STRATEGIC RESTRAINT

Another defining element of the current strategic environment is the reluctance of major powers to assume direct military risks on behalf of their partners. China's conduct during recent crises illustrates this dynamic clearly. Despite its political alignment with Russia, Beijing has avoided direct military involvement in the Ukraine war. China has expanded economic engagement with Moscow, particularly in energy trade, and provided diplomatic support in international forums. But it has refrained from supplying significant military assistance that could provoke confrontation with Western powers.

Similarly, during tensions involving Iran, China has limited its role to diplomatic statements and economic engagement rather than military intervention.

This approach reflects Beijing's strategic priorities. China's central geopolitical objective remains the balance of power in the Indo-Pacific. Direct involvement in distant conflicts could expose China to sanctions, economic disruption, and military confrontation with the United States. Instead, China practices strategic restraint combined with opportunistic positioning. By avoiding entanglement while expanding economic and diplomatic influence, Beijing benefits from the strategic distraction of Western powers.

## ECONOMIC STATECRAFT

As mentioned above, economic tools increasingly function as mechanisms of strategic coercion. Under President Trump 2.0, tariffs have emerged as a central instrument of American foreign policy. The imposition of tariffs on Chinese goods



during the US–China trade confrontation marked a significant departure from traditional trade diplomacy.

Tariffs were deployed not merely to address trade imbalances but to signal strategic competition with China. Economic pressure soon expanded beyond tariffs alone. Export controls, technology restrictions, sanctions regimes, and supply-chain restructuring became part of a broader framework of economic statecraft. Economic policy is increasingly integrated with national security strategy.

## THE STRATEGIC COMPETITION

The Indo-Pacific represents the central arena of long-term strategic rivalry between China and the United States. Tensions surrounding Taiwan illustrate the logic of signalling within this rivalry. China conducts regular military exercises around the island, deploying naval forces and aircraft to demonstrate its ability to isolate Taiwan in the event of a crisis.

The United States responds through freedom-of-navigation operations, security cooperation with regional allies, and continued arms transfers to Taiwan. These actions serve as strategic signals rather than preparations for immediate war. Similarly, confrontations in the South China Sea frequently involve aggressive manoeuvres between vessels but rarely escalate into lethal engagements.

Several structural forces encourage this emerging pattern of calibrated confrontation. The first is nuclear deterrence, which continues to impose powerful constraints on escalation between major powers. The presence of nuclear weapons fundamentally alters strategic calculations, ensuring that direct war between nuclear-armed states carries risks far beyond conventional conflict.

The second structural driver is economic interdependence. In an era of deeply integrated global markets, supply chains, and financial networks, large-scale interstate war would generate severe economic consequences not only for the belligerents but for the global system.

The third factor is the rise of economics as an instrument of strategic competition. Tariffs, sanctions, export controls, and financial restrictions now function as tools of geopolitical signalling and coercion. The growing fusion of economic policy with national security strategy has expanded the toolkit available for managing confrontation.

Taken together, these forces create powerful incentives for states to pursue rivalry through controlled escalation rather than decisive conflict. The resulting strategic environment is one in which competition remains intense and persistent, yet major powers seek to ensure that escalation remains manageable rather than catastrophic.

*The emerging global order preserves stability not through resolution of conflicts but through continuous calibration of rivalry, embedding the international system in persistent uncertainty.*

## FUNDAMENTAL TRANSFORMATION

The contemporary international order is increasingly being shaped by crises that are managed rather than resolved. Major powers rely on calibrated strategies of competition while attempting to avoid uncontrolled escalation.

This evolving pattern reflects a fundamental transformation in how power is exercised in the international system. Military confrontation is no longer the sole mechanism of coercion; it is now complemented by economic statecraft and technological restrictions. Together, these tools allow states to impose costs, demonstrate resolve, and shape adversary behaviour without crossing the thresholds that might trigger large-scale war.

The presence of nuclear weapons, economic interdependence, and the availability of non-military instruments of coercion all serve to discourage direct great-power conflict. Yet the mechanisms through which escalation is managed are becoming increasingly complex and unpredictable. Because crises are prolonged rather than decisively settled, the boundaries of acceptable behaviour remain fluid and constantly contested.

The age of managed escalation thus represents a new strategic equilibrium in global politics, one that reduces the immediate likelihood of catastrophic war but simultaneously embeds the international system in a persistent condition of strategic uncertainty. Stability is preserved, but it is a fragile stability, maintained not through resolution but through the continuous calibration of rivalry among competing powers.

*(Ambassador Sushil Kumar Singhal, IFS (R), former Ambassador to Angola. He has served in Tanzania, Belgium, Bangladesh and Hungary. The views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of **The News Analytics Herald**.)*

## QUICK INSIGHTS

- Major powers now manage crises via calibrated escalation, avoiding decisive victory or settlement.
- Conflicts from Ukraine to West Asia illustrate competition conducted within limits to avoid uncontrollable great-power escalation.
- Economic statecraft now complements military signalling as a strategic coercion tool.
- Nuclear deterrence and interdependence prevent war yet sustain intense geopolitical rivalry.
- Managed escalation preserves short-term stability but embeds the international system in persistent cycles of strategic uncertainty.

# GLOBAL INFLUENCER

## SANAE TAKAICHI: REDEFINING

NEWS ANALYTICS | SPECIAL FEATURE

In a period marked by geopolitical uncertainty and shifting power balances, leadership in key regions plays an important role in shaping the direction of the international system. Among the figures attracting attention in this evolving environment is Sanae Takaichi. Her rise to office is significant not only because she is Japan's first female prime minister, but also because it reflects a broader shift in Japan's strategic outlook in the Indo-Pacific.

Takaichi assumed office at a time when Japan faced a rapidly changing security environment. Tensions in East Asia have been rising steadily. China's growing military presence in the region and North Korea's continued missile and nuclear programmes have raised concerns in Tokyo. These developments have encouraged Japan to rethink some elements of its long-standing security posture.

### RISING SECURITY PRESSURES

Under Takaichi's leadership, Japan has continued to strengthen its national security planning. Defence reforms are moving forward with greater urgency, including efforts to expand strategic capabilities and gradually increase defence spending. The goal is to ensure that Japan can respond

more effectively to emerging threats while maintaining stability in its surrounding region.

One of the defining features of Takaichi's approach is her emphasis on technology as a core element of national power. Her administration has placed strong focus on investment in advanced sectors such as artificial intelligence, semiconductor manufacturing, biotechnology and defence innovation. In today's global environment, technological capacity is increasingly linked to national resilience and economic security. For Japan, strengthening its technological base is seen as essential for maintaining competitiveness and strategic independence.

This focus on technology also reflects a wider global trend. Competition between major powers is no longer limited to traditional military capabilities. It now extends to areas such as digital infrastructure, supply chains, industrial technology and scientific research. Countries that lead in these fields are better positioned to shape the future balance of power.

### INDO-PACIFIC PARTNERSHIPS

At the diplomatic level, Takaichi's leadership signals continuity in Japan's engagement with the broader Indo-Pacific region. Tokyo has consistently supported the idea of a free and open Indo-Pacific, emphasising cooperation among countries that share an interest in regional stability and secure sea lanes. Japan is therefore strengthening partnerships with a range of countries across Asia and beyond.



# OF THE MONTH

## JAPAN'S STRATEGIC ROLE

Within this framework, India has emerged as one of Japan's most important strategic partners. Over the past decade, the India–Japan relationship has developed into a Special Strategic and Global Partnership covering multiple areas of cooperation. These include infrastructure development, economic connectivity, defence collaboration and supply-chain resilience.

## SHAPING FUTURE ARCHITECTURES

For India, Japan's evolving strategic role carries considerable importance. Both countries view the Indo-Pacific as a region where economic growth, maritime security and technological progress intersect. Cooperation between the two nations increasingly focuses on areas such as semiconductor development, emerging technologies and defence innovation. These areas are expected to play a critical role in shaping future economic and security architectures.

India and Japan also share a broader interest in maintaining stability across the Indo-Pacific. Secure sea lanes are vital for global trade, and both countries depend heavily on maritime routes for economic prosperity. Through frameworks such as the Quad, they are working with other partners to strengthen cooperation in areas ranging from maritime security to critical technologies.

Takaichi's tenure, therefore, comes at an important moment for Japan's strategic trajectory. The country is gradually moving towards a more active role in shaping regional security arrangements. While Japan continues to value its long-standing alliances and international commitments, it is also becoming more proactive in protecting its own national interests.

## IMPORTANT OPPORTUNITIES

This shift does not represent a sudden departure from Japan's post-war identity. Rather, it reflects a careful adjustment to changing geopolitical realities. Japanese policymakers increasingly recognise that economic strength, technological leadership and security preparedness must work together in order to safeguard national interests.

Takaichi has been clear in emphasising the importance of economic security. In recent years, disruptions in global supply chains and technological competition have highlighted the risks of excessive dependence on external sources for critical technologies. Strengthening domestic capabilities and building trusted partnerships, therefore, form an important part of Japan's strategy.

Her leadership also highlights a broader transition in global politics. Middle powers with advanced technological capabilities are beginning to play a more prominent role in shaping regional security architectures. Countries such as Japan are no longer content to remain passive observers of global developments. Instead, they are seeking to influence the strategic environment through diplomacy, economic partnerships and technological innovation.

## CHANGING REALITY

For India, Japan's evolving role under Takaichi offers important opportunities. The two countries share similar concerns about regional stability, technological security and resilient supply chains. As cooperation expands in fields such as research, infrastructure and advanced manufacturing, the partnership between India and Japan is likely to become even more significant.

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# INDIA'S DELICATE BALANCE IN WEST ASIA

## INSIGHT

*Prime Minister Narendra Modi's February 2026 visit to Israel marked more than a diplomatic ceremony. It signalled a visible shift in India's West Asia strategy. By elevating ties to a Special Strategic Partnership, New Delhi indicated that Israel is now viewed not only as a defence partner but as part of a wider regional architecture linking technology cooperation, connectivity initiatives, and India's evolving geopolitical balancing in a volatile region.*



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Prime Minister Narendra Modi's visit to Israel on 25–26 February 2026 was not merely a ceremonial reaffirmation of an already warm bilateral relationship. It marked a clear strategic step forward. By upgrading ties to a “Special Strategic Partnership for Peace, Innovation and Prosperity”, the visit showed that, in New Delhi's current foreign policy thinking, Israel is no longer viewed only as a defence supplier or a useful technology partner. It is increasingly being integrated into India's broader strategy in West Asia.

own political weight. By addressing the Knesset and stating that India stands with Israel “firmly, with full conviction”, Modi signalled that New Delhi is now more willing than in

*India is no longer engaging Israel merely as a defence supplier. The relationship is gradually becoming a broader strategic instrument within New Delhi's evolving West Asia policy framework.*



the past to display its closeness to Israel openly and at the highest political level.

