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**WHO
SHAPES
THE GULF?**

GEOSTRATEGIC

BHARAT'S STRATEGIC AUTONOMY
IN A FRACTURED WORLD

BIG STORY

AFTER IRAN: WHO SHAPES
THE GULF?

HI-TECH

QUANTUM'S RACE TO
RELIABILITY

THE POWER PANEL



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|| FOREWORD



THE NEW GULF ORDER

Long viewed through the prism of hydrocarbons and deep-rooted conflicts, the Gulf has emerged as a vital barometer of global geopolitical shifts. As major powers face obstacles in their efforts to influence regional dynamics, a fundamental question confronts us: Who shapes the Gulf?

Low-cost military technologies increasingly prevent global powers from imposing their will swiftly. Regional states must continually calibrate their positions, balancing traditional security partnerships against emerging multipolar realities.

Conflicts across the Gulf are deeply intertwined, making it impossible to isolate any single theatre. The hostilities ignited by the Hamas attack on Israel on 7 October 2023 represent an escalation in a decades-old confrontation. Backed by the United States, Israel's military campaign is now widely viewed as an endeavour to alter regional maps and demographics permanently.

Meanwhile, Washington has struggled to constrain Iranian influence. It's unilateral withdrawal from the 2015 JCPOA has, ironically, left the United States confronting steeper odds in checking Tehran's nuclear advances, ballistic missile capabilities, and network of regional proxies.

China may project optical parity with the United States, yet it remains reliant on Gulf energy and cannot easily disregard Western sanctions. Russia remains consumed by the war in Ukraine, leaving it ill-equipped to drive Middle Eastern diplomacy or arbitrate regional hostilities. Concurrently, the United Nations is unable to guide the combatants toward peace.

For India, stability in the Gulf remains indispensable, bearing directly upon national security, energy supplies, diaspora welfare and critical trade corridors.

This November edition offers readers an incisive exploration of how the region is being shaped.

A handwritten signature in black ink that reads "Gitesh Sarma". The signature is written in a cursive, flowing style.

Ambassador (R) Gitesh Sarma
Former High Commissioner/Ambassador
to Australia, Fiji, Pacific Island countries and Uzbekistan

|| 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



WHO SHAPES THE GULF?

The world is going through a period of major change. Global powers are competing for influence, traditional alliances are under pressure, and nations are finding it harder to balance their interests with changing geopolitical realities.

Our November edition, "Who Shapes the Gulf?", examines the changing balance of power in the Gulf following regional conflicts, shifting partnerships and growing competition among major powers.

Beyond the Gulf, this edition explores the challenges facing the Commonwealth, China's growing strategic influence, ASEAN's regional importance and the changing nature of modern warfare.

We also examine India's efforts to maintain strategic independence through multiple partnerships, the challenges of energy security, and the growing influence of climate diplomacy and emerging technologies, particularly quantum computing.

Together, these articles highlight a simple reality: military strength alone no longer determines global influence. Economic resilience, technological progress, diplomatic relationships and the ability to adapt are equally important.

At The News Analytics Herald, our aim remains to provide balanced analysis, informed perspectives and a clearer understanding of global developments.

As the world becomes more uncertain, understanding how nations protect their interests and shape the future matters more than ever.

Jai Hind!

Sandhya Srivastava
Editor-in-Chief &
Publisher

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QUANTUM'S RACE TO RELIABILITY

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DIPLOMACY

The Commonwealth faces a defining test of relevance. Despite its global reach, economic potential and diplomatic legacy, persistent inequalities and institutional weaknesses undermine its effectiveness. CHOGM 2026 must demonstrate whether meaningful reforms can transform ceremonial diplomacy into practical multilateral cooperation.



**AMBASSADOR JEITENDRA TRIPATHI, IFS (R) |
FOR THE NEWS ANALYTICS HERALD**

The concept of Commonwealth as an organisation was first established in 1926 through the Balfour Declaration but was formalised by the Statute of Westminster in 1931. While the London Declaration of 1949 is the historical constitutional document establishing the Commonwealth in its modern form, the 1971 Declaration, adopted at the Singapore CHOGM Summit, articulated its objectives: commitment to world peace, promotion of human rights and individual liberty, free trade and the fight against poverty, ignorance and disease. Later summits added opposition to discrimination on the basis of sex (Lusaka Summit) and environmental sustainability (Langkawi Summit).

Originally envisaged as an organisation comprising former British colonies, the Commonwealth has gradually evolved into a 56-member group: 21 from Africa, 14 from the Americas and the Caribbean, eight from Asia, three from Europe and 10 from Australia and Oceania. It therefore no longer comprises only former British territories but also includes some former

Portuguese and Dutch colonies. Moreover, the governance models of its members are not uniform, as some member nations are full-fledged monarchies.

The fact that the last CHOGM summit was held in Samoa and the forthcoming summit is being held in the Caribbean itself demonstrates the enthusiasm of Small Island Developing States (SIDS) for this organisation. The theme of the forthcoming summit is “Accelerating Partnerships and Investment for a Prosperous Commonwealth”, while its priority areas are climate resilience, trade and investment, sustainable development and innovation and leadership.

The Commonwealth’s economic potential remains constrained by weak internal trade, unequal development and institutional limitations that demand urgent collective action.



INSTITUTIONAL CHALLENGES

Let us begin by examining its economic performance. The combined landmass of the Commonwealth members is 29.958 million sq. km, while the world's total surface area is approximately 510 million sq. km, almost 17 times greater. While the world's population is now 8.3 billion, that of the Commonwealth is 2.7 billion, almost one-third of the global population.

Despite this, the GDP of the Commonwealth group is US\$13.18 trillion, compared with the global GDP of US\$126.3 trillion, approximately one-tenth of the latter. This may be partly explained by the group's smaller landmass, which could mean less scope for production.

member and a non-member, leaving the organisation without a clear locus standi.

Even in disputes between members, the organisation lacks a formal interstate judicial body or military backing to enforce its decisions. In its formative years, the Commonwealth considered establishing a formal Commonwealth Tribunal, but member states were unwilling to sacrifice their sovereignty.

Electoral observation, climate assistance and educational scholarships demonstrate that Commonwealth cooperation succeeds when shared interests outweigh competing national priorities and ambitions.

COMMONWEALTH SUCCESS STORIES

However, it would be far from the truth to claim that the Commonwealth has failed entirely. The success or failure of any organisation depends on the integrity and political will of its members. In the case of the Commonwealth, as with the United Nations, it has been largely successful in areas where the vested interests of its members do not clash.

Electoral Observation: The Commonwealth has been successful in electoral observation, sending over 200 monitoring missions to more than 40 countries to support transparent and fair elections. It has established its credentials as an impartial observer of, and guide to, democratic elections.

However, what cannot be justified is that, out of the Commonwealth group's total trade of US\$4.794 trillion, only US\$854 billion (less than 25%) can be attributed to intra-Commonwealth trade. This suggests that the group's major economies are either more interested in trading outside the Commonwealth or are unable to trade within the group because of trade barriers, duty restrictions or a lack of trust in the business practices of other members.

This concern is further corroborated by the fact that, although the Commonwealth collectively holds US\$10.4 trillion in foreign direct investment (FDI) globally, intra-Commonwealth FDI amounts to just US\$1.7 trillion. This requires serious introspection on the part of Commonwealth leaders.

The second concern arises from geographical inequality, asymmetrical judicial systems and governance structures in smaller member states. These countries often accuse their bigger neighbours of displaying a “big brotherly attitude”, which hampers their own development.

Internal instability and violent disputes within some African member states have also adversely affected their progress within the group. The Commonwealth has been unable to resolve these disputes because, in some cases, they involve a



Climate and Small-State Advocacy: The group supports climate action and small-state advocacy through programmes such as the Climate Finance Access Hub, established in 2015, which has helped vulnerable Small Island Developing States secure funding to combat climate change.

Although the Hub has no fixed fund to distribute to needy small states, it provides small amounts of seed capital from time to time to help these countries translate their climate targets into action.

It also offers technical support through specialised short-term advisory services for the preparation and implementation of climate-related projects.

The Commonwealth delivers practical assistance in agriculture, healthcare and education while focusing resources on a population in which more than 60% are under the age of 30.



Commonwealth Scholarships: Perhaps the Commonwealth's biggest attraction is the Commonwealth Scholarship and Fellowship Scheme, established in 1960 through the Commonwealth Scholarship Commission. It has so far benefited more than 34,000 individuals and professionals.

THE REFORM IMPERATIVE

Changing global realities have raised questions about the effectiveness and relevance of the Commonwealth. The emergence of new economic powers, climate change, technological transformation, geopolitical competition, pandemics and economic inequalities call for reforms in its institutions and working methods.

Some of the suggested reforms are outlined below.

Strengthening the Secretariat: The Commonwealth Secretariat must have greater financial and professional resources, with stronger expertise in climate change, digital technology, cybersecurity, international trade, public health, maritime security and sustainable development.

Programme Evaluation: Its programmes should be regularly monitored and independently evaluated to enable member states to assess their results.

Stronger Monitoring Mechanisms: The Commonwealth Ministerial Action Group (CMAG) should have stronger early-warning, monitoring and follow-up mechanisms.

Electoral Reforms: Election observation should also cover

electoral reforms, campaign financing, media freedom, political participation and post-election reconciliation.

Trade and Investment: The organisation should promote trade facilitation, investment, digital commerce and cooperation among small and medium-sized enterprises.

Climate Prioritisation: Climate change must be a central Commonwealth priority. Many member states, particularly small island countries, face serious risks from sea-level rise and extreme weather events.

Climate Resilience: The Commonwealth should strengthen cooperation in renewable energy, disaster preparedness, climate-resilient agriculture, coastal protection, early-warning systems and climate finance.

Digital Transformation: The Commonwealth should develop a common agenda for digital transformation. Countries with successful digital-governance systems could share their experience with other members.

Youth Participation: The future relevance of the Commonwealth depends heavily on its ability to involve younger generations. They should be given greater representation in Commonwealth discussions concerning employment, education, entrepreneurship, climate change and technology.

Women's Empowerment: Similarly, programmes promoting women's political participation, economic empowerment, education and entrepreneurship should be strengthened.



Conflict Resolution and Security: The Commonwealth should develop stronger mechanisms for mediation, preventive diplomacy, peacekeeping operations and post-conflict reconstruction.

Greater cooperation in maritime security, disaster response, combating transnational crime and addressing cyber threats would also enhance its relevance.

Accountability and Implementation: Each CHOGM Summit should identify a manageable number of priorities with clear targets, financial commitments and implementation deadlines. Progress, or the lack of it, should be regularly reviewed and publicly reported.

FROM RHETORIC TO RESULTS

The Commonwealth remains potentially valuable, but its future relevance depends heavily on its ability to adapt to changing international realities.

CHOGM must move beyond ceremonial declarations towards measurable commitments, institutional accountability and practical cooperation that delivers meaningful benefits to members.

The Commonwealth should move from declarations to

implementation and from ceremonial diplomacy to practical cooperation.

The organisation can remain relevant as a useful platform for cooperation among all members and make a meaningful contribution to multilateralism only if these reforms are implemented in a more pragmatic and time-bound manner.

(Ambassador Jeitendra Tripathi, IFS (R.), Former Ambassador to Zimbabwe. He has vast experience in Africa, Europe, the Middle East and Latin America. The views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The News Analytics Herald.)

IN BRIEF

- *CHOGM 2026 must confront the Commonwealth's declining effectiveness and growing institutional challenges.*
- *Weak intra-Commonwealth trade and investment expose persistent economic and structural limitations.*
- *Electoral monitoring, climate assistance and scholarships demonstrate the organisation's continuing practical value.*
- *Institutional reforms must prioritise climate resilience, digital transformation, youth and economic cooperation.*
- *Measurable commitments, stronger accountability and timely implementation will determine future Commonwealth relevance.*



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AFTER IRAN: WHO SHAPES THE GULF?

BIG STORY

The Iran war is exposing the vulnerabilities of America's Gulf security architecture. As regional powers reconsider their dependencies, diversify alliances and confront Iran's enduring influence, a fundamental question emerges: who will shape the Gulf's security order after the guns fall silent?



**DR. AFTAB ALAM | DEAN, FACULTY OF INTERNATIONAL STUDIES |
ALIGARH MUSLIM UNIVERSITY | FOR THE NEWS ANALYTICS HERALD**

The US-Israeli war against Iran, widely viewed by much of the international community as unlawful, is reshaping the Gulf's security order. Its consequences, however, extend well beyond the damage inflicted on Iran and its regional allies. The war has sent shockwaves through the global economy and raised broader questions about the resilience of the post-Second World War liberal international order.

For decades, the United States has been at the centre of Persian Gulf security, providing a broad security umbrella through its substantial military presence and extensive arms sales, while helping to safeguard the energy supplies on which the global economy depends. It maintains military bases and facilities across Bahrain, Egypt, Iraq, Jordan, Kuwait, Qatar, Saudi Arabia and the United Arab Emirates. The United States also maintains a substantial military presence across the region, with more than 50,000 personnel deployed in the Middle East. Amid the continuing conflict, Washington has been considering further reinforcements, potentially including additional troops and fighter aircraft.

The Gulf states have long been concerned that Washington gives greater priority to Israeli security than to their own. The current war has reinforced these concerns. While the United States focused heavily on defending Israel, some of its Gulf partners felt that their own security concerns were receiving insufficient attention, even as they faced Iranian retaliatory missile and drone attacks. This was despite their efforts to exercise restraint and remain outside the conflict and, in some cases, their refusal to allow their territory

to be used for offensive operations against Iran. The war has further deepened doubts about Washington's willingness to restrain Israel when its military actions risk wider regional escalation.

AMERICA'S SECURITY DILEMMA

Perhaps the most important lesson of the war for the Gulf states is that a security architecture centred on the United States may no longer be sufficient to guarantee their security. The Iranian attacks exposed vulnerabilities in this arrangement and demonstrated that foreign military bases can become liabilities as readily as strategic assets, leaving host states exposed to retaliation.

The war has also sharpened a broader question about the Gulf's place in regional security. For decades, its security was shaped largely by the calculations of Washington, Tehran and other major powers, while the Gulf states themselves were often treated as objects of great-power competition. The challenge now is to translate their growing awareness of these vulnerabilities into a greater role in shaping the region's security order.

The Iran war has exposed a fundamental paradox: foreign military bases can become strategic liabilities rather than guarantees of security.

The new realities exposed by the Iran war are pushing Gulf states to diversify their strategic partnerships. They are strengthening economic and diplomatic ties with China, expanding defence and political cooperation with Türkiye, and keeping channels open with Iran. At the same time, they are seeking greater regional coordination and a stronger voice in matters that directly affect their security. Their aim

channels open even amid deep regional tensions. Qatar maintains close defence ties with the United States while also keeping channels of communication open with Iran and playing a diplomatic role in regional crises. Oman, too, has supported mediation and efforts to reduce tensions.

Such engagement does not mean that Gulf states have overcome their distrust of Iran or set aside their security concerns. Rather, it reflects a growing realisation that geography makes Iran an unavoidable neighbour and that lasting regional stability cannot be achieved without Iran being part of the regional security architecture. The emerging approach is therefore not alliance politics in the traditional sense, but a search for greater strategic flexibility.

Gulf states are not abandoning Washington; they are seeking strategic flexibility through diversified partnerships, regional cooperation and renewed diplomatic engagement.

CHINA'S STRATEGIC CALCULUS

The Iran war has further highlighted China's growing importance in the Gulf, where it has expanded its economic and diplomatic influence without assuming the direct military

is not to replace or abandon Washington, but to ensure that their strategic options are not tied to a single power.

The Makkah Joint Defence Agreement, signed by Saudi Arabia, Türkiye and Pakistan on 7 August 2026, takes this trend a step further. By committing the three countries to treat an armed attack on one as an attack on all, it introduces a collective-defence dimension into a regional security environment long shaped by external powers. Its significance lies not simply in the military capabilities of the three countries, but in the possibility of regional powers assuming a more direct role in deterrence. If such arrangements develop further, they could contribute to a more plural regional security order, in which the United States remains central but is no longer its sole pillar.

REGIONAL STRATEGIC REALIGNMENT

One possible consequence of the war is a renewed push by some Gulf states towards rapprochement with Iran. Since the 1979 Islamic Revolution, Israel has sought to isolate Iran. Yet, in a twist of irony, its military action against Iran may have strengthened the case for engagement with Tehran among some of its Arab neighbours.

Saudi Arabia's restoration of diplomatic relations with Iran in 2023, brokered by China, had already marked an important step in this direction. Beijing's role in the rapprochement demonstrated its capacity to use economic and political influence to facilitate regional diplomacy.

Qatar and Oman illustrate the importance of keeping diplomatic

commitments that underpin the American security role. Beijing has sought to preserve its ties with rival regional powers while avoiding a direct military role in the conflict.

Despite its Comprehensive Strategic Partnership with Iran, signed on 27 March 2021, and its substantial economic interests in the region, China did not intervene militarily during the war. Its response during the war remained largely confined to diplomatic posturing at the United Nations.

China's influence in the Gulf rests on its extensive trade, energy imports and investment in infrastructure. Rather than relying exclusively on formal military alliances, it maintains partnerships with countries that have competing interests,



including Iran, Saudi Arabia, the UAE, Israel and Türkiye. This allows Beijing to preserve strategic flexibility and maintain relations across regional divides.

The war thus highlights both the reach and the limits of Chinese influence: China can deepen its regional presence without assuming the risks and responsibilities of acting as the Gulf's principal security guarantor. This approach may also appeal to Gulf states, which can deepen their ties with China without necessarily abandoning their security relationships with the United States.

BEYOND MILITARY POWER

The war has also exposed the limits of military power in shaping the regional security order. Iran, a major challenger to American influence in the region, may have suffered enormous military losses, including the killing of its Supreme Leader, Ayatollah Ali Khamenei, and other senior leaders, alongside a severe economic crisis. Yet its regime remains intact.

The war may have weakened Iran militarily, but it has not removed the country from the Gulf's strategic equation. This underscores a broader limitation of military force: the ability to inflict extensive damage does not necessarily translate into the ability to determine a country's political future or reshape its regional environment.

Washington now faces a difficult strategic dilemma. While continuing the conflict risks further regional instability and economic disruption, ending it without achieving its principal objectives could invite criticism that the war has failed to achieve its intended political goals. The challenge is therefore not simply to weaken Iran militarily, but to find a political

settlement that can translate military action into a durable strategic outcome.