Still, the significance of the visit lies not only in rhetoric or symbolism. It is also evident in the substance of the agreements and public announcements. The joint statement makes clear that the relationship is expanding well beyond defence procurement. India and Israel agreed to deepen cooperation in defence and security, critical and emerging technologies, artificial intelligence, cybersecurity, semiconductors, quantum technologies, biotechnology, space, digital payments, health, higher education, and labour mobility. The two sides also

### STRATEGIC SHIFT

The timing of the visit is important. Modi arrived in Israel at a moment of deep regional instability, ongoing war in Gaza, and rising tensions involving Iran and the United States. In that context, the decision to proceed with the visit carried its

moved forward on bilateral free trade agreement talks, expanded research cooperation, and agreed that up to 50,000 additional Indian workers may come to Israel over the next five years. This is no longer a narrow security relationship. It is becoming a broader strategic partnership with economic, technological, and institutional depth.

Defence, of course, remains central. The joint statement referred explicitly to the November 2025 defence cooperation memorandum and noted that the two leaders had provided both a vision and a roadmap for future defence ties. It's also reported that Modi spoke of joint development, joint production, and technology transfer in defence. This matters because it aligns closely with the logic of Atmanirbhar Bharat. India is no longer looking only to buy foreign systems; it seeks co-development, technology absorption, and industrial gains. Israel fits this model well because it offers innovation, operational experience, and a relatively flexible framework for technological cooperation.



## EXPANDING AGENDA

At the same time, it would be too narrow to read the visit only through a defensive lens. What stands out is the extent to which the relationship is now being framed as part of India's broader state-building and resilience agenda. The "horizon scanning" initiative, the focus on financial and cyber resilience, the proposed linkage between India's UPI and Israeli payment systems, and the strengthening of joint research and innovation all point in that direction. In other words, Israel is becoming relevant not only to India's security policy but also to its wider effort to build technological capacity and long-term resilience.

The regional dimension is just as important. In his public remarks, Modi explicitly linked India-Israel ties to IMEC and I2U2, placing bilateral relations within wider multilateral and connectivity frameworks. This suggests that New Delhi increasingly sees Israel not as a separate bilateral track but as part of a larger regional design that connects India to the Gulf and the eastern Mediterranean. In that sense, the visit did two things at once: it deepened bilateral ties while also reinforcing India's broader strategic role in the evolving political economy of West Asian connectivity.

## REGIONAL GEOMETRY

What matters now, however, is not only what Modi's visit achieved in terms of diplomatic signalling but also how the partnership has been reframed by the severe regional disruption

that followed. Since the visit, India has had to confront a direct disruption of energy flows through the Gulf and the Strait of Hormuz. Reuters reported that the crisis affected India's supplies of crude oil, LPG, and LNG, forcing the government to divert supplies towards priority civilian sectors, urge households to shift to piped gas where possible, and introduce emergency measures to stabilise domestic consumption. Indian industrial firms also began reporting reduced output due to shortages of fuel and industrial gases. This changes the meaning of the visit in important ways. Israel can no longer be understood only through the language of defence, innovation, and technology; it is now also part of a wider regional strategic equation whose escalation imposes real material costs on India.

This does not mean that India's balancing logic has disappeared. Rather, it has become more expensive, more difficult to sustain, and more exposed to external pressure. That is precisely why the deepening partnership with Israel must be read alongside India's continuing need for Iran. For New Delhi, Iran has long represented more than a bilateral relationship. It has been a gateway to Afghanistan and Central Asia, a geopolitical workaround to Pakistan, and a strategic counterweight to Gwadar and the wider China-Pakistan axis. The logic of Chabahar was therefore never merely commercial. It reflected a broader effort to preserve westward access under conditions of territorial denial and strategic competition. The problem now is that this asset has become progressively more vulnerable to both American sanctions pressure and the broader militarisation of the regional environment. In that sense, the current crisis has not eliminated India's western strategy; it has exposed its growing fragility.



*The expanding agenda shows that India-Israel ties are moving beyond defence transactions toward a wider partnership linking technology, economic cooperation, innovation ecosystems, and long-term strategic resilience.*

## STRATEGIC TRADE-OFFS

The broader implication is that Modi's visit to Israel should no longer be read only as a sign of deepening bilateral ties. It should also be understood as a moment that revealed the narrowing room for manoeuvre within India's wider West

Asia strategy. The closer India moves towards visible strategic convergence with Israel, the harder it becomes to preserve a functional working relationship with Iran at a time when access, connectivity, energy security, and maritime stability remain vital Indian interests. What has changed, then, is not the existence of balancing but the cost structure surrounding it. India is still attempting to maintain multiple regional relationships at once, but it is now doing so in an environment where every alignment produces sharper trade-offs than before.

*India's West Asia strategy still rests on balancing multiple partners simultaneously, but the intensifying regional conflict is steadily increasing the economic, diplomatic, and strategic costs of that balancing act.*



That said, the visit should not be overstated. It does not mean that India has chosen Israel at the expense of all its other regional relationships. Modi was careful to stress that peace and stability in West Asia are directly linked to India's own interests, and that India will continue to engage in dialogue and cooperation with all countries. This remains essential for New Delhi. India has major interests in the Gulf, including energy security, trade routes, the safety of its diaspora, and access to wider Eurasian corridors. So while Modi visibly tightened ties with Israel, India did not abandon its broader balancing logic. What changed was not the existence of balancing itself but the degree of public comfort with a closer

strategic relationship with Israel.

This also helps explain why the visit drew criticism. Opposition voices and outside commentators argued that a visit taking place during the devastation in Gaza and amid growing regional tensions marked a departure from India's earlier diplomatic caution and from its traditional posture on Palestine. These criticisms should not be dismissed. They do not negate the strategic logic of the visit, but they do highlight the political and reputational costs that may accompany India's closer embrace of Israel. The period in which New Delhi could deepen ties with Israel while maintaining a degree of rhetorical distance is clearly fading.

## POLICY TRANSITION

The visit is therefore, best understood as a sign of transition in Indian foreign policy. It reflects an India that is less committed to the older language of distance, more willing to turn strategic convergence into visible political alignment, and increasingly ready to integrate diplomacy, defence, technology, labour, and connectivity within a single framework. From Israel's perspective, this means that India is no longer just an important bilateral partner. It is becoming part of a wider strategic landscape in which Israel is seeking to position itself.

This does not amount to a formal alliance. India still avoids alliances, protects its room for manoeuvre, and resists full identification with any single regional bloc. But the visit does show that, under Modi, strategic autonomy no longer means maintaining equal public distance from all sides. In that sense, the visit was not only about Israel. It was also about the terms under which India now seeks to operate in West Asia: more visibly aligned, more strategically invested, and more exposed to the costs of regional instability than before.

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## QUICK INSIGHTS

- *Modi's 2026 Israel visit signalled India's shift from transactional ties toward a broader strategic partnership framework.*
- *Cooperation now extends beyond defence into technology, innovation, economic links, and institutional collaboration.*
- *India increasingly integrates Israel into wider regional frameworks such as IMEC and I2U2 connectivity initiatives.*
- *India faces rising trade-offs balancing Israel–Iran ties amid Gulf energy disruptions.*
- *Visit signals shift toward visible strategic alignment while maintaining broader regional balance.*

# PAKISTAN'S STRATEGIC DEPTH TURNS STRATEGIC TRAP

## NEIGHBOURHOOD

*Pakistan's doctrine of strategic depth in Afghanistan was conceived as a shield against external threats. Instead, it has evolved into a source of strategic vulnerability. The Taliban's return to power, the resurgence of Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan, and rising cross-border tensions now expose the unintended consequences of decades of proxy-driven policy, leaving Islamabad confronting militancy, instability, and a volatile western frontier.*



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**ASIAN REGION FOR NEWS ANALYTICS**

For nearly half a century, Pakistan's generals spoke in the language of geometry. Depth. Flanks. Strategic rear space. Afghanistan, in this cartography of fear, was never just a neighbour; it was a buffer against India, a fallback position in the event of war, a pliable hinterland that could be shaped through influence and proxies. The phrase was deceptively clinical—"strategic depth." The consequences have been anything but.

It was a doctrine born of insecurity after 1971, hardened during the Soviet war, refined during the first Taliban emirate, and resurrected in the long American twilight in Afghanistan. Today, that doctrine lies in ruins. What was meant to be depth has become quicksand.

The policy's unintended consequence is now unmistakable: internal militancy, cross-border insurgency, and a Taliban regime in Kabul that behaves less like a proxy and more like a sovereign actor with its own agenda. Blowback is no longer theoretical. It is measurable—in bomb blasts, funerals, refugee convoys, and diplomatic isolation.

## STRATEGIC MIRAGE

Pakistan's concept of strategic depth emerged in the 1980s, when the anti-Soviet jihad in Afghanistan offered both opportunity and leverage. Through patronage of Islamist factions—most notably the precursors to what would become the Afghan Taliban—Islamabad sought influence in Kabul. The assumption was simple: a friendly Afghanistan would



*Strategic depth promised Pakistan security through influence in Afghanistan, yet decades later the doctrine has returned as instability, insurgency, and strategic exposure.*

prevent encirclement by India and provide fallback space in the event of conventional war.

That logic endured long after the Soviet collapse. During the 1990s, Pakistan backed the Afghan Taliban's rise to power. After 2001, even as Islamabad formally joined the U.S. war

on terror, elements within its security apparatus were accused of maintaining selective ties to Taliban factions. The gamble was that militant proxies could be calibrated—useful against external rivals, containable at home.

History is littered with examples of states believing they could tame irregular forces. The United States thought it could manage Afghan warlords. The Soviets assumed they could control revolutionary allies in Eastern Europe. Pakistan believed it could ride the tiger of jihadist militancy. Tigers, as it turns out, do not accept leashes.



## TALIBAN MISCALCULATION

When the Afghan Taliban swept back to power in August 2021, many in Islamabad quietly celebrated. The expectation was not public but palpable: the new rulers in Kabul would reciprocate years of support. Pakistan anticipated cooperation against anti-Pakistan militants operating from Afghan soil, particularly the Tehreek-e-Taliban Pakistan (TTP).

Instead, the Taliban prioritised autonomy. They sought legitimacy beyond Pakistan's shadow—courting regional actors, consolidating internal unity, and resisting overt Pakistani pressure. Ideological affinity with the TTP complicated matters further. Both movements share Deobandi roots, tribal linkages, and a history of collaboration.

Rather than dismantle TTP sanctuaries, the Taliban adopted what might be called strategic ambiguity. Public denials. Private tolerance. Occasional mediation. No sustained crackdown. The result? The TTP resurged with vigour.

## TTP'S RESURGENCE

Since 2021, the TTP has grown in strength, organisation, and ambition. Estimates suggest its fighting force has expanded into the thousands, bolstered by released prisoners, unification of splinter groups, and access to Afghan safe havens.

The numbers tell part of the story. Attacks surged dramatically after 2021. By 2024 and 2025, incidents ranged from ambushes

in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa to bombings in urban centres and operations extending into Balochistan and Punjab. In early 2026, a single January week reportedly witnessed dozens of attacks.