The Iran war may ultimately be remembered not only for the damage it inflicted, but for the changes it set in motion in the Gulf's regional order. The question that matters most is not whether Iran has been substantially weakened or whether the United States remains the region's strongest power, but whether the Gulf is moving towards a new regional order in which no single power can shape the region on its own.

The United States will remain the Gulf's foremost external military power, and Iran will remain too important to ignore.



China and Türkiye may assume larger roles, while the Gulf states seek to diversify their partnerships, strengthen regional cooperation and gain a greater say in their own security.

The result could be a more plural regional order in which the Gulf states are not merely affected by decisions made elsewhere, but help shape the region's future.

Military superiority can devastate an adversary, but it cannot alone deliver political stability or determine the future regional security order.

*(Dr Aftab Alam is the Dean, Faculty of International Studies and teaches international law at Aligarh Muslim University. The views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of **The News Analytics Herald**.)*

IN BRIEF

- *The Iran war exposes growing vulnerabilities in America's Gulf security architecture.*
- *Gulf states are diversifying strategic partnerships without abandoning longstanding American security ties.*
- *Regional defence cooperation and diplomatic engagement could reshape the Gulf's security order.*
- *China expands its economic influence while avoiding direct military commitments and responsibilities.*
- *Military superiority alone cannot guarantee political stability or lasting regional security.*



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TAMIM BIN HAMAD AL THANI - EMIR OF THE STATE OF QATAR

Diplomacy, Strategic Balance and the Changing Gulf Order

POWER PROFILE

As the Gulf faces one of its most uncertain periods, the question of who shapes its future has become increasingly important. Regional conflicts, energy security, competing international interests and changing alliances are testing the ability of Gulf nations to protect their sovereignty while maintaining stability.

Amid these developments, Sheikh Tamim bin Hamad Al Thani, Emir of Qatar, represents an approach to regional influence built around diplomacy, economic strength and strategic partnerships.

His leadership offers an important perspective on how a relatively small state can exercise influence in a region shaped by much larger powers.



DIPLOMACY AS STRATEGIC INFLUENCE

Since becoming Emir in 2013, Sheikh Tamim has continued Qatar's emphasis on international engagement and mediation.

Doha has maintained communication channels with governments and political actors that often struggle to engage directly. This diplomatic positioning has enabled Qatar to participate in sensitive negotiations involving regional conflicts, humanitarian concerns and international security.

In July 2026, Qatar reaffirmed its mediation efforts concerning US–Iran negotiations. Addressing the United Nations General Assembly in September, Sheikh Tamim called for diplomatic solutions and a regional system of collective security.

These initiatives reflect Qatar's efforts to combine national security with diplomatic engagement. For Qatar, influence increasingly rests on maintaining dialogue where political divisions make direct engagement difficult.

NAVIGATING THE GULF'S NEW ORDER

The Gulf's strategic environment has changed considerably. Regional rivalries, the conflict involving Iran, maritime insecurity and concerns over energy supplies have increased uncertainty.

Qatar occupies a sensitive position within this environment. It maintains important security relationships with Western partners while preserving diplomatic engagement across the region. This balancing approach creates

OF THE MONTH

opportunities for mediation but also exposes Qatar to pressure from competing interests.

At the September 2026 UN General Assembly, Sheikh Tamim emphasised regional sovereignty, peaceful settlement of disputes and the importance of reopening the Strait of Hormuz to maritime navigation.

His position reflects a broader challenge facing Gulf states: maintaining national independence while navigating security relationships, economic dependence and regional competition.

ECONOMIC STRENGTH AND GLOBAL REACH

Qatar's international influence extends beyond diplomacy. Its natural gas resources, particularly liquefied natural gas exports, have established the country as an important participant in global energy markets.

Energy relationships provide Qatar with economic strength and long-term partnerships across Asia and Europe.

The country has also pursued international investment, infrastructure development and economic diversification to reduce dependence on hydrocarbons.

These economic connections strengthen Qatar's diplomatic reach while making regional stability essential to its own prosperity.

The relationship between energy security and geopolitical influence has become particularly important as conflicts threaten shipping routes and international supply chains.



INDIA–QATAR STRATEGIC PARTNERSHIP

For India, Qatar holds significance across energy, investment, trade and the welfare of the Indian community. A major development came during Sheikh Tamim's February 2025 state visit to New Delhi, when both countries elevated their relationship to a Strategic Partnership.

Prime Minister Narendra Modi and the Emir agreed to deepen cooperation in energy, technology, investment, security and emerging industries. They also established a target of doubling bilateral trade by 2030.

Qatar's energy supplies remain important to India's economic security, while investment and technology cooperation offer opportunities for broader engagement.

During the regional crisis in March 2026, PM Modi and Sheikh Tamim discussed sovereignty, regional stability and the safety of the Indian community in Qatar, reinforcing the importance of sustained bilateral dialogue.

SHENZHEN'S GREAT-POWER MOMENT

IN FOCUS

From Great-Power Management to Regional Agency: Who Shapes the Indo-Pacific Order? Shenzhen may bring Xi, Trump and Putin together, but the Indo-Pacific's future will not be decided by great powers alone. As rivalry intensifies, India, Japan and Southeast Asia are asserting strategic choices that could redefine regional influence and power.



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

When leaders gather in Shenzhen for the APEC summit in November 2026, attention will turn to the possibility of Chinese President Xi Jinping, US President Donald Trump and Russian President Vladimir Putin meeting on the sidelines. Such an encounter would matter amid persistent geopolitical tensions. But a photograph of three leaders would tell us little about a more consequential question: who will shape the future of the Indo-Pacific?

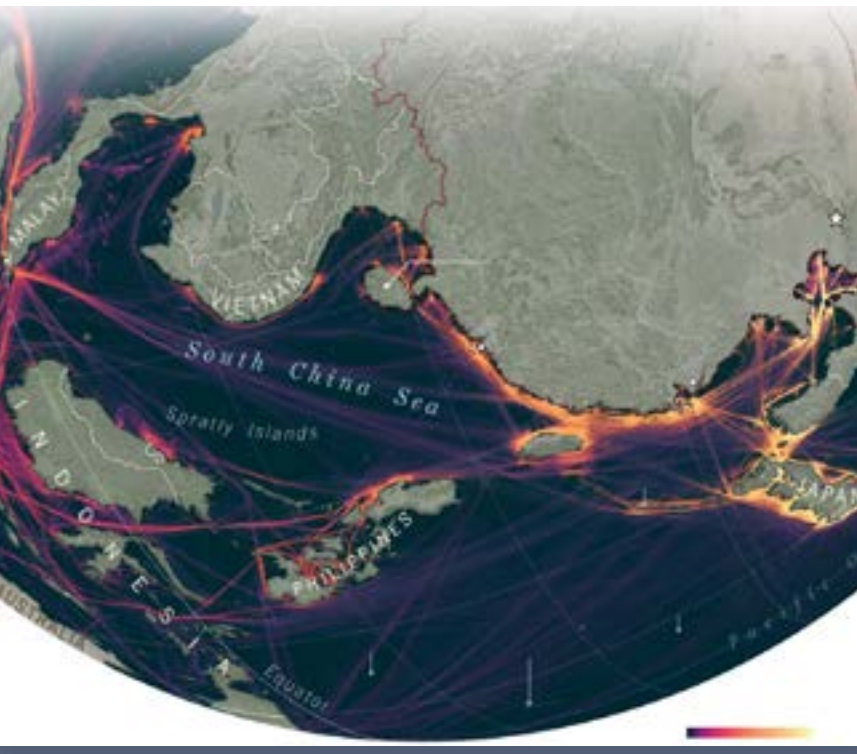
Washington and Beijing dominate the regional balance of power, but they do not operate in an empty space. India, Japan, Indonesia and other regional actors are developing ways to protect their interests and influence decisions made around them. Shenzhen may provide an opportunity to manage great-power competition. It may also reveal why diplomacy among the strongest powers cannot, on its own, define the regional order.

Great-power diplomacy may manage tensions, but no summit photograph can determine the Indo-Pacific's future without the region's other strategic actors.

CHINA'S DIPLOMATIC OPPORTUNITY

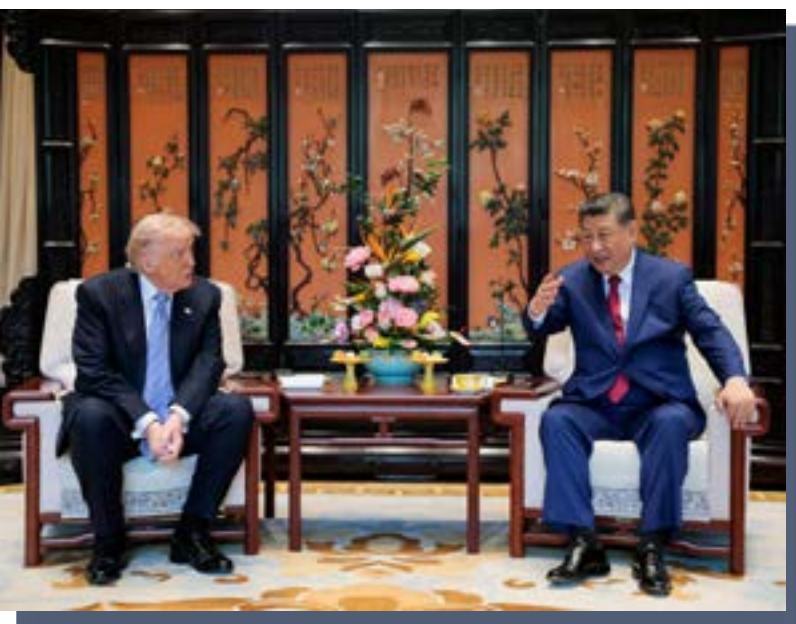
For Beijing, hosting APEC is an opportunity to place China at the centre of Asia-Pacific diplomacy. Shenzhen is a fitting stage. Transformed by the economic reforms that helped drive China's rise, the city is now associated with manufacturing, international trade and technological innovation. It embodies the capabilities China wants the region to recognise.

Beijing has chosen openness, innovation and cooperation as priorities for its APEC presidency. The language is economic, but the stakes are strategic. Trade routes, digital infrastructure, advanced technologies and supply chains affect national security and shape the choices available to governments. China wants greater



influence over these arrangements, not merely access to them.

Its neighbours, however, face a dilemma. Many depend on Chinese markets and manufacturing networks while worrying about Beijing's military capabilities and territorial claims. Southeast Asian governments especially want the benefits of economic engagement without the costs of strategic dependence. Hosting a successful summit may strengthen China's diplomatic profile, but it cannot erase those concerns.



APEC itself illustrates the tension. Its members cooperate on trade and growth, yet the forum is not a security alliance and cannot negotiate away disputes over maritime boundaries or military deployments. Economic cooperation can make confrontation costlier; it does not make confrontation impossible. Xi, Trump and Putin would approach any meeting with different expectations. Xi wants to keep relations with Washington manageable without abandoning China's technological and military ambitions. Trump has incentives to seek visible gains on trade and economic relations while protecting American influence. Putin would welcome a prominent diplomatic platform that reinforces Russia's international relevance amid the war in Ukraine and its confrontation with the West.

These are not three equally positioned powers. The United States and China remain the principal competitors in the Indo-Pacific. Russia possesses formidable military and nuclear capabilities, but its economic weight in the region is smaller. Nor would their appearance together imply that they had agreed on a new international order.

Washington and Beijing may reach understandings on particular economic issues while remaining sharply divided over Taiwan, technology restrictions and regional security. Diplomatic communication can lower the risk of miscalculation, especially when military forces operate in close proximity. It cannot

eliminate the mistrust driving the competition.

There is another complication: a meeting between leaders can produce headlines without creating durable rules. What matters after the leaders depart is whether officials can sustain practical arrangements, whether businesses consider commitments credible and whether regional governments see room to pursue their own priorities.

Great-power diplomacy is necessary precisely because rivalry is enduring. Its limits become clear, however, when the region is viewed from the capitals that must live with the consequences of those negotiations.

AUTONOMY TAKES SHAPE

Regional governments are not choosing between identical versions of strategic autonomy. Their options depend on their security commitments, economic exposure and national capabilities.

Japan remains committed to its alliance with the United States, yet is investing in stronger defence capabilities, technological resilience and economic security. Tokyo is not seeking distance from Washington. It wants greater ability to protect its interests and contribute to stability from within that partnership.

Indonesia follows a different course. Its long-standing *bebas dan aktif*, or free and active, foreign policy favours independent decision-making, diverse partnerships and



ASEAN centrality. In the 2026 State of Southeast Asia Survey, 80.1 per cent of Indonesian respondents chose China over the United States when presented with a hypothetical forced choice. That figure describes the preferences of surveyed opinion-makers, not the Indonesian government's policy or the views of the population as a whole. Nor does it establish support for Chinese regional dominance.

Southeast Asia is hardly uniform. Some governments place particular value on American security cooperation; others give greater weight to economic ties with China. ASEAN

offers a framework for cooperation, but its members have different threat perceptions.

For many, autonomy means keeping options open rather than accumulating the military capabilities of a major power. Even that modest-sounding goal is difficult when export markets, investment, infrastructure financing and security guarantees pull in different directions.



INDIA'S STRATEGIC AGENCY

India offers a more ambitious variation. Although it does not belong to APEC, its economic, diplomatic and security roles make it central to any serious discussion of the wider Indo-Pacific. New Delhi has expanded defence and maritime cooperation with the United States, including through the Quad, while maintaining ties with Russia and pursuing dialogue with China despite unresolved border tensions.

India's strategic ambition is evolving beyond preserving independence towards actively shaping regional outcomes through partnerships, maritime capabilities and technological strength.

This balancing act is often described as strategic autonomy. But India's ambitions now extend beyond retaining the freedom to say no. New Delhi increasingly wants the capacity to shape developments beyond its borders: what might be called a shift from strategic autonomy towards strategic agency.

For much of its post-independence history, autonomy meant avoiding dependence on rival blocs and safeguarding independent political judgement. That principle remains. What is changing is the emphasis on the material means of exercising it. Maritime reach, domestic defence production, technological capabilities and partnerships with countries such as Japan are becoming integral to India's foreign policy.

The shift should not be overstated. India's resources are stretched across multiple security priorities, including its continental frontier with China. Its capacity to project sustained influence in the Western Pacific remains limited.

Nevertheless, shaping a regional order does not require matching American or Chinese power across every domain. India can matter through selective partnerships, maritime cooperation and the ability to offer other countries additional strategic options.

RESILIENCE AND CHOICE

India also exposes the gap between political independence and economic freedom of action. Despite tense relations with Beijing, Indian industry relies on Chinese machinery, components and intermediate goods. Its merchandise trade

Strategic autonomy means little without economic resilience; dependence on critical foreign technologies can turn national sovereignty into constrained strategic choice.



deficit with China reached approximately \$99.2 billion in the 2024–2025 financial year. This dependency creates vulnerabilities that diplomatic declarations cannot resolve.

New Delhi is expanding domestic manufacturing and diversifying suppliers, not attempting a complete break with Chinese production networks. The goal is to reduce dependence where it could become a source of pressure during a crisis. Japan's economic security initiatives and Southeast Asian efforts to diversify supply chains reflect comparable concerns, although their policies and resources differ.

Economic resilience is thus more than an industrial objective. A country whose critical infrastructure or essential technologies can be disrupted from abroad may retain formal sovereignty while having fewer practical choices.

Strategic agency requires the ability to absorb pressure as well as the diplomatic skill to negotiate around it. It also demands choices: diversification can raise costs, domestic production takes time and trusted partners may disagree on priorities. Resilience is not self-sufficiency, but a deliberate effort to prevent any single dependency from becoming a strategic veto.

Shenzhen could produce useful results: More reliable communication between Washington and Beijing, limited trade agreements or measures to prevent military incidents. None should be dismissed. But none would settle who shapes the Indo-Pacific.

The region's future will emerge from a series of decisions made well beyond the summit. India will test whether strategic autonomy can translate into influence. Japan will

seek more capability within an alliance. Indonesia and its ASEAN partners will try to preserve flexibility without losing regional cohesion.

Their power is unequal, and their interests do not always align, but their choices constrain and redirect the ambitions of larger states. Shenzhen may show whether great powers can manage their differences. The deeper measure of the emerging regional order is whether other countries can develop the economic strength, partnerships and institutional influence to shape the conditions under which that competition unfolds.

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IN BRIEF

- *Shenzhen's APEC summit could manage rivalries without determining the Indo-Pacific's strategic future.*
- *China seeks greater regional influence through economic cooperation, technology and diplomatic engagement.*
- *Japan and ASEAN members pursue distinct approaches to autonomy amid great-power competition.*
- *India is moving from strategic autonomy towards active regional influence and agency.*
- *Economic resilience, diversified partnerships and technological capabilities increasingly determine meaningful strategic independence.*



CLIMATE DIPLOMACY MEETS HARD POWER

GEOECONOMICS

"On no one quality, on no one process, on no one country, on no one route, and on no one field must we be dependent. Safety and certainty in oil lie in variety, and in variety alone."

— Winston Churchill, First Lord of the Admiralty, House of Commons, July 17, 1913



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Antalya was not supposed to be hosting this. For most of the past two years, Australia and Türkiye fought over who would chair COP31, a dispute serious enough that Germany, as home to the UN climate secretariat, quietly prepared Bonn as a fallback venue. The compromise that emerged in 2025 split the job in two: Türkiye holds the gavel, Australia runs the actual negotiations, and a separate pre-COP gathering is being arranged in the Pacific to keep the islands most exposed to rising seas inside the room. Delegates will sit down on 9 November, having already spent two years negotiating

who gets to negotiate. The real preview of what's coming, though, isn't procedural. It's offshore, in the Strait of Hormuz.

ENERGY SECURITY CRISIS

Since 28 February 2026, the US and Israel have been at war with Iran, and the fighting has never fully stopped despite repeated ceasefire attempts. Iran responded by closing Hormuz to shipping it doesn't approve of, a waterway that carried roughly a fifth of the world's oil and gas before the war.



Washington imposed its own naval blockade on Iranian vessels in April, briefly tried an escort operation called Project Freedom to force the strait back open, and has struck Iranian territory repeatedly since a ceasefire collapsed in July.

As of early October, Hormuz is contested rather than closed. Crude is getting through, somewhere around 9 to 10 million



barrels a day against a pre-war baseline near 14.5 million, but only because of a heavy US naval escort — and Iran still managed to hit roughly two ships for every hundred that attempted the transit last quarter. Brent passed \$104 a barrel on 8 October, after word leaked that the White House had asked the Pentagon for options to strike Iran again before the US midterms.