This is not mere insurgent persistence. It is a strategic adaptation. The TTP has refined its tactics—improvised explosive devices, coordinated ambushes, targeted assassinations—while attempting to cultivate a narrative of disciplined resistance. The group's leadership under Noor Wali Mehsud has emphasised unity and strategic focus. Blowback has a body count. Pakistani soldiers, police officers, and civilians have paid the price.

*The Afghan Taliban's autonomy has exposed the illusion of proxy control, leaving Pakistan confronting a militant threat nurtured by its own strategic calculations.*

## SAFE HAVENS

The Afghan Taliban's role in enabling TTP operations is central. Reports from international monitoring bodies indicate that TTP fighters operate from eastern Afghan provinces such as Kunar, Nangarhar, Khost, and Paktika. Safe houses, logistical networks, and access to weaponry have provided operational depth to a group once battered by Pakistani military campaigns.

Financial and logistical facilitation, whether direct or permissive, has allowed the TTP to regroup. The Taliban



leadership insists it does not allow Afghan soil to be used against neighbours. Yet actions—or inaction—suggest otherwise.

This dynamic reflects ideological kinship and political calculus. The Taliban fear that aggressively suppressing the TTP could fracture their own ranks or push militants towards rivals like Islamic State Khorasan Province (ISKP). Containing TTP without confronting it has become Kabul's uneasy compromise. For Pakistan, that compromise feels like betrayal.

## MANAGEMENT TO CONFRONTATION

Islamabad's response has shifted from negotiation to coercion. Diplomatic talks mediated in cities like Doha and Istanbul collapsed. Cross-border artillery exchanges and airstrikes followed. By early 2026, Pakistani officials spoke openly of "open war" scenarios after alleged Taliban drone incursions and cross-border assaults.

Airstrikes in Afghan territory have reportedly caused civilian casualties, inflaming Afghan public opinion. Meanwhile, Pakistan deported hundreds of thousands of Afghan refugees



in 2025, a move framed as a security policy but criticised as collective punishment. The border, once imagined as a manageable frontier, has hardened into a volatile frontline. Strategic depth has inverted into strategic exposure.

Internally, Pakistan faces a convergence of crises: economic fragility, political polarisation, and militant resurgence. Security operations drain resources. Casualties strain morale. Public frustration mounts. The spectre of a two-front dilemma—India to the east, instability to the west—haunts military planners. Even if a conventional war with India remains unlikely, the psychological pressure shapes policy. No state can sustain chronic insurgency without cost. Trust erodes. Investors hesitate. Citizens question. Militant proxies once justified as instruments of national security now appear as liabilities undermining that very security.

## REGIONAL RECALIBRATION

Regional actors are adjusting accordingly. India, long wary of Pakistan's Afghan manoeuvring, has deepened engagement with Kabul through humanitarian assistance, infrastructure projects, and diplomatic outreach. New Delhi has simultaneously strengthened counterterror vigilance along the Line of Control, wary of spillover from TTP–Al-Qaeda linkages.

China, for its part, approaches the crisis pragmatically. Beijing's primary concern is the protection of Belt and Road investments, particularly the China–Pakistan Economic Corridor (CPEC). TTP attacks on Chinese interests have prompted tighter

security cooperation between Islamabad and Beijing. China has engaged the Taliban diplomatically, seeking assurances that Afghan territory will not endanger regional connectivity.

Neither India nor China desires chaos in Afghanistan. But neither will subordinate its interests to Pakistan's strategic anxieties.

## AL-QAEDA DIMENSION

The TTP's historical and operational ties to Al-Qaeda add another layer of complexity. Access to training expertise, ideological reinforcement, and transnational networks elevates the threat profile. For the United States and other Western actors, such linkages violate the spirit—if not the letter—of the Doha Agreement.

Washington has relied primarily on sanctions and diplomatic pressure rather than renewed military intervention. Yet the perception that Afghanistan could once again serve as a platform for transnational jihadism unsettles global security planners.

Pakistan, ironically, now finds itself urging the very Taliban regime it once sheltered to fulfil counterterrorism commitments. History has a dark sense of humour.

*What was conceived as strategic depth has inverted into strategic vulnerability, where the buffer once imagined as security now generates instability along Pakistan's western frontier.*



## THE STRATEGIC TRAP

Analysts increasingly describe Pakistan's predicament as a "strategic trap." Escalation risks wider conflict with Kabul. Restraint invites continued TTP attacks. Mass deportations strain humanitarian norms. Airstrikes inflame nationalism across the border.

The Taliban, meanwhile, have diversified diplomatic ties—with Russia, China, Iran, and regional forums—reducing



reliance on Pakistan. Afghan nationalism resists subordination. The proxy era, if it ever truly existed, is fading.

Islamabad's recalibrated approach now blends deterrence with selective engagement. Precision strikes coexist with offers of ceasefire. Multilateral diplomacy supplements unilateral force. Yet the core dilemma remains unresolved: how to neutralise a militant threat rooted in ideological affinity and geographic sanctuary without igniting full-scale war.

## THE BLOWBACK

As of February 2026, volatility persists. Ceasefires are fragile. Airstrikes invite retaliation. Refugee flows strain humanitarian systems. The possibility of miscalculation looms large. Yet history offers cautionary lessons. States that cultivate irregular forces for short-term advantage often confront long-term blowback. The United States learned this

in Central America. The Soviet Union learned it in Afghanistan itself. Pakistan is confronting its own iteration of that pattern.

Strategic depth, once heralded as strategic wisdom, now appears a strategic mirage. The buffer has become a breach. The backyard has become a battleground. Whether Islamabad recalibrates decisively—or doubles down on coercion—will shape not only its own security but the stability of South and Central Asia. For now, one conclusion is unavoidable: the doctrine meant to shield Pakistan has returned as blowback, and the costs are still unfolding.

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## QUICK INSIGHTS

- *Pakistan's strategic depth in Afghanistan triggered militant blowback and rising internal instability.*
- *The Afghan Taliban pursue autonomy, resisting Pakistan's pressure to dismantle TTP sanctuaries.*
- *The TTP's resurgence has intensified insurgent violence across Pakistan's western provinces and major urban centres.*
- *Regional powers, particularly India and China, are recalibrating policies amid Afghanistan's evolving security landscape.*
- *Pakistan faces a strategic dilemma between escalation with Kabul and continued militant attacks on its territory.*

# CURTAIN RAISER

## BALIKATAN 2026: EXPANDING ALLIANCE COOPERATION IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

### NEWS ANALYTICS | SPECIAL COVERAGE

*Large-scale military exercises have become an increasingly important feature of the evolving security landscape in the Indo-Pacific. Among the most prominent of these is Exercise Balikatan, the annual joint training activity conducted by the United States and the Philippines. Scheduled to take place in April–May 2026, the upcoming iteration of Balikatan will once again bring together thousands of troops and multiple partner nations to strengthen operational cooperation and reinforce regional security partnerships.*

The term “Balikatan,” meaning “shoulder-to-shoulder” in Filipino, reflects the long-standing defence relationship between the United States and the Philippines. The exercise remains the most prominent annual military drill between the two allies and serves as a key component of their defence cooperation framework.

### ALLIANCE FOUNDATIONS

Balikatan is rooted in the 1951 U.S.–Philippines Mutual Defence Treaty, which established a formal alliance between the two countries during the early Cold War period. Over the decades, the exercise has evolved from a relatively modest training activity into one of the largest and most complex military exercises in the region.

The drills aim to improve interoperability between the Armed Forces of the Philippines (AFP) and the United States Armed Forces, allowing the two militaries to coordinate effectively during security

crises. Activities typically include amphibious operations, live-fire exercises, air defence drills, maritime security operations and humanitarian assistance simulations.

These training activities serve both operational and symbolic purposes. Operationally, they enhance the readiness of the participating forces. Strategically, they demonstrate the continued strength of the U.S.–Philippines alliance in an increasingly complex regional environment.

### EXPANDING MULTINATIONAL PARTICIPATION

The Balikatan 2026 exercise is expected to be one of the largest in the history of the drills. Alongside U.S. and Philippine forces, participation from partner nations continues to expand. Countries such as Australia, Canada, France, and New Zealand have previously taken part in various capacities, while many others participate as observers.

A significant development in the 2026 exercise is the participation of approximately 1,000 personnel from the



Japan Self-Defence Forces (JSDF). Their involvement marks an important step in expanding Japan's practical defence cooperation with the Philippines and the United States.

The deployment of Japanese troops follows the entry into force of the Japan–Philippines Reciprocal Access Agreement (RAA) in 2025, which facilitates joint training and military cooperation between the two countries. The agreement allows Japanese and Philippine forces to conduct exercises and disaster response operations in each other's territory.

This expanded participation reflects the growing convergence among like-minded Indo-Pacific partners seeking to strengthen security cooperation and maintain stability in the region.

## STRATEGIC CONTEXT IN THE INDO-PACIFIC

Balikatan 2026 takes place amid rising geopolitical tensions in the Indo-Pacific. Maritime disputes in the South China Sea, increasing naval deployments and broader strategic competition among major powers have heightened concerns about regional stability.

For the United States, the exercise forms part of a broader strategy to reinforce alliances and partnerships across the Indo-Pacific. Strengthening defence cooperation with regional partners helps ensure that allied forces can operate together effectively during potential crises.

For the Philippines, the exercise supports ongoing military modernisation efforts. The country has been investing in new capabilities to improve maritime surveillance, coastal defence and joint operational planning. Training alongside U.S. forces provides valuable operational experience and exposure to advanced military technologies.

The growing participation of other partners, including Japan, also demonstrates the increasing emphasis on multilateral security cooperation in the Indo-Pacific. Such cooperation strengthens the network of partnerships that underpin regional stability.



## STRATEGIC SIGNIFICANCE

Beyond its operational objectives, Balikatan carries broader strategic significance. Large-scale exercises demonstrate the readiness and commitment of allied forces while strengthening trust among participating nations.

The inclusion of additional partners, particularly Japan's growing role in the 2026 edition, highlights the gradual evolution of Indo-Pacific security cooperation toward more multilateral frameworks.

For observers of regional security, Balikatan 2026 provides an important indicator of how defence partnerships are adapting to the changing geopolitical landscape. The exercise showcases the continued relevance of alliances while also reflecting the emergence of wider networks of cooperation.

# CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE AS THE NEW BATTLE SPACE

## WAR STRATEGY

*Critical infrastructure has emerged as a decisive arena of modern conflict. Power grids, communication networks, ports, financial systems and healthcare services now represent strategic vulnerabilities that adversaries increasingly exploit. Through cyber operations and hybrid tactics, states and non-state actors can disrupt essential services, impose economic costs and undermine public confidence without conventional warfare, redefining how power is contested in the twenty-first century.*



**LT GEN KAPIL AGGARWAL (R) | FORMER DG EME INDIAN ARMY  
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The nature of conflict is undergoing a profound transformation in this decade of the twenty-first century. Traditional battlefields defined by geographic front lines, massed armies, and kinetic weapons are no longer the sole arenas where national power is contested. Instead, modern adversaries increasingly target

the systems that sustain everyday life—power grids, telecommunications networks, water systems, transportation hubs, financial platforms, and healthcare services. Collectively known as critical infrastructure, these systems have emerged as a new and highly consequential battlespace.