This is the energy-security backdrop COP31 is walking into. It isn't abstract for the country three hundred kilometres down the coast from Antalya's own conference centre. Qatar used to supply something like a fifth of the world's LNG. Not anymore, or not reliably. An Iranian strike in March forced Qatar Energy to shut part of its Ras Laffan complex — the first outage of its kind there in nearly thirty years — and took out around 17 per cent of national production capacity that officials now say will take years, not months, to rebuild.

Exports fell off a cliff: from roughly 20 million tonnes a quarter to under 2 million between April and June, though trade data on exactly how far below that floor they dipped in any given week has been genuinely hard to pin down.

What is pinned down is the budget. Qatar's second-quarter deficit came in at 21.2 billion riyals, about \$5.8 billion, its worst in close to a decade, on top of a first-quarter gap of 10.3 billion. Add the two together and Doha had already blown past its entire deficit forecast for 2026 by mid-year.

GDP shrank 7 per cent year-on-year in the first quarter — a quarter in which hydrocarbon output alone fell almost 26 per cent — and the IMF now expects the full year to come

in somewhere north of an 8 per cent contraction. Ministries have been told to cut spending by up to 30 per cent. The central bank pulled roughly \$13 billion back home to steady domestic lenders. A country that was running a budget surplus as recently as 2024 has gone out and issued \$3 billion in bonds, its first real borrowing in years.

Unlike Saudi Arabia or the UAE, Qatar has no pipeline workaround for Hormuz. LNG doesn't travel overland the way crude sometimes can. More than 90 per cent of its exports depend on one strait staying open, which is presumably why the finance ministry's statement gave no breakdown between energy and non-energy revenue this time — there was barely enough of the former left to bother separating out.

What happens to a state that built two decades of soft power and sovereign-wealth muscle on being the world's most dependable gas supplier, the moment it can no longer supply gas dependably?

The Gulf's energy crisis exposes how quickly geopolitical warfare can dismantle export reliability, undermine sovereign finances and destabilise global markets.



Four hundred kilometres southwest, the other chokepoint got worse in a different way. Houthi forces spent 2026 escalating attacks on shipping through Bab al-Mandeb, first against vessels tied to Israel and Saudi Arabia, then, in September, actually seizing the port of Mocha and the island of Mayyun — not just harassing ships anymore, but holding Yemen's entire Red Sea coastline outright.

The strait carries about 12 per cent of global trade, including roughly 11 per cent of seaborne oil and 8 per cent of LNG. Shipping through it had already fallen some 60 per cent since the Houthi campaign began in late 2023; container lines unwilling to risk it now sail around the Cape of Good Hope instead, adding roughly two weeks to an Asia–Europe run

and starving the Suez Canal of toll revenue along the way.

Gulf shippers increasingly treat the two straits as one combined risk, because a tanker owner refusing Hormuz this month is usually refusing Bab al-Mandeb too.



Two members of the GCC, then, will be walking into Antalya with their energy exports under direct fire and their treasuries bleeding in real time — not a scenario some war-gaming unit modelled years ago, but the year they have actually just lived through.

It puts a sharper edge on an argument Gulf producers were already making before anyone fired a shot: that climate finance pledges and oil-and-gas revenue are separate conversations, and a war that guts one of them does nothing to soften the appetite for defending the other

WASHINGTON'S CLIMATE WITHDRAWAL

Washington's own absence compounds it. On 27 January 2026, the US completed its second withdrawal from the Paris Agreement, a process Trump set in motion on his first day back in office — and this time it is also working to exit the UN Framework Convention on Climate Change itself, something no country has previously attempted.

Antalya will be the first COP ever convened without the US as a party, while that same administration quietly debates whether to hit Iran again before its own voters go to the polls.

Belém left its own unfinished business behind. Brazil's presidency delivered a pledge to triple adaptation finance by 2035, a new Just Transition Mechanism, and the first agreed indicators for tracking adaptation progress — real things, not nothing.

What it couldn't deliver was any binding roadmap to phase out fossil fuels, blocked by the exporters who'd be phasing out, and shoved instead into a voluntary track outside the formal UN process. The \$120 billion a year that was pledged already sits far below the \$360 billion independent estimates say the job actually needs.

Washington's withdrawal leaves climate diplomacy confronting an uncomfortable reality: the world's most consequential powers can evade responsibility while demanding concessions.

NEGOTIATIONS AND OMISSIONS

A fair amount of what matters won't be on the Antalya agenda at all, and the gaps are their own kind of statement. Military emissions — the fuel burned by every carrier group, strike aircraft and naval blockade enforcing this war — aren't counted in any UN climate accounting framework, and neither Washington, as a non-party now anyway, nor its allies have shown the slightest appetite to start counting them.

Enforcement of clean-technology transfer is in roughly the same place: developing countries keep pointing out that a climate-finance pledge means little if the solar, battery and green-hydrogen patents behind it stay locked inside Washington, Brussels and Beijing.

A binding fossil-fuel phase-out, the thing Belém couldn't deliver, isn't coming back onto the table either. None of these absences will be debated in Antalya. They'll just sit there, unaddressed, the way they always do.

China's position threads through nearly all of it. Beijing is simultaneously the world's largest manufacturer of solar panels and batteries, the largest coal burner on the planet, and the country holding the rare-earth licences everyone else's energy transition quietly depends on.



Whether China plays Antalya as a bridge — offering technology access in exchange for something on emissions — or simply sits back and lets the US absence and the Gulf crisis do the blocking for it, will shape what comes out of this COP about as much as anything the actual chair and co-chair agree on.

Antalya's defining test is whether governments confront the collision between energy security and climate commitments, or retreat into diplomatic declarations.

ANTALYA'S DEFINING TEST

There's a reasonably obvious historical echo here, if anyone in Antalya has the stomach to draw it.

The 1973 oil embargo was the last time energy security and geopolitics fused this completely, this fast — and it produced the International Energy Agency, built specifically because governments realised they could no longer treat oil supply as separate from foreign policy.

Whether 2026 produces an equivalent institutional reckoning, or just a lot of strongly worded adaptation-finance paragraphs, is roughly the question Antalya exists to answer. Qatar's finance ministry will keep posting its quarterly numbers whether or not COP31 produces anything at all. Ras Laffan's repair timeline runs on years, not conference schedules.

Somewhere off Bandar Abbas right now, there's a tanker sitting at anchor with its transponder switched off, waiting to see which way this goes — and nobody in Antalya gets a vote on that.

(Mousa Altarawneh, Banking and Commodity Finance Director, Fimar Fintech, Dubai, United Arab Emirates. Expert in Trade Finance, SCF, M&A and Commodity. The views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The News Analytics Herald.)

IN BRIEF

- COP31 confronts escalating energy warfare, geopolitical divisions and mounting climate-finance pressures.
- Hormuz disruptions and Qatar's LNG crisis expose critical global energy vulnerabilities.
- Washington's climate withdrawal threatens multilateral negotiations and weakens international leadership credibility.
- China's clean-technology dominance could shape negotiations over emissions and technology access.
- Antalya must reconcile energy security with climate commitments or risk diplomatic irrelevance.



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ARCTIC STRIKE 2026: TESTING THE FUTURE OF HIGH NORTH WARFARE

SPECIAL COVERAGE

As NATO strengthens its northern defences, Arctic Strike 2026 will examine how autonomous systems, counter-drone technologies and multinational interoperability can reshape military operations in one of the world's most demanding environments.

- **AUTONOMOUS WARFARE:**

Arctic drone technologies offer valuable lessons for India's challenging Himalayan frontiers.

- **MILITARY INTEROPERABILITY:**

NATO's integrated systems highlight India's need for stronger tri-service operational coordination..

- **STRATEGIC SELF-RELIANCE:**

Arctic experimentation reinforces India's priorities in indigenous defence innovation and deterrence.

The Arctic is emerging as an important theatre of geopolitical competition. Climate change, expanding access to maritime routes, critical resources and military infrastructure have increased its strategic significance.

Russia maintains substantial military capabilities across its northern territories, while China has expanded its interest in Arctic shipping, energy and resources.

For NATO, Finland's accession in 2023 and Sweden's in 2024 have strengthened the Alliance's northern position. Seven of the eight Arctic states are now NATO members.

In February 2026, NATO launched Arctic Sentry to strengthen regional deterrence and defence. Forward Land Forces Finland followed in June, reinforcing the Alliance's northern and eastern flanks.

Against this background, Arctic Strike reflects growing interest in technologies capable of operating reliably across difficult northern terrain.

TECHNOLOGY UNDER PRESSURE

Arctic Strike's announced focus includes uncrewed aerial systems (UAS), counter-uncrewed aerial systems (C-UAS) and uncrewed ground vehicles (UGVs).

These technologies are increasingly relevant to surveillance, reconnaissance, force protection and battlefield awareness.

Autonomous aerial platforms can potentially monitor dispersed positions, while ground vehicles may support reconnaissance and logistics. Counter-drone systems are becoming important as inexpensive unmanned aircraft increasingly threaten military installations and manoeuvring forces.

However, Arctic conditions present unusual challenges. Extreme cold can affect batteries, electronics and mechanical components. Snow, ice, limited visibility and difficult terrain complicate navigation, communications and sensor performance.

Consequently, testing technology in northern environments is not simply about demonstrating equipment. It is



about establishing whether systems can remain effective under demanding operational conditions.

The decisive Arctic advantage may belong not to the force possessing the most advanced technology, but to the one capable of operating it reliably in extreme conditions.

MULTINATIONAL INTEROPERABILITY

A central objective of Arctic Strike is interoperability: enabling equipment, personnel and information systems from different military organisations to operate together.

For autonomous systems, this requires compatible communications, secure data-sharing and effective command arrangements.

NATO's broader Task Force X-Arctic initiative provides relevant context. Launched in June 2026, it is testing networked uncrewed systems for persistent maritime awareness across the North Atlantic and High North.

Initial experimentation took place around Iceland, followed by further assessment during Portugal's REPMUS 2026 exercise. NATO expects full-scale demonstrations in summer 2027. These are related technological developments, not confirmed activities within Arctic Strike itself.



The strategic challenge is translating technological innovation into dependable military capability. Future deterrence will increasingly depend on how effectively allied forces connect sensors, autonomous platforms and command systems.

FINLAND'S STRATEGIC ROLE

Finland's geography gives it particular importance in northern European security. Its long border with Russia, established winter-warfare experience and extensive training infrastructure make it an important contributor to NATO's northern defence posture.

Rovajärvi, in Finnish Lapland, is a major military training area where demanding terrain and seasonal conditions support realistic operational testing. Arctic Strike's scheduled activities reflect Finland's expanding role in multinational defence experimentation.

The exercise also illustrates a wider transformation: NATO members are seeking faster ways to evaluate commercial innovations and integrate useful technologies into military operations.

WHAT TO WATCH

Three questions will shape the significance of Arctic Strike 2026. First, can autonomous systems operate dependably in harsh northern conditions? Second, can different technologies exchange information securely and support coordinated operations? Third, can successful experimentation translate into deployable capabilities without compromising human control and operational accountability?

As of October 2026, NATO's public event notices do not provide a confirmed list of participating nations, troop numbers or specific equipment. Those details should not be assumed. Arctic Strike should therefore be viewed as a forthcoming technology-focused military activity rather than evidence of capabilities already demonstrated. Its broader importance lies in the direction of modern defence planning. Military superiority increasingly requires not only advanced platforms but also reliable software, resilient communications and the ability to integrate emerging technologies rapidly. Arctic Strike 2026 will offer an opportunity to examine whether autonomous systems can move beyond controlled demonstrations towards practical military utility in the High North. For NATO, that transition could become an important element of future deterrence, readiness and collective defence.

THE RETURN OF STRATEGIC DEPTH?

WAR STRATEGY

Precision weapons and drones have transformed warfare, but they have not defeated geography. From Ukraine and Iran to the Indo-Pacific, strategic depth, terrain and resilient logistics are determining whether nations can withstand attacks, sustain operations and preserve national power. Technology cannot trump the relevance of geography.



LT GEN DP PANDEY(R) | FORMER CORPS COMMANDER CHINAR CORPS | FOR THE NEWS ANALYTICS HERALD

The advent of long-range missiles, precision weapons, drones and persistent surveillance has created a perception that geography is losing its strategic significance in warfare. Some Indian strategic thinkers argue that China's technological advances could overcome the geographical distance from its mainland and the formidable Himalayan barrier.

Geographical depth creates time and options, but only industrial capacity, resilient infrastructure and sustained logistics can convert territory into endurance.

If an adversary can be detected and struck across thousands of kilometres, territorial distance appears to offer diminishing protection. Recent conflicts, however, suggest a different conclusion. Geography has not become less important; its military significance has changed.

The Russia–Ukraine war, the US–Israeli confrontation with Iran and emerging Indo-Pacific contingencies demonstrate that the ability to strike an adversary does not necessarily translate into political subjugation or submission.



Geography enables dispersed infrastructure, hardened facilities, logistical networks, industrial capacity and access to resources. These determine a nation's ability to sustain military operations despite technological or numerical disadvantages.

Indian planners must therefore consider geography not merely as territory behind the front line, but as the capacity to preserve, regenerate and employ national power under

sustained military pressure.

TERRITORIAL ENDURANCE

The Russia–Ukraine war illustrates the continuing importance of strategic depth. Russia's enormous territorial expanse provides room to disperse military assets, relocate selected facilities and sustain industrial activity beyond the immediate

reach of Ukrainian ground forces. Its resources and defence-industrial capacity further support prolonged operations.

Yet distance no longer guarantees immunity. On 1 June 2025, Ukraine conducted Operation Spider's Web, using drones covertly transported into Russia to attack military airbases deep inside the country. Four airbases were targeted, including Belaya in Irkutsk, approximately 4,850 kilometres from Kyiv. Ukrainian officials claimed that 41 aircraft were damaged, although the precise losses required independent verification.



The operation exposed a critical vulnerability, but an audacious deep strike is not equivalent to neutralising an entire military system. Despite extensive NATO financial, technological and military assistance to Ukraine, Russia's geographical scale, industrial resources and capacity to regenerate selected capabilities complicate efforts to achieve decisive results.

Ukraine, by contrast, must defend population centres, energy infrastructure, industrial facilities and transport networks within a more restricted territory. A CSIS analysis, *The Geography of Coercion* presents Russian Missile and Drone Campaigns in Ukraine, highlights how geographical proximity and concentrated infrastructure can magnify the cumulative effects of sustained attacks.

Territorial size does not guarantee victory. Geographical depth creates time, space and options, while industrial capacity and logistical resilience convert these advantages into endurance. Smaller countries must compensate through dispersal, mobility, external support and rapid regeneration.

Geographical depth creates time and options, but only industrial capacity, resilient infrastructure and sustained logistics can convert territory into endurance.

GEOGRAPHICAL LEVERAGE

Iran illustrates how a country can preserve national power and frustrate a militarily superior adversary through its geographical characteristics.

Covering approximately 1.65 million square kilometres, Iran possesses extensive mountain ranges, varied terrain and dispersed military installations. Some critical facilities are hardened or underground, complicating surveillance, targeting and efforts to achieve lasting results through airpower.

The struggle over the Strait of Hormuz, through which approximately one-fifth of global energy supplies pass, and the extension of maritime threats towards the Red Sea through the Houthis, demonstrate Iran's ability to impose consequences beyond the immediate battlefield. Disruptions to merchant shipping affect energy supplies, freight costs and global markets, transforming geographical location into economic and diplomatic leverage.

The US–Israeli military campaign beginning on 28 February 2026, known as Operation Epic Fury in the United States and Operation Roaring Lion in Israel, demonstrated advanced airpower's reach against Iranian military infrastructure. Yet it also exposed the distinction between battlefield superiority and achieving political objectives.

Iran does not need to match American military power platform for platform to impose substantial costs. Its coastline, proximity to strategic waterways and capacity to threaten maritime



traffic provide leverage disproportionate to its conventional military strength.

Geography therefore functions simultaneously as a military obstacle, economic pressure point and geopolitical instrument. It can complicate an adversary's calculations and expand the options available to a weaker power, although it cannot independently guarantee strategic success.

CONTESTED MARITIME LOGISTICS

In the Indo-Pacific, strategic depth assumes a distinctly maritime character. The enormous distances separating military bases, ports, supply depots and operational areas make logistics central to combat power. Unlike continental theatres, where supplies can move through interconnected road and rail networks, maritime forces depend on ports, shipping, replenishment vessels and secure sea lines of communication.



US Army analyses of contested logistics identify the region's vast distances, archipelagos and adversary capabilities as major challenges to sustaining joint operations. Forward bases provide operational reach but are increasingly vulnerable to long-range missiles and drones. Concentrating aircraft, fuel, ammunition and command facilities at a few installations allows adversaries to disrupt operations through limited successful strikes.

The 2026 US–Iran conflict further demonstrated these vulnerabilities. Iranian missile and drone attacks reportedly damaged American military facilities across the Gulf, including command infrastructure, satellite communications equipment and warehouses at Naval Support Activity Bahrain, a key logistics hub for the US Fifth Fleet.

Damage and personnel evacuations reportedly disrupted support networks, compelling greater reliance on Diego Garcia, approximately 2,200 miles away. Extended supply routes reportedly increased logistics cycles to 14–18 days, placing additional pressure on replenishment and operational endurance.

Combat power depends not merely on weapons and platforms but on secure bases, resilient supply chains, maintenance facilities and repair capabilities.

When forward installations become vulnerable, distance

becomes a logistical penalty, reducing operational flexibility and the sustainable tempo of military operations. The emerging response involves distributing forces and supplies across multiple locations, developing alternative operating sites, strengthening regional partnerships and ensuring continuity when established facilities become unavailable.

Distributed logistics is no longer merely a support function; it is essential to operational resilience. The United States benefits from geographical separation from potential continental adversaries, but this creates formidable sustainment challenges when projecting power into the Western Pacific.

China enjoys continental scale and substantial industrial capacity, yet its maritime trade and energy supplies remain vulnerable along critical sea lines of communication. In both cases, geography creates advantages and vulnerabilities. India's peninsular geography, Indian Ocean access and island territories provide advantages for maritime surveillance, operational presence and influence over vital shipping routes. These require sustained investment in maritime capabilities, infrastructure and operational reach.

The central challenge is not simply establishing bases within striking distance of an adversary, but ensuring forces can continue operating when bases, communications and supply routes come under attack.

In contested maritime theatres, military superiority becomes meaningless without secure bases, resilient supply chains and the capacity to sustain operations.