This shift reflects both technological change and strategic evolution. As societies become more interconnected and digitally dependent, the disruption of essential services can manifest in outcomes that were once achievable only through large-scale military operations. A well-executed cyberattack on a national power grid, for example, can paralyze cities, undermine public confidence, and

impose massive economic costs—all without crossing borders with troops. Understanding critical infrastructure as a contested domain is therefore essential for policymakers, security professionals, and citizens alike.

## CRITICAL INFRASTRUCTURE

Critical infrastructure refers to the physical and digital systems whose disruption would have a debilitating impact on national security, economic stability, public health, or safety. It usually



includes sectors such as:

- Energy (electricity, oil, gas) grids
- Water infrastructure

*In the digital age, power grids, data networks and water systems have become strategic targets, transforming critical infrastructure into a new and invisible battlefield.*

- Transportation and logistics
- Telecommunications and digital networks
- Constellations of satellites
- Ports and undersea cables
- Financial services
- Healthcare and public health
- Food and agriculture
- Government services and emergency response

Historically, these sectors were protected primarily against natural disasters, accidents, and conventional sabotage.



Today, however, they are increasingly being targeted through cyber operations and hybrid warfare tactics.

## US-IRAN WAR

The first week of the US-Iran conflict has already demonstrated how critical infrastructure is becoming a primary target. Energy facilities, transport hubs, water systems, digital networks and civilian infrastructure across the Gulf region have all been affected.

Among the reported incidents:

- Fuel depots and energy facilities in Iran struck by Israeli airstrikes.
- Gulf energy infrastructure targeted, including Ras Tanura refinery and Ras Laffan LNG hub.
- Jebel Ali Port and several Gulf airports damaged by missile and drone attacks.
- Desalination plants and water infrastructure targeted in Fujairah, Bahrain and Qeshm.
- Cyber disruptions and drone attacks affecting cloud data centres and financial systems.

## INFRASTRUCTURE AS BATTLEGROUND

Several structural trends have converged to elevate critical infrastructure into a primary domain of conflict.

Modern infrastructure is deeply digitised. Industrial control

systems (ICS), supervisory control and data acquisition (SCADA) networks, and cloud-based management platforms now operate many essential services. While these technologies improve efficiency and monitoring, they also expand the attack envelope.

Attacking infrastructure offers adversaries, especially smaller states or non-state actors, an asymmetric tool. Rather than matching a militarily superior opponent tank for tank or aircraft for aircraft, attackers can impose disproportionate costs through relatively low-cost cyber operations. An immediate example is the asymmetric escalation leverage being exercised by Iran in the conflict.

Modern societies depend heavily on continuous infrastructure availability. Even short disruptions can cascade across sectors. For example, power outages disrupt hospitals and telecom networks, financial system interruptions halt commerce, and transportation failures break supply chains.

Cyber and hybrid attacks on infrastructure often allow attackers to obscure attribution. Malware can be routed through multiple jurisdictions, false flags can be planted, and technical evidence can be ambiguous. This uncertainty complicates deterrence and response.

## STATE ACTORS

Nation-states increasingly view infrastructure targeting as part of their strategic toolkit. Pre-positioning malware in adversary networks allows states to hold critical systems at risk during



crises. Such operations may serve multiple purposes:

- Intelligence collection
- Coercive signalling
- Battlefield preparation
- Economic disruption

*Cyber operations against infrastructure allow adversaries to impose massive disruption without deploying armies, creating asymmetric leverage in modern geopolitical competition.*

## NON-STATE AND CRIMINAL GROUPS

Ransomware gangs and cybercriminal syndicates have demonstrated the fragility of infrastructure sectors. Attacks on hospitals, fuel pipelines, and municipal governments show that financially motivated actors can generate national-level disruption. These groups sometimes operate with tacit state tolerance or protection, blurring the line between crime and geopolitics.



**Insider Threats:** Employees, contractors, or partners with legitimate access can pose significant risks, whether through negligence, coercion, or malicious intent. As infrastructure systems become more complex and outsourced, managing insider risk grows more difficult.

**Supply Chain Vulnerabilities:** Modern infrastructure depends on globally sourced hardware and software. Compromise at any point in the supply chain can cause malicious code insertion, counterfeit components, or compromised updates. This can create systemic vulnerabilities that are difficult to detect.

**Power Grid Disruptions:** Cyberattacks against electrical utilities have demonstrated the feasibility of remote grid disruption. These operations showed that attackers could move from IT networks into operational environments and manipulate industrial controls. The strategic lesson was clear: cyber operations can produce physical effects.

**Ransomware:** Major ransomware incidents targeting fuel distribution and logistics networks have caused fuel shortages, panic buying, and emergency government responses. Even when systems were restored quickly, the economic and psychological impact was substantial. These events reveal how privately owned infrastructure can become a national security liability.

**Healthcare System Attacks:** Hospitals and healthcare providers have been repeatedly targeted with ransomware. In some cases, patient care was delayed, emergency rooms diverted,

and sensitive medical data exposed. The targeting of healthcare demonstrates the ethical and humanitarian dimensions of infrastructure warfare.

## STRATEGIC IMPLICATIONS

The emergence of infrastructure as a battlespace carries several profound implications. Infrastructure targeting often occurs below the threshold of armed conflict. States may conduct persistent cyber campaigns during nominal peacetime, creating a condition of continuous competition rather than episodic war.

Much critical infrastructure is owned and operated by private companies, yet its disruption has national security consequences. This creates a complex governance challenge: defence responsibilities are increasingly shared between governments and industry.



Traditional deterrence relies on clear attribution and credible retaliation. In cyber infrastructure attacks, attribution can be slow or uncertain, proportional response is ambiguous, and legal thresholds are unclear. As a result, deterrence by punishment is less reliable, increasing the importance of resilience and denial strategies.

Infrastructure attacks during crises could be misinterpreted as preparation for kinetic conflict, potentially accelerating escalation dynamics. For example, disabling an adversary's power grid during a standoff might be seen as a precursor to military action.

*The security of modern states increasingly depends not only on military strength but on the resilience of the networks that sustain everyday life.*

## BUILDING RESILIENCE

Resilience has therefore become the central strategic objective in infrastructure protection. Since perfect defence against cyber and hybrid threats is nearly impossible,

governments increasingly focus on strengthening the capacity of systems to anticipate, absorb and recover from disruption.

Key measures include:

- Strong cyber hygiene and multi-factor authentication
- Segmentation between IT and operational networks
- Continuous monitoring and vulnerability management
- Backup power and redundant communications systems
- Regular incident response and cyber exercises
- Public–private coordination and intelligence sharing
- Stronger supply-chain security and vendor risk oversight

## EMERGING TECHNOLOGIES

New technologies can both strengthen and threaten critical infrastructure.

**Artificial Intelligence:** AI can enhance anomaly detection, predictive maintenance, and automated response. However, adversaries can also use AI for phishing, vulnerability discovery, and developing adaptive malware, thus creating an offence–defence cycle.

**Internet of Things (IoT):** The proliferation of connected sensors and devices expands visibility but dramatically increases the attack envelope. Poorly secured IoT deployments in industrial environments are a growing concern.

**Quantum Computing (Future Risk):** Although still emerging, quantum computing could eventually threaten current cryptographic protections, requiring long-term planning for post-quantum security.

## FUTURE TRENDS

Critical infrastructure will only grow more central to national power and societal stability in the years ahead. Adversaries are likely to continue the practice of persistent pre-positioning, quietly embedding access within infrastructure networks in preparation for future contingencies. At the same time, competition in the grey zone—below the threshold of open conflict—is expected to intensify, with infrastructure increasingly becoming a preferred arena for strategic signalling and coercion. As these risks expand, the responsibility for security will fall more heavily on private sector operators who own and manage much of the infrastructure itself.

Consequently, nations are likely to prioritise resilience and rapid recovery capabilities rather than relying solely on prevention. Security strategies will increasingly rely on integrated deterrence, combining cyber, economic, and diplomatic tools to shape adversary behaviour. Ultimately, those countries and organisations that succeed will be the ones that recognise infrastructure security not merely as a technical challenge, but as a fundamental component of national strategy.



## NEW BATTLESPACE

Critical infrastructure has unmistakably become the new battlespace of the modern era. The convergence of digital dependence, geopolitical competition, and asymmetric cyber capabilities has transformed power grids, pipelines, hospitals, and data networks into strategic targets.

Yet this shift also presents an opportunity. By investing in resilience, strengthening public–private cooperation, and developing clear norms of responsible behaviour, societies can reduce vulnerability and manage risk.

The battlefield of the future may be largely invisible, embedded in code, networks, and control systems; however, its consequences will be profoundly physical. Nations that recognise this reality and act decisively will be far better prepared for conflicts in the digital age.

*(Lt Gen Kapil Aggarwal (R), former Director General EME. He is an alumnus of IIT Kharagpur, having done MTech (Electronics). The views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of **The News Analytics Herald**.)*

## QUICK INSIGHTS

- *Conflict shifts from physical battlefields to infrastructure systems sustaining modern societies.*
- *Cyber and hybrid attacks disrupt essential services, creating strategic, asymmetric warfare advantages.*
- *Critical infrastructure includes energy, telecom, water, finance, healthcare, and transport systems.*
- *State and non-state actors exploit vulnerabilities, supply chains, and insider access risks.*
- *Resilience, public-private coordination, and integrated deterrence shape future infrastructure security strategies.*

# INDIA–BRAZIL AI AXIS RESHAPES GLOBAL SOUTH TECH

## GLOBAL AFFAIRS

*Brazilian President Lula da Silva's February 2026 visit to India underscored a quiet but important shift in India–Brazil relations, signalling deeper strategic coordination between two major Global South democracies navigating an evolving multipolar order. This dialogue signals a new phase in their bilateral relations and the evolving role of the Global South.*



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Brazilian President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva's state visit to India from 18–22 February 2026 marked an important moment in the evolution of India–Brazil relations. The trip occurred amid intensifying geopolitical competition, supply-chain reconfiguration, and renewed debates about the role of emerging powers in shaping global governance.

Lula's participation in the Artificial Intelligence Impact Summit and his bilateral meeting with Prime Minister Narendra Modi were accompanied by a large delegation of ministers, business leaders, and civil society representatives, signalling that the visit was not merely ceremonial but aimed at deepening economic and strategic engagement.



To better understand the implications of the visit, I consulted experts in both India and Brazil to share their perspectives.