INDIA'S STRATEGIC DEPTH

Pakistan's traditional pursuit of strategic depth through influence in Afghanistan offers a cautionary comparison. Seeking additional geographical space or influence over a neighbouring country does not necessarily produce greater security. Political relationships can prove unreliable, while

modern missiles and drones can penetrate territorial depth without conventional forces crossing the intervening space. Strategic depth cannot therefore be measured in kilometres alone. It must encompass the survivability of critical assets, redundancy of command systems, resilience of infrastructure, availability of essential resources and capacity to regenerate combat power.

Military planners must shift from protecting individual installations towards preserving the wider national system. Bases should be dispersed where practicable, critical facilities hardened, communications made redundant, stockpiles distributed and industrial production designed to continue under attack.

Civilian infrastructure, energy networks and transport corridors must also form part of national resilience planning. India's vast geographical expanse, protected by the Himalayas in the north and the Indian Ocean in the south, provides significant strategic advantages.

Although China's growing inventory of long-range missiles and drones increases its capacity to strike distant targets, overcoming the physical challenges of terrain remains difficult.

India's geographical depth enables the dispersal of logistics, stockpiles, supply chains and critical infrastructure across multiple locations, complicating targeting and increasing the costs of sustained attacks. However, vulnerable approaches in the west and east remain potential chokepoints requiring resilient infrastructure, redundancy and alternative routes.

India's Indian Ocean advantages must be reinforced through resilient ports, airfields, logistics networks, stockpiles, repair facilities and indigenous defence production. Strengthening security and strategic infrastructure in the Andaman and Nicobar Islands is particularly important. These islands can extend India's surveillance and operational reach, provide

leverage the eastern Indian Ocean and protect vital maritime approaches.

India's continental responsibilities and maritime ambitions demand the integration of geographical depth with military preparedness, industrial capacity and resilient supply chains. Geography provides opportunities, but national capability determines whether they become sustainable instruments of strategic power.

Geography has returned as a central consideration in modern warfare, although distance alone cannot guarantee protection. Precision weapons and drones have made previously secure rear areas vulnerable. Nevertheless, territorial scale, terrain, maritime chokepoints and the distribution of military and industrial assets continue to influence the costs, duration and outcomes of conflict.

Russia demonstrates the advantages and limitations of territorial scale. Iran illustrates geography's asymmetric military and economic leverage. The Indo-Pacific reveals how distance, access and contested logistics determine whether military power can be sustained.

Energy security, industrial capacity, resource availability, resilient infrastructure and dependable international partnerships directly influence a nation's endurance. Modern strategic depth is not simply the distance between national borders and vital assets. It is the capacity to absorb attacks, preserve freedom of action, regenerate strength and continue pursuing political objectives.

The decisive advantage will belong not necessarily to the country possessing the greatest territory, but to the one that most effectively converts geographical opportunity into sustained national power. Geography provides the space for resilience, resources for industrial endurance, depth to withstand threats and location from which strategic leverage can be exercised.

India's geographical advantages will deliver strategic power only when reinforced by resilient infrastructure, indigenous defence production and sustained military preparedness.

*(Lt Gen DP Pandey (R), Former Corps Commander, Chinara Corps, DG Territorial Army, Director of Military Intelligence, Foreign Division and the Commandant of the Army War College. The views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of **The News Analytics Herald**.)*

IN BRIEF

- *Modern precision warfare transforms geography's significance without eliminating strategic depth or terrain.*
- *Russia's territorial scale supports military endurance despite increasingly sophisticated deep-strike capabilities.*
- *Iran exploits terrain and maritime chokepoints to generate disproportionate strategic leverage.*
- *Indo-Pacific operations depend on distributed logistics, secure bases and resilient supply networks.*
- *India's strategic advantage requires integrating geographical depth with industrial and military resilience.*

ASEAN AT THE CENTRE OF THE CONTEST

STRATEGIC OUTLOOK

The Philippines will host the 49th ASEAN Summit in Metro Manila from November 16–18, 2026, under the theme “Navigating Our Future, Together.” The leaders meet amid heightened strategic uncertainty as Southeast Asia becomes a central arena for major-power competition. Having assumed the rotating chairmanship after conflict-torn Myanmar stepped aside, and following the May Cebu Summit, the Philippines must now steer the bloc through intensifying major-power competition while preserving ASEAN’s internal unity, centrality and long-term strategic relevance.



**AMBASSADOR SRIKUMAR MENON, IFS(R) |
FOR THE NEWS ANALYTICS HERALD**

China’s growing economic and maritime influence, shifting US leadership and security commitments, and the increasing activism of middle powers such as Japan and Australia are reshaping the regional security landscape. Against this backdrop, ASEAN’s long-standing principle of centrality — defined by its role as the primary convening platform and agenda-setter for regional affairs — faces one of its most crucial tests in decades.

ASEAN centrality has never implied strategic uniformity. Rather, it rests on the Association’s capacity to convene

competing powers, shape regional norms and ensure that external actors engage through ASEAN-led mechanisms, including the East Asia Summit, the ASEAN Regional Forum, the Treaty of Amity and Cooperation and the ASEAN

ASEAN’s credibility in the South China Sea depends on transforming diplomatic consensus into enforceable commitments that restrain coercion and instability.



Outlook on the Indo-Pacific (AOIP).

Yet the very principles that have historically underpinned ASEAN cohesion — consensus and non-interference — increasingly constrain efforts towards collective action, especially when member states hold sharply divergent positions on urgent political and security issues.

SECURITY CHALLENGES

The most immediate operational challenge to ASEAN’s strategic relevance lies in the South China Sea. China continues to assert extensive maritime claims through its controversial U-shaped ‘ten-dash line’, encompassing

features across the Paracel, Spratly, Pratas and Macclesfield Bank areas. Despite the 2016 arbitral tribunal ruling — which rejected the legal foundation for China's expansive claims under the United Nations Convention on the Law of the Sea (UNCLOS) — tensions persist through continued coastguard activity, construction of outpost facilities, infrastructure development and military exercises.

Recent confrontations between Chinese and Philippine vessels near Second Thomas Shoal and Sabina Shoal, alongside accelerated construction at emerging outposts such as Antelope Reef, illustrate the ongoing use of grey-zone tactics to consolidate positions without triggering open conflict.

Beyond territorial sovereignty, the stakes are global: the South China Sea serves as a critical artery carrying nearly a quarter of global maritime trade and goods worth over \$5 trillion annually. Any sustained disruption would reverberate far beyond Southeast Asia, threatening global energy and manufacturing supply chains.

Consequently, negotiations between ASEAN and China on a Code of Conduct (COC) remain a primary benchmark for ASEAN's credibility. Claimant states such as the Philippines and Vietnam continue to push for a substantive, legally meaningful framework consistent with UNCLOS, while non-claimant members advocate more cautious stances. The Philippine chairmanship must demonstrate that consensus can produce concrete outcomes rather than serving merely as a tool for inaction.



STRATEGIC ECONOMIC AUTONOMY

In navigating external pressures, ASEAN states consistently favour "multi-alignment" and strategic hedging over choosing sides, seeking to preserve policy autonomy while engaging all major actors. China remains the region's primary economic partner, with bilateral trade surpassing \$1 trillion alongside extensive infrastructure and supply-chain investments. However, this deep interdependence generates vulnerabilities, including exposure to industrial overcapacity and critical input dependencies.

Conversely, while the United States offers crucial security and technology partnerships, its regional engagement remains uneven, punctuated by shifting policies on tariffs and critical minerals. To mitigate these vulnerabilities, ASEAN states are diversifying partnerships with Japan, the European Union, India and South Korea, while advancing intra-regional connectivity. The Philippines' emphasis on "Prosperity Corridors" highlights actionable avenues for



resilience, including the ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA) and joint initiatives in semiconductors, critical minerals and the ASEAN Power Grid.

Translating these regional commitments from aspirational goals into binding frameworks and operational infrastructure will be essential as Southeast Asia navigates energy transitions and supply-chain disruptions.

INTERNAL COHESION TEST

Internal constraints continue to hamper ASEAN's responsiveness. Uneven institutional capacity, persistent development gaps and differing national priorities make rapid, unified responses difficult to execute. The ongoing crisis in Myanmar represents ASEAN's most severe internal test. Five years after the 2021 coup in Myanmar, the grouping's Five-Point Consensus remains largely unimplemented, while humanitarian pressures escalate.

Recent diplomatic moves, such as Thailand's push for calibrated re-engagement, reflect recognition that isolation has yielded limited results. However, any semblance of engagement also risks conferring legitimacy on the junta without securing meaningful concessions. Balancing principle and pragmatism remains a delicate task, while failure to achieve progress on Myanmar will continue to erode ASEAN's credibility as a manager of regional order.

Concurrently, Timor-Leste's accession as ASEAN's eleventh member in late 2025 reinforces the Association's geographical coverage of Southeast Asia, but also highlights capacity disparities. Targeted integration through the Initiative for ASEAN Integration will be vital to prevent a two-tier structural divide.

Furthermore, broader priorities under the chair's "People Empowerment" framework — covering youth, food security, climate resilience and social development — can reinforce ASEAN's domestic legitimacy, provided national implementation keeps pace.

ASEAN centrality cannot rest on rhetoric alone. It requires tangible progress on the Code of Conduct, credible movement on the Myanmar crisis, actionable integration in digital and energy domains, and sufficient internal flexibility to navigate geopolitical rivalries without fracturing cohesion.

Consensus and non-interference sustain ASEAN's unity, but without institutional flexibility, these principles risk becoming obstacles to meaningful regional collective action.

MAJOR POWER PERSPECTIVES

The US Perspective: The US views the Manila ASEAN Summit as a key platform to deter cross-Strait conflict, protect vital maritime trade routes near Taiwan and counter Chinese coercion. By urging the bloc to uphold regional security and supply-chain resilience, Washington aims to anchor Indo-Pacific stability and reinforce its economic footprint.

India's Outlook on the Summit: The forthcoming summit serves as a crucial platform for India to solidify its Act East Policy and deepen its economic and strategic ties with Southeast Asia. With 2026 designated as the "ASEAN–India Year of Maritime Cooperation", New Delhi will approach the summit proactively, focusing on maritime security, regional connectivity and supply-chain resilience.

Strategic Alignment and Expectations: India's primary perspective revolves around reinforcing ASEAN centrality in the Indo-Pacific region. Amid rising geopolitical friction, New Delhi expects the summit to strengthen a rules-based maritime order adhering to UNCLOS, while aiming to advance collaborative frameworks for Humanitarian Assistance and Disaster Relief (HADR), blue economy initiatives and joint anti-piracy operations.

On the economic front, India will be looking to revitalise its trade ties (\$114.1 billion in 2025). Key expectations involve moving forward with negotiations to review existing trade frameworks to ensure more balanced and predictable commercial flows. Furthermore, India would aim to build synergy with ASEAN's digital push, aligning its own digital public infrastructure capabilities with the upcoming ASEAN Digital Economy Framework Agreement (DEFA).

In Manila, India will position itself as a reliable Global Value Chain Partner. Prime Minister Modi can be expected to drive the push for regional infrastructure connectivity, focusing on long-term projects such as the India–Myanmar–Thailand Trilateral Highway and enhanced cross-border digital links. By participating actively in the concurrent East Asia Summit dialogues, India will seek to reinforce its role as a key net security provider and economic anchor, while ensuring that Southeast Asia remains a pillar of a free, open and inclusive Indo-Pacific ecosystem.

India's Act East engagement strengthens ASEAN centrality through maritime cooperation, economic connectivity and shared commitment to a rules-based Indo-Pacific order.

All things considered, it is reasonable to conclude that the ensuing 49th ASEAN Summit presents a decisive opportunity for the members. What ultimately matters is whether the Association can actively shape the regional order or merely react to one dictated by external powers.

If the Philippine chairmanship can convert its key strategic priorities into enforceable outcomes, ASEAN will reinforce its central position in the Indo-Pacific; if not, its strategic space risks being progressively narrowed and diminished by the very competition it seeks to manage.

*(Ambassador Srikumar Menon, IFS (R.), former Ambassador of India to South Sudan, Angola and Sao Tome & Principe. The views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of **The News Analytics Herald**.)*

IN BRIEF

- *ASEAN centrality faces mounting pressure from maritime disputes and intensifying geopolitical competition.*
- *South China Sea negotiations will test ASEAN's ability to deliver meaningful commitments.*
- *Economic diversification and digital integration are essential for preserving regional strategic autonomy.*
- *Myanmar's unresolved crisis exposes institutional limitations and challenges ASEAN's collective credibility.*
- *India's Act East engagement supports maritime security, connectivity and ASEAN-led regional cooperation.*

BIMSTEC'S DELHI DECLARATION: STRENGTHENING REGIONAL SECURITY

TNH Special Coverage

The Bay of Bengal region took an important step towards strengthening collective security as the First BIMSTEC Home Ministers' Meeting convened in New Delhi on 13 October 2026. The landmark gathering adopted the Delhi Declaration, reaffirming the seven member states' commitment to a connected, secure, resilient and prosperous regional community.



Bringing together Bangladesh, Bhutan, India, Myanmar, Nepal, Sri Lanka and Thailand, the meeting established a higher-level political mechanism to guide cooperation against shared security challenges. It followed consultations among Home Secretaries and senior officials on 12 October.

The ministers approved a draft BIMSTEC Convention Against Trafficking in Persons, alongside an action plan and implementation matrix to combat human trafficking. They also endorsed measures addressing illicit financial flows, money laundering, terrorist financing and drug trafficking. The proposed convention and memorandum on financial-crime capacity-building await domestic approval procedures before signing.

The Delhi Declaration strongly condemned terrorism, including cross-border terrorism, while emphasising coordinated responses to radicalisation, organised crime, cybercrime and emerging transnational threats.

Maritime security and disaster preparedness received particular attention. India is scheduled to host the First BIMSTEC Maritime Security Exercise from 30 October to 3 November 2026, reflecting growing operational cooperation among member states.

The ministers also approved a regional action plan to improve preparedness and coordination in responding to natural disasters, complementing ongoing initiatives in early warning, humanitarian assistance and disaster relief. For BIMSTEC, the inaugural meeting represents a significant institutional milestone. Its strategic importance will ultimately depend on translating agreed frameworks into sustained operational cooperation across the Bay of Bengal.

Source Courtesy: BIMSTEC Secretariat in Special Association with The News Analytics Herald as it's Media Outreach Partner.

IN THE SPOTLIGHT

US-IRAN PEACE NEGOTIATIONS FACE RENEWED DEADLOCK



Iran rejected the latest American response to its proposal for ending hostilities, describing Washington's position as insufficient. Tehran also warned that renewed fighting could expose regional digital infrastructure to attacks. The impasse complicates efforts to reopen the Strait of Hormuz and restore confidence in Gulf security arrangements.

HOUTHİ ATTACKS ON RIYADH AIRPORT ESCALATE SAUDI-YEMEN CONFLICT



Houthi missile attacks struck Riyadh's international airport, causing casualties and major aviation disruption. Saudi-led forces subsequently launched strikes against Houthi-controlled areas in Yemen. The escalation threatens civilian aviation, regional security and diplomatic efforts to contain wider Middle Eastern hostilities, with airlines cancelling services to affected destinations.

EU AND CHINA MOVE TOWARDS MAJOR TRADE CONFRONTATION



European trade officials travelled to Beijing amid growing concern over China's expanding exports and the EU's substantial bilateral trade deficit. Brussels sought greater market access and fairer competition, particularly in manufacturing. The dispute highlighted mounting tensions between economic interdependence, industrial protection and strategic autonomy in Europe.

UKRAINE QUESTIONS ALLIED INTELLIGENCE AFTER RUSSIAN STRIKES



President Volodymyr Zelenskyy said Ukraine received no advance intelligence from international partners before Russian ballistic missiles struck civilian infrastructure in Kyiv. President Trump maintained that Washington continued sharing intelligence. The disagreement highlighted Kyiv's dependence on external early-warning capabilities as Russian attacks intensified against Ukrainian cities and energy infrastructure.

TRUMP-PUTIN DIESEL ARRANGEMENT AMID UKRAINE PEACE STRATEGY



American envoys reportedly told Ukrainian officials that permitting Russian diesel exports could encourage Moscow to return to peace negotiations. The arrangement drew criticism from Ukraine, which questioned concessions benefiting Russia. The initiative highlighted Washington's attempt to combine economic incentives with diplomacy despite continued Russian military operations.

CHINA CONDUCTS LIVE-FIRE DRILLS AROUND TAIWAN



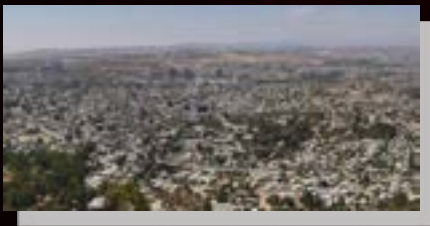
Taiwan monitored Chinese live-fire exercises along several coastal areas, including waters off Zhejiang province. Defence Minister Wellington Koo said Taipei would remain vigilant despite the drills not directly surrounding Taiwan. The exercises renewed concerns over military pressure in the Taiwan Strait and the potential for miscalculation.

PAKISTAN IMPOSES EMERGENCY RULE IN KHYBER PAKHTUNKHWA



Pakistan's President Asif Ali Zardari suspended the provincial government in Khyber Pakhtunkhwa, controlled by former Prime Minister Imran Khan's party. Federal authorities cited counterterrorism failures, while Khan's supporters condemned the intervention. The emergency deepened Pakistan's political crisis amid rising militant violence and tensions with neighbouring Afghanistan.

RENEWED FIGHTING IN ETHIOPIA'S TIGRAY RAISES REGIONAL WAR FEARS



Airstrikes and artillery exchanges intensified in northern Ethiopia as government forces clashed with Tigrayan fighters. Humanitarian sources reported civilian casualties, while neighbouring countries faced accusations of supporting rival factions. The renewed fighting threatened to destabilise the Horn of Africa and undermine fragile regional security arrangements.

BRAZIL'S PRESIDENTIAL ELECTION HEADS TOWARDS DECISIVE RUNOFF



Brazil's presidential election advanced towards an October 25 runoff between President Luiz Inácio Lula da Silva and Senator Flávio Bolsonaro. Their competing political visions could reshape Brazil's relations with Washington, Beijing and BRICS partners. Trade policy, critical minerals and national sovereignty have emerged as major geopolitical issues.

TRUMP ANNOUNCES RUSSIA-UKRAINE ENERGY CEASEFIRE



President Donald Trump announced an immediate energy ceasefire between Russia and Ukraine, surprising Kyiv and prompting questions about implementation. The Kremlin subsequently confirmed continuing discussions without endorsing a final agreement. The