From a Brazilian perspective, Vito Villar, a specialist in international policy and trade, interprets the visit as part of Brasília's effort to diversify its international partnerships and strengthen South–South dialogue. Engaging with India, one of the world's fastest-growing major economies, demonstrates Brazil's intention to broaden its diplomatic and economic horizons beyond traditional partners.



Carlos Rifan, a Brazilian international consultant specialising in institutional and government relations, similarly characterises the visit as “carefully calibrated and mature”. In his view, it moved beyond symbolic diplomacy and reorganised the bilateral agenda around concrete strategic interests.

Alexandre Uehara, IR Programme Coordinator at ESPM and Visiting Professor at the University of São Paulo (USP), emphasises that the visit also highlighted the untapped potential of the relationship. Despite the size of both economies—India's GDP reached approximately US\$4.1 trillion in 2025, while Brazil's stood at around US\$2.2 trillion—bilateral trade remains modest. According to Uehara, Brazilian exports represent less than 1 per cent of India's total imports, illustrating the considerable room for expansion in economic relations.

Rodrigo Fagundes César, Professor of International Relations at Fundação Getulio Vargas in São Paulo, summarises the strategic dimension succinctly: “Lula's visit to India also reflects Brazil's need to reduce its level of dependence on China.”

Indian analysts broadly share this interpretation. Rajan Mishra, an independent analyst, describes the visit as “substantively productive and strategically timed”, pushing the relationship beyond symbolic messaging towards an operational agenda centred on trade expansion, technological cooperation, and critical mineral supply chains.

Ravi Shankar Raj, Assistant Professor of Political Science at DAV PG College in Varanasi, observes that the visit also

reaffirmed a long-term cooperation framework structured around five pillars: defence and security, food security, energy transition, digital transformation, and industrial partnerships. These priorities suggest that the relationship is gradually evolving into a more structured strategic partnership.

Taken together, these perspectives suggest that Lula's visit went beyond routine diplomacy, reflecting a deliberate effort by both governments to reposition their partnership within an evolving global economic and political order.

*India–Brazil relations are gradually shifting from symbolic South–South diplomacy towards a more structured partnership centred on trade expansion, technological cooperation, and strategic coordination in a changing global order.*

## STRATEGIC PRAGMATISM

When asked whether the India–Brazil relationship could evolve into an alternative geopolitical pole between the United States and China, most experts offered a cautious assessment.

According to Vito Villar, both countries pursue pragmatic



foreign policies centred on strategic autonomy rather than alignment. Their partnership should therefore not be interpreted as the formation of a rigid “third pole”, but rather as evidence of their ability to maintain diversified relations while advancing national priorities.

Carlos Rifan describes the relationship as a “functional axis” rather than a geopolitical alliance. Its value lies in selective coordination aimed at reducing vulnerabilities in strategic sectors, expanding technological autonomy, and increasing diplomatic room for manoeuvre in a fragmented international system.

From the Indian perspective, Rajan Mishra emphasises the concept of strategic optionality. Closer cooperation with Brazil allows India to diversify supply chains, expand South–South trade, and develop technological partnerships

without replacing existing relationships with major powers.

Vinicius Teixeira, a Brazilian geopolitical analyst and university professor at UNEMAT, highlights another important dimension: the structural similarities between the two countries. Both are large developing economies with substantial domestic markets and ongoing industrialisation strategies. These shared characteristics create opportunities for cooperation in sectors such as agriculture, infrastructure, and industrial development.



Ravi Shankar Raj similarly argues that the partnership should not be interpreted as a direct geopolitical counterweight to the United States or China. Instead, it represents collaboration between two emerging powers seeking to promote a more inclusive multipolar order.

Farijuddin Khan emphasises that Brazil is already India's largest trade partner in Latin America. Strengthening this relationship, therefore, fits within India's broader strategy of diversifying economic partnerships and supply networks.

For Pravesh Kumar Gupta, Associate Fellow at the Vivekananda International Foundation, the partnership also reflects complementary interests: India gains access to strategic resources and markets, while Brazil benefits from technology transfers, investments, and stronger alliances within the Global South.

Taken together, these analyses suggest that India–Brazil relations are best understood as a flexible strategic partnership grounded in complementarity rather than geopolitical rivalry.

## BRICS AND THE GLOBAL SOUTH

Multilateral frameworks such as BRICS also shape the relationship, although experts differ on how decisive they are.

For Vito Villar, BRICS remains an important platform for political coordination among emerging economies, particularly regarding the reform of global governance institutions.

Rajan Mishra similarly views BRICS and other Global

*Rather than forming a rigid geopolitical bloc, India and Brazil appear to be pursuing pragmatic cooperation designed to expand strategic autonomy while maintaining diversified relationships with major powers*

South forums as accelerators of bilateral cooperation. These platforms create opportunities for high-level dialogue and diplomatic coordination. However, he emphasises that the durability of the partnership will ultimately depend on tangible economic results.

Carlos Rifan adopts a pragmatic perspective: “multilateral frameworks function primarily as instruments.” They can open doors and facilitate dialogue, but the relationship's long-term relevance will depend on concrete projects involving investment, industrial cooperation, and technological exchange.

Historically, Brazil and India have cooperated in several multilateral initiatives, including BRICS, IBSA, and the G20. Both also continue to support reform of the United Nations Security Council and have reiterated mutual backing for each other's aspirations for permanent membership.

These shared institutional ambitions contribute to a common diplomatic agenda that continues to shape bilateral cooperation.

## STRATEGIC DELIVERABLES

Several outcomes of the Modi–Lula meeting attracted particular attention from analysts.

One important area concerns critical minerals and rare earth elements, resources essential for technologies such as electric vehicles, renewable energy systems, and advanced electronics. Brazil holds significant reserves, while India is seeking to diversify supply chains currently dominated by China.

Pravesh Gupta describes the memorandum of understanding on rare earths as a potentially important step towards strengthening industrial resilience in sectors such as clean energy and advanced manufacturing.

Trade expansion also featured prominently in the discussions. Leaders from both countries expressed ambitions to increase bilateral trade significantly in the coming years. For Rajan Mishra, the importance of these targets lies less in the specific figures than in the creation of measurable benchmarks for government and private-sector initiatives.

Technological cooperation represents another important dimension. Experts point to opportunities in digital public infrastructure, artificial intelligence, pharmaceuticals, and innovation ecosystems.

Defence cooperation could also emerge as a promising area.

According to Vinicius Teixeira, collaboration between Indian partners and Brazil's aerospace company Embraer—possibly involving firms such as Hindustan Aeronautics Limited—could accelerate joint aeronautical development. India's experience in nuclear technology and submarine development may also offer valuable expertise for Brazil, while the potential adoption of Embraer's KC-390 military transport aircraft by the Indian Air Force would represent a concrete step towards deeper industrial cooperation.

At the same time, these initiatives remain complex and require sustained political commitment.

*The deeper significance of Lula's visit lies not in immediate breakthroughs but in laying the groundwork for a long term economic and strategic alignment between two influential Global South democracies.*

## THE BROADER MEANING

Beyond specific agreements, the strengthening of India–Brazil relations carries broader geopolitical implications.

Rodrigo Fagundes César interprets Brazil's engagement with India as part of a strategy to diversify its external economic relations and reduce excessive dependence on China.

At the same time, Brazilian diplomacy has sought to avoid framing the partnership in explicitly geopolitical terms that could raise concerns in Washington or Beijing. Lula himself has often emphasised the economic and cooperative aspects of the relationship when addressing the media, as Fagundes César reminds us.

Alexandre Uehara offers a similar interpretation. For him, strengthening ties with India contributes to Brazil's effort to enhance its international status while preserving strategic autonomy. However, he cautions that the relationship should be presented as a positive bilateral agenda rather than as a counterweight to other major powers.

Rajan Mishra adds that cross-regional partnerships between emerging economies increase their collective leverage in negotiations on trade, climate policy, and institutional reform.

## CONVERGENCES AND NUANCES

Taken together, the perspectives of Brazilian and Indian specialists reveal a broad convergence regarding the significance of Lula's visit and the future trajectory of India–Brazil relations.

Experts widely agree that the relationship is moving from a historically cordial but limited partnership towards a more structured and multidimensional form of cooperation.

The complementarity between the two economies, also highlights that the relationship still operates far below its potential, given the scale of both markets.

The emergence of a strategic framework organised around key sectors such as defence, food security, energy transition, digital transformation, and industrial cooperation.

At the geopolitical level, most analysts agree that India and Brazil are not seeking to build a rigid bloc between the United States and China. Rather, they aim to strengthen their strategic autonomy within an evolving multipolar order.

In this sense, Lula's visit to India may prove significantly less for immediate breakthroughs than for consolidating a long term diplomatic and economic alignment between two of the most influential democracies of the Global South.

*(Ricardo Martins. PhD in Sociology, specialising in international relations, geopolitics, and Latin American politics. He recently completed his postdoctoral fellowship at Utrecht University in the Netherlands and covers major developments in Latin America for News Analytics. The views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of **The News Analytics Herald**.)*

## QUICK INSIGHTS

- *Lula's recent India visit signalled efforts to deepen India–Brazil relations amid shifting global geopolitical dynamics.*
- *Experts see the partnership as pragmatic cooperation advancing trade, technology, and supply chains.*
- *Both nations pursue strategic autonomy, avoiding rigid alignments, strengthening South–South cooperation.*
- *Multilateral forums like BRICS enable diplomacy, but economic projects ensure lasting credibility.*
- *Cooperation in minerals, technology, trade, defence could evolve into structured strategic partnership.*

# IN THE SPOTLIGHT

## MIDDLE EAST WAR WIDENS AND RATTLES GLOBAL MARKETS



On 1–2 March, the U.S.-Israeli war against Iran widened sharply, triggering a global rush into safe-haven assets and a jump in oil and gas prices. It was reported that investors initially hoped the crisis would be short-lived, but markets quickly priced in the risk of a prolonged regional conflict with wider economic consequences. The immediate geopolitical significance lay not only in the military escalation itself, but in the possibility that a major Middle East war could disrupt energy flows, revive inflation and reshape the calculations of powers such as China, Europe and India.

## UKRAINE'S FAST-TRACK EU PUSH MEETS RESISTANCE



On 2–3 March, Ukraine's effort to link any future peace arrangement with a faster path into the European Union ran into resistance from several EU governments. It was reported that while Kyiv argued it had completed much of the technical work for accession negotiations, many European capitals feared that rapid entry would create political, financial and institutional problems for the bloc. The dispute highlighted a wider geopolitical reality: even as Europe continues to support Ukraine strategically, there remain sharp divisions over how far and how fast that support should be translated into irreversible political integration.

## EUROPE RALLIES AROUND CYPRUS AFTER DRONE STRIKE



On 10 March, European leaders rallied behind Cyprus after what was described as the first drone attack on European Union territory during the Iran war. French President Emmanuel Macron visited Cyprus, backed stronger military support and announced a larger French naval presence in the eastern Mediterranean. The incident carried symbolic and strategic weight: the spillover of the Iran conflict onto EU territory raised the stakes for Europe directly, moving the crisis from a nearby regional war to a security challenge with immediate continental implications. It also accelerated European thinking on air defence, maritime protection and energy security.

## G7 LEADERS COORDINATE ON IRAN AND THE ENERGY SHOCK



On 10 March, media reported that French President Emmanuel Macron would host a G7 leaders' call to discuss the Iran crisis and the surge in oil prices. The move reflected concern among major industrial democracies that the war was becoming not only a regional military conflict but a global geo-economic shock. The G7's immediate challenge was to balance deterrence, diplomacy and market stability, especially after energy ministers hesitated to authorise a coordinated reserves release before the International Energy Agency completed its assessment. The episode showed how quickly a regional conflict can force top-level coordination among leading economies over energy, inflation and strategic signalling.

## EUROPE'S NUCLEAR RETREAT A "STRATEGIC MISTAKE"



European Commission President Ursula von der Leyen said reducing Europe's nuclear energy sector had been a "strategic mistake". Her remarks came as governments grappled with an energy crunch worsened by the Iran war. This was important geopolitically because it linked energy policy directly to strategic autonomy. The statement implied that Europe's past energy choices had increased dependence on volatile external supplies and weakened resilience during crises. In the broader context of war, sanctions and disrupted shipping, the debate over nuclear power was no longer just environmental or economic. It had become a question of continental security and long-term strategic posture.

## ISRAEL STRIKES OPENS A NEW PHASE IN LEBANON



On 12 March, Israel launched airstrikes into central Beirut, including areas near Lebanese government institutions, after Hezbollah's largest rocket attack of the conflict. The development was geopolitically significant because it signalled an escalation from border confrontation into deeper urban strikes, raising the risk of a prolonged Israel-Hezbollah war with stronger Iranian involvement. The humanitarian impact was already severe, with hundreds killed and mass displacement reported. Strategically, the strikes underscored how the post-Iran-assassination crisis was spreading beyond Iran itself, drawing Lebanon into a more dangerous phase and complicating any effort to contain the regional conflict.

## IEA WARNS OF THE BIGGEST OIL SUPPLY DISRUPTION ON RECORD



On 12 March, the International Energy Agency said the Middle East war had triggered the largest oil supply disruption in history, with global supply in March expected to fall by around 8 million barrels per day after the Strait of Hormuz closure. The IEA authorised a record strategic-reserves release of 400 million barrels. This was one of the most consequential geopolitical developments of the period because it converted a regional war into a full-spectrum global economic crisis. Energy, inflation, shipping and diplomacy were suddenly linked in one strategic shock, forcing governments worldwide to reassess both immediate contingency measures and long-term energy security planning.

## U.S. AND CHINA PREPARE FOR HIGH-LEVEL ECONOMIC TALKS



U.S. Treasury Secretary Scott Bessent would meet Chinese Vice Premier He Lifeng in Paris on 15–16 March ahead of a planned late-March summit between Donald Trump and Xi Jinping in Beijing. The talks were set against the backdrop of a fragile trade truce, court rulings against earlier tariffs and fresh U.S. import measures. This was geopolitically important because it suggested both sides wanted to stabilise economic ties before top-level diplomacy, even as broader strategic rivalry persisted. It also showed that trade, tariffs and supply-chain politics remain central channels through which U.S.-China competition is managed.

# R&D AS INDIA'S STRATEGIC POWER

## BEYOND CONVENTION

*For decades, India's most valuable export was its talent. Engineers, scientists and researchers powered innovation abroad while remittances flowed home. That model is now being reconsidered. With major investments in quantum technologies, semiconductors and defence innovation, India is attempting to build an integrated research ecosystem. The ambition is not simply technological progress, but strategic leverage in a world where science increasingly shapes geopolitical power.*



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India has spent 60 years sending the best brains to work in other countries, including California's Silicon Valley and China's manufacturing hub of Shenzhen. As a result, the cash sent back to New Delhi has been steady. That's the profit from turning talent into a commodity that other countries buy and India sells. But this system is coming to an end much sooner than expected and more purposefully than ever before.

India's Ministry of Science and Technology has allocated one trillion rupees (\$12 billion) for the National Quantum Mission through 2031. The Anusandhan National Research

Foundation has been given ₹50,000 crore over five years to reset the way India works with the private sector in terms of research and development. It is no longer a question of whether India can develop technology, but rather when and how it will be implemented.

*For decades, India exported its brightest minds; today, it is attempting to build the laboratories, capital and institutions that will keep innovation at home.*

### TALENT EXPORT MODEL

Most Indians have not fully understood how neglectful India's national approach to science and technology has been since Independence. There were always more pressing concerns, including eliminating poverty, building infrastructure, and ensuring defence purchases, among others. R&D was a nice-to-have, often covered in the small print of the annual budget.

Now, India's R&D expenditure (like other aspects of the economy) is something India's elites take as given, and a number towards which it should tend. So it is a number that has stayed largely the same for several decades and is roughly within the range of 0.65–0.7 per cent of GDP. It is worth comparing with the country of



our closest rival in terms of pace of economic growth, i.e., China. Its R&D expenditure as of 2017 was 2.4 per cent of GDP, and the US, where this amount is 3.4 per cent. Mind you, their GDP is far bigger than India's. So we are not talking about just a fiscal issue of expenditure; what we see here is also a matter of strategic vulnerability that has been accumulated over years of policy disregard.



The correction is happening in a methodical manner and it is on the record. This is something the Anusandhan NRF was created for. However, there was always a wide gap between academia, industry, and the government that ensured that India's innovations remained stuck within India.

While some believe India is an emerging economy that is rapidly scaling the ranks, I would argue India is more of a developing economy, and it ranks roughly around 40 in the Global Innovation Index (GII). It is a metric that reflects the sum of investments made years, if not a decade, ago and is therefore not reflective of the current state of affairs and the structural changes that are taking place.

There are two futures for countries that are not serious about R&D: the dependent future and the irrelevant future. India has finally looked at the calendar, and it is now in the realisation phase. It has been recognised that the window is closing and the government is reacting.

## THE ECOSYSTEM ARCHITECTURE

India is no longer indulging in isolated project research. It is trying to link these segments together, i.e., academic research institutions and private-sector laboratories, the private sector and defence procurement, and the procurement by the defence ministry, pulling them all forward.

The National Quantum Mission organises investment across four thematic hubs: quantum computing, quantum communication, quantum sensing, and materials. ISRO and DRDO serve as anchor institutions with active procurement pipelines. The India Semiconductor Research Centre (ISRC) has secured its

first domestic fabrication partnerships with Tata Electronics and CG Power, backed by over a ₹75,000 crore incentive package. Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) has engaged over 350 startups on specific defence technology challenges—a bottom-up approach with the potential to outperform the top-down funding model of DARPA.

The Eisenhower Interstate Highway System is the right analogy. Launched in 1956, its value was never a single road. The military and economic multiplier came from the connection, where all roads finally met. Something similar is now happening in India. The purpose is to enable nodes that had no previous reason to talk to each other. IIT/ BITS Pilani research labs, private-sector conglomerates, defence procurement agencies, and startup founders speak different languages.

Professors and researchers did not know the defence problems. The private sector, no matter how much it developed, was rarely procured by the government, and fast-paced innovation was never incentivised in India. Now, government departments (ISRO, defence, DRDO, etc.) are releasing problem statements calling out research proposals. The projects are scrutinised not just from a research point of view, but also through technology readiness levels.

Partnerships between research labs and the private sector are not only encouraged but are now made mandatory. The



government has schemes where it reimburses investments made by startups, sometimes up to 50 per cent or more.

When this system is fully mature, its geopolitical outcomes will be visible to everyone. Autonomous weapons, quantum-encrypted communications, and homegrown space technology will develop at a velocity faster than current trendlines suggest. An ecosystem, once activated, does not compound linearly.

In reality, we have seen that money is sanctioned and officers are incentivised to utilise the sanctioned budget. However, researchers have not changed, sanctioning authorities have not changed, and India has still not embraced innovation.



## Global Innovation Index 2025 Innovation at a Crossroads



### DUAL-USE FRONTIER

India's most important R&D initiatives cannot be fairly categorised as purely civilian or purely military. They are designed with mixed intent—and that is by design. The quantum key distribution via satellites initiative sits under the communication pillar of the National Quantum Mission. Civilian in framing, decisive in military application: unhackable command-and-control channels mean an adversary running signals intelligence against Indian networks finds nothing to intercept.

ISRO's commercial launch programme, especially LVM3 contracts, OneWeb deployments, and reusable vehicle development, is generating propulsion data with direct implications for strategic deterrence. DRDO's Centre for Artificial Intelligence and Robotics (CAIR) has moved decisively from research institution to procurement agency, with autonomous surveillance and battlefield decision-support systems already entering the acquisition pipeline.

India's hypersonic programme is the clearest example. The Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle (HSTDV)

*When research laboratories, private industry and defence procurement align, technological ecosystems begin to compound power far faster than isolated investments ever could.*

carries a civilian scramjet framing in its public documentation. The propulsion data it generates feeds directly into the BrahMos-II development pipeline. The research and the weapon are the same investment.

No amount of purely military R&D can match this advantage. Civilian technology cooperation with the US, EU, and Japan carries a strategic spin-off of considerable importance to India's defence preparedness. The world views India as a research partner. It is also quietly funding a competitor.



### LEVERAGE AND LIMITATIONS

India has a unique capacity to influence the trajectory of this global race. India's contribution of approximately 2.5 million STEM graduates annually is among the largest. However, in R&D, quality always supersedes quantity. Innovation is a constructive game where persistence matters. The quality of STEM graduates needs significant improvement.

The increasingly higher education costs in India over the past decade require a relook at the education policies of the bygone era, which produced academic institutions of global repute. The number of institutions is increasing, but their quality remains a matter of debate.

India has followed non-alignment. This is a structural asset. India has enjoyed active technology partnerships with the US via iCET, with the EU via the Trade and Technology Council, with Israel via joint defence production, and with Russia via Cold War-era legacy systems simultaneously.

The Indian startup ecosystem is improving with over 100 recognised unicorns. Real-world deployment with innovations like UPI, Aadhaar, and CoWIN has generated training and validation data that laboratory nations simply cannot manufacture.



# DEFENCE INNOVATION PRIZE

*India possesses the talent and capital commitments for technological leadership, but without execution velocity, these advantages risk remaining potential rather than geopolitical capability.*

Three exposed flanks could negate a decade of investment if left unaddressed. In Indian bureaucratic cycles, disbursement often lags allocation by three to five years. Announced capital and deployed capital are not the same thing. Only one of them builds laboratories. The translation problem is equally damaging: India produces world-class basic research, but moving that research out of the lab and into a deployable system remains a broken process. The postdoctoral pipeline still flows strongly toward American and European universities. The brain drain has become more complex.

Chess grandmasters call this configuration a material advantage with positional weakness. You have the pieces, but they are not yet controlling the board. India has the talent, the capital commitments, and the institutional frameworks. It does not yet have the execution velocity that makes those advantages decisive. The reforms that are being talked about need to run ahead of the geopolitical calendar. The speed of disbursement, functional technology transfer, and credible talent retention incentives need urgent action. The window for correction does not stay open indefinitely.

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## QUICK INSIGHTS

- *India shifts from talent export to domestic research in advanced technologies.*
- *Low R&D spending created strategic vulnerability versus China and the United States.*
- *New initiatives integrate academia, industry, and defence into a unified innovation ecosystem.*
- *Emerging technologies enable civilian progress while enhancing India's strategic defence capabilities.*
- *India's success hinges on faster execution, research translation, and retaining domestic scientific talent.*



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# HYPERSONICS AND THE NEW STRATEGIC BALANCE

## HI-TECH

*Hypersonic weapons are redefining the strategic landscape of modern warfare. Capable of travelling at speeds above Mach 5 while manoeuvring within the atmosphere, these systems challenge the effectiveness of existing missile defence architectures. Their ability to compress warning and decision times is altering traditional deterrence dynamics, triggering a new phase of technological competition among major powers.*



**AIR MARSHAL ANIL KHOSLA (R) | FORMER VICE CHIEF, IAF  
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Hypersonic weapons are weapons capable of sustained flight at Mach 5 or higher. Existing missile defence systems do not cater for this new threat. Their speed and manoeuvrability demand a new approach to early warning and subsequent neutralisation. These weapons are emerging as highly valued systems for militaries worldwide. Their rapid development marks a turning point in military technology and strategic thought. These weapons are giving a new meaning to deterrence and stability.

Intercontinental Ballistic Missiles (ICBMs) can also reach hypersonic speeds. However, they travel through space in a predictable parabolic arc. Their trajectory becomes predictable, and long-range radars can track them. On the other hand, the characteristics of hypersonic weapons include sustained high speed, increased manoeuvrability,

*Hypersonic weapons combine extreme speed and manoeuvrability, compressing decision time and challenging the effectiveness of existing missile defence architectures designed for predictable ballistic trajectories.*

and a high-altitude trajectory (in the upper atmosphere—higher than cruise missiles but lower than the apogee of ballistic missiles). These attributes of hypersonic weapons are blurring the line between ballistic and cruise missiles.

## A STRATEGIC GAME-CHANGER

Hypersonic weapons are classified into two categories: hypersonic glide vehicles (HGVs) and hypersonic cruise

missiles (HCMs). HGVs are carried and launched from ballistic missiles. Post-separation, they glide through the upper atmosphere at extreme speeds following a controllable trajectory. HCMs sustain hypersonic flight within the atmosphere



using advanced scramjet engines. Hypersonic weapons can alter their trajectory. This adds to the complexity of detecting, tracking, and intercepting them. High speed also compresses decision-making time. It shortens the window for assessing the threat and making a decision on counteraction.

Hypersonic missiles are commonly depicted as a “game changer”, and the unprecedented capabilities of these weapons portend a revolution in missile warfare. It is considered that the speed, accuracy, and manoeuvrability of hypersonic boost-glide weapons will fundamentally change the character of warfare. Developments in hypersonic propulsion will revolutionise warfare by enabling faster strikes. With unmatched speed, these weapons will likely hit over-the-horizon targets in a fraction of the time. This claimed speed advantage is ostensibly accompanied by near-immunity to detection, rendering hypersonic weapons “nearly invisible” to existing early warning systems. Together, these capabilities will significantly compress decision and response times.

## MISSILE DEFENCE 2.0

Existing defences are primarily designed to counter ballistic missiles. They rely on layered architectures that include early-warning launch detection, long-range radar-based trajectory tracking, and interception. Destruction could occur during the boost, midcourse, or terminal phases. These systems operate on the logic of predictability. However, they are not optimised for low-flying targets that manoeuvre frequently and provide little warning time.

A comprehensive missile defence strategy is required to provide an integrated and practical capability to counter ballistic, cruise, and hypersonic missile threats. The speed of hypersonic weapons leaves little time to compute a fire-control solution, communicate with command authorities, and complete

an engagement to intercept them. Anti-hypersonic defence would require a combination of disruptive data links and sensors, space-based tracking sensors, and innovative interception methods. Some passive defensive measures against traditional missiles are also effective against hypersonic weapons; these include deception, dispersal, hardening, concealment, etc.

To counter hypersonic threats, defence developers are exploring what might be called Missile Defence 2.0. This concept emphasises integration, speed, and adaptability. One key area is sensor networks. Future defences rely on constellations of space-based infrared and tracking satellites that can track hypersonic weapons throughout their flight. Methods of interception also need to evolve. Instead of relying solely on kinetic weapons, multiple new interceptors may be required to neutralise the threat. Artificial intelligence would be essential for data fusion from multiple sensors. Another element of Missile Defence 2.0 is layered resilience rather than perfect protection, recognising that no defence will be impenetrable.

*As hypersonic systems mature, missile defence strategies must shift from predictable interception models to integrated sensor networks, rapid data fusion and layered resilience.*

## HYPERSONIC RACE

The United States, China, and Russia are competing to develop these weapons. They are likely to field a wide array of hypersonic systems in the coming decades. The development of short, medium, and long-range variants of these weapons by major powers is resulting in a new arms race. These technologies are changing the nature of warfare, and they have the potential to destabilise the global security environment.

**USA:** The U.S. has pursued both hypersonic weapon technologies since the early 2000s. It has sought to develop longer-range systems capable of reaching deep into an adversary’s territory to attack defended, hardened, and time-urgent targets. The Department of Defence (DoD) is developing hypersonic weapons under the Navy’s Conventional Prompt Strike programme and through several Air Force, Army, and DARPA programmes.

**Russia:** Russia is reportedly the first nation to deploy a hypersonic missile. It characterises these weapons as a centrepiece of its security strategy and has extensively tested at least three distinct hypersonic systems. Russia’s HGV, known as Avangard, is equipped with a nuclear warhead and deployed on SS-19 long-range land-based ballistic missiles. Avangard reportedly features onboard countermeasures and can manoeuvre in flight to evade ballistic missile defences. Russia has successfully fielded the Zircon and Kinzhal hypersonic weapons, and it has launched the air-launched Kinzhal hypersonic missiles (with a speed of Mach 10 and a payload of 480 kg) against Ukraine.

China: China has made a significant effort to match Russian and U.S. capabilities. It has invested heavily in hypersonic research, development, test, and evaluation programmes over the past decade. China is also investing heavily in hypersonic development infrastructure and weapon systems, reportedly outpacing the United States in testing these technologies. China has developed an HGV known as the DF-ZF, previously referred to as the WU-14. China is also developing the DF-41 long-range intercontinental ballistic missile, which could carry a nuclear hypersonic glide vehicle.

India: India has been investing in hypersonic weapon development. In September 2020, India successfully tested the Hypersonic Technology Demonstrator Vehicle (HSTDV). HSTDV is a hypersonic unmanned scramjet demonstration aircraft. In addition to the HSTDV programme, India is continuing its research and development efforts across



various aspects of hypersonic technology (propulsion systems, materials science, and guidance systems). In July 2025, India reportedly conducted a successful test of a hypersonic cruise missile capable of reaching Mach 8 under Project Vishnu. Reportedly, the project aims to develop the Extended Trajectory–Long Duration Hypersonic Cruise Missile (ET-LDHCM). It is a weapon system that will fundamentally enhance India’s strategic capabilities.

## TECHNOLOGICAL ASYMMETRY

The development of hypersonic weapons has the potential to create a new form of asymmetry. In technologically advanced states, having these weapons gives them an edge in overcoming opponents’ defences. On the other hand, smaller or less technologically advanced states find it difficult to keep up. This creates a growing divide between the “haves” and the “have-nots.” This asymmetry is reshaping the strategic

calculus. Major powers may become more aggressive, while weaker states may double down on asymmetric strategies such as cyber operations or unconventional warfare.

The most concerning aspect of hypersonics is their impact on deterrence stability. During the Cold War, stability was based on the philosophy of “Mutually Assured Destruction”. However, with reduced reaction time, the risk of miscalculation has increased dramatically. The shift is taking place from “Launch on Warning” to “Launch on Uncertainty”. States may be tempted to launch their own weapons at the first sign of a perceived threat. This “crisis instability” is compounded by strategic ambiguity: most hypersonic vehicles can carry either a conventional or nuclear payload, leaving an adversary to guess the stakes of an incoming strike.

*Hypersonic weapons shorten warning times and blur nuclear ambiguity, increasing crisis instability and raising the risk of miscalculation between technologically advanced military powers.*

## RISK OF MISCALCULATION

Technology is both a useful tool and a destructive weapon. Hypersonic weapons signify a significant advancement in military technology. These weapons are even more powerful than traditional ballistic ones because of their incredible speed and agility. Many countries are actively working on developing and testing them. At the same time, Missile Defence 2.0 is evolving to counter this new threat. It includes advanced sensors, smarter interceptors, and a robust architecture to provide better protection.

The proliferation of hypersonic weapons could have significant implications for the global security landscape. Their speed and manoeuvrability could reduce decision-making time in crises, increasing the risk of miscalculation. The development of hypersonic weapons is also starting a new arms race, as states seek to secure or maintain military superiority in this domain, where velocity is no longer just an advantage, but a destabilising force.

*(Air Marshal Anil Khosla (R), Former Vice Chief, Indian Air Force. Researcher, Analyst & Distinguished Fellow - USI & CAPS. The views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of **The News Analytics Herald**.)*

## QUICK INSIGHTS

- *Hypersonic weapons combine speed and manoeuvrability, defeating traditional predictable missile defence systems.*
- *Compressed decision timelines heighten uncertainty and complicate crisis management between nuclear states.*
- *Major powers—United States, China, Russia—are rapidly advancing hypersonic strike capabilities.*
- *Missile Defence 2.0 integrates sensors, space tracking and hypersonic interception technologies.*
- *Hypersonic weapons proliferation may heighten great-power rivalry and destabilise global deterrence.*



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# THE NEXT BIG

## LAAD DEFENCE & SECURITY 2026



LAAD Defence & Security is described as the largest defence and security exhibition in Latin America, bringing together armed forces, police agencies, and defence industries from across the region and beyond. The event is scheduled from 14-16 April at São Paulo, Brazil. It focuses on land, naval and aerospace defence systems, cybersecurity, homeland security and public safety technologies. The exhibition is supported by the Brazilian Ministry of Defence and several security institutions. Target participants include defence ministries, military procurement authorities, law-enforcement agencies, defence manufacturers, system integrators and technology

providers. The event also hosts official delegations, government representatives and industry leaders to facilitate procurement discussions, strategic partnerships and technology demonstrations.

## DSA & NATSEC ASIA 2026



DSA & NATSEC Asia is Asia's leading defence and homeland security exhibition, held with strong support from the Malaysian Ministry of Defence and Ministry of Home Affairs. The event is scheduled from 20-23 April at Kuala Lumpur, Malaysia. It focuses on defence systems, homeland security technologies, border protection, maritime security, cyber defence and disaster response capabilities. The exhibition is designed to bring together military leaders, defence procurement officials, government security agencies and global defence companies. The event also features conferences and

official meetings addressing regional security challenges. Participants typically include armed forces, coast guards, police agencies, defence contractors, technology developers and international delegations exploring defence cooperation and procurement opportunities.

## SAHA EXPO 2026



SAHA Expo is organised by SAHA Istanbul, one of Türkiye's largest defence and aerospace industry clusters. The event is scheduled from 05-09 May 2026 at Istanbul, Türkiye. The exhibition focuses on defence, aviation and space technologies, highlighting advanced capabilities in aerospace systems, unmanned platforms, naval systems, electronic warfare and defence manufacturing. The event aims to connect global defence companies with Turkish manufacturers and research institutions, strengthening

industrial cooperation and supply chains. Target participants include defence ministries, armed forces procurement agencies, aerospace companies, defence technology firms, research institutions and start-ups. SAHA Expo also hosts business-to-business meetings, official delegations and technology showcases aimed at promoting international defence industry collaboration

# THING

## BLACK SEA DEFENCE & AEROSPACE 2026



The Black Sea Defence & Aerospace Exhibition (BSDA) is a key platform for defence, aerospace and security cooperation in Central and Eastern Europe. The event is scheduled from 13-15 May at Bucharest, Romania. The exhibition focuses on land systems, naval technologies, aerospace capabilities, cyber defence and homeland security solutions. Given Romania's strategic position on NATO's

eastern flank, the event attracts significant interest from NATO members, defence ministries and regional armed forces. Target participants include military officials, procurement authorities, defence manufacturers, aerospace companies and security technology providers. The event also features conferences and official meetings designed to promote regional defence cooperation, technology exchange and procurement dialogue.

## UNDERSEA DEFENCE TECHNOLOGY (UDT) 2026



Undersea Defence Technology (UDT) is organised as a leading international event dedicated to naval and undersea warfare technologies. The exhibition focuses on submarine capabilities, anti-submarine warfare, underwater surveillance, maritime security systems, autonomous underwater vehicles and naval sensors. The event is scheduled from 14-16 April at London, United Kingdom. The event combines a technical conference with an exhibition where experts discuss developments in undersea defence operations. Target participants include navies, defence ministries,

naval procurement agencies, maritime research organisations, defence contractors and technology developers specialising in underwater systems. UDT aims to bring together the global naval community to exchange knowledge and explore emerging maritime defence technologies.

## ITEC 2026



ITEC is organised as a major international event dedicated to military simulation, training technologies and defence education systems. The exhibition focuses on advanced simulation platforms, virtual training environments, artificial intelligence-enabled training tools, mission rehearsal systems and human performance technologies. The event is scheduled from 14-16 April 2026 at London, United Kingdom. The event combines a large exhibition with a conference programme addressing the future of military training and operational readiness. Target participants include armed forces training commands, defence ministries, simulation technology companies, research institutions and training system developers. The event serves as a forum for defence professionals to explore innovative training solutions and operational preparation technologies.

# AI IN NATIONAL SECURITY ARCHITECTURES

## DEEP-TECH

*Outer space has shifted from a Cold War preserve to a contested arena shaped by commercial actors, strategic competition, and military ambitions. Technological acceleration, mega-constellations, dual-use systems, and non-state participation now blur civilian–military boundaries across LEO and GEO. This evolving landscape marks the start of a new race for control of orbit, sensitive infrastructure, data bank, and spectrum offering a strategic edge during any conflict.*



TECH DESK

THE NEWS ANALYTICS HERALD

Artificial Intelligence (AI) is rapidly becoming one of the most influential technologies shaping the future of national security. From battlefield decision-making to cyber defence, intelligence analysis and surveillance systems, AI is transforming the way states prepare for and respond to security threats. Nations that successfully integrate AI into their national security architectures will gain significant strategic advantages in speed, precision and situational awareness.

For India, the adoption of AI in security systems is not merely a technological upgrade. It represents a strategic necessity in an increasingly complex regional and global environment. India faces a wide spectrum of challenges ranging from conventional military threats and cyber attacks to terrorism, maritime security concerns and information warfare. AI has the potential to strengthen India's ability to detect threats earlier, respond faster and manage large volumes of information in real time.

However, integrating AI into national security systems requires not only technological capability but also institutional coordination, regulatory frameworks and ethical safeguards. India is still in the early stages of building such an architecture, but the foundations are gradually being established.

*Artificial Intelligence allows security agencies to process vast volumes of data, detect hidden patterns and identify emerging threats far faster than traditional intelligence methods.*



## MILITARY APPLICATIONS

One of the most visible uses of AI in national security lies in the military domain. Armed forces around the world are increasingly deploying AI for operational planning, intelligence analysis and autonomous systems.

In India, the armed forces have begun incorporating AI into several operational areas. The Indian Army has explored AI-enabled surveillance along the Line of Control and the Line of Actual Control. These systems use image recognition and data analytics to detect unusual movements or infiltration attempts.

The Indian Air Force is also experimenting with AI-assisted decision systems that help pilots and commanders analyse battlefield information quickly. Such systems can support mission planning, threat assessment and resource allocation. Similarly, the Indian Navy is exploring AI for maritime domain awareness. AI algorithms can analyse data from satellites, radar networks and automatic identification systems to track suspicious maritime activity in the Indian Ocean region.



AI also has the potential to support the development of autonomous or semi-autonomous platforms such as unmanned aerial vehicles, underwater drones and robotic ground systems. These technologies could perform surveillance or reconnaissance missions in high-risk environments without exposing personnel to danger.

## INTELLIGENCE REVOLUTION

AI is particularly valuable in intelligence and surveillance operations. Intelligence agencies often collect massive amounts of data from multiple sources, including satellite imagery, intercepted communications, social media and open-source information.

AI-based tools can assist analysts by rapidly sorting and analysing these datasets. Machine learning algorithms can identify patterns that might otherwise remain hidden, allowing agencies to detect emerging threats more efficiently.

For example, AI-powered image recognition can analyse satellite imagery to detect changes in military infrastructure or troop movements. Natural language processing systems can examine large volumes of text data, helping analysts identify relevant information from news reports, online discussions or intercepted communications.

In the Indian context, such capabilities could strengthen intelligence coordination across agencies and improve early warning systems.

## INTERNAL SECURITY

India's long and complex borders require constant monitoring. AI can support border security by improving surveillance systems.

Smart border technologies using AI-powered cameras, drones and sensor networks can help security forces detect infiltration attempts in difficult terrain. AI systems can analyse patterns of movement and alert authorities when unusual activity occurs.

AI may also assist internal security agencies in analysing crime patterns, identifying potential threats and coordinating law enforcement responses. However, such applications must be implemented carefully to protect civil liberties and prevent misuse.

*AI-enabled surveillance systems, autonomous platforms and decision-support tools are gradually becoming critical components of modern military capability and operational planning.*

## DEFENCE INNOVATION ECOSYSTEM

Recognising the strategic importance of AI, India has begun developing an ecosystem to support defence innovation.

The Ministry of Defence established the Defence Artificial Intelligence Council (DAIC) and the Defence AI Project Agency (DAIPA) to coordinate AI initiatives within the armed forces. These institutions aim to identify priority areas for AI deployment and facilitate collaboration between military organisations, research institutions and private companies.

India's growing technology sector also plays an important role. Startups working in data analytics, robotics and machine learning can contribute innovative solutions to national security challenges.

Government programmes such as Innovations for Defence Excellence (iDEX) encourage collaboration between defence organisations and technology startups.

Universities and research laboratories are also becoming part of this ecosystem. Institutes such as the Indian Institutes of Technology are increasingly engaged in AI research with potential defence applications.

## STRATEGIC CHALLENGES

Despite its advantages, the integration of AI into national security architectures raises several challenges.

One major concern relates to ethics and accountability. Autonomous weapons systems capable of making lethal decisions without human oversight raise complex moral and legal questions. Many experts argue that human control must remain central to any use of AI in warfare.

Another challenge involves reliability. AI systems depend heavily on data quality. If the data used to train algorithms is incomplete or biased, the resulting decisions may be inaccurate.



Cyber vulnerabilities also pose risks. AI systems themselves can become targets for cyber attacks or manipulation.

For India, building a secure and transparent AI framework will be essential to ensure that these technologies are used responsibly.

## GLOBAL COMPETITION

AI is becoming a central element of strategic competition between major powers. Countries such as the United States and China are investing heavily in AI research and military applications.

China has already integrated AI into several military programmes, including surveillance systems, autonomous vehicles and decision-support platforms. The United States has launched initiatives such as the Joint Artificial Intelligence Center to accelerate military AI development.

India must navigate this competitive environment while maintaining its strategic autonomy. Collaboration with trusted partners in areas such as research, standards and data governance may help strengthen India's capabilities. At the same time, India must invest in domestic research and talent development to ensure long-term technological independence.

For India, the successful integration of AI into national security will depend on several key factors. First, sustained investment in research and development is necessary to build indigenous capabilities. AI technologies evolve rapidly, and maintaining competitiveness requires continuous innovation.

Second, stronger coordination between government agencies, defence organisations and private industry will be essential. AI systems operate across multiple domains, making institutional cooperation crucial.

Third, regulatory frameworks must ensure the responsible use of AI technologies. Transparency, accountability and ethical standards should guide their deployment. Finally, developing skilled human resources will be critical. AI systems require experts in data science, cybersecurity, robotics and engineering. Expanding education and training programmes in these fields will support India's long-term security architecture.

*In the emerging security environment, technological capability in artificial intelligence will increasingly shape national power, strategic autonomy and the ability to manage complex threats.*

## STRATEGIC FRAMEWORKS

Artificial Intelligence is gradually transforming national security architectures around the world. It enhances the ability of states to process information, detect threats and respond quickly in complex security environments.

For India, AI offers an opportunity to strengthen defence capabilities, improve intelligence systems and enhance cybersecurity. At the same time, its adoption requires careful planning, strong institutions and responsible governance.

The future of national security will depend not only on military strength but also on technological capability. Nations that successfully integrate AI into their strategic frameworks will be better equipped to navigate the uncertainties of the twenty-first century. India's challenge now is to ensure that its security architecture evolves quickly enough to keep pace with this technological transformation.

## QUICK INSIGHTS

- *Artificial intelligence enhances national security through improved detection, analysis, and defence decision-making.*
- *India is steadily integrating AI into military surveillance, maritime awareness, and command systems.*
- *AI enhances cybersecurity, countering disinformation, cyberattacks, and hybrid warfare in modern environments.*
- *AI security ecosystems require collaboration among government, defence, academia, and private technology companies.*
- *India's strategic success will depend on sustained investment, ethical frameworks and skilled human resources in AI.*

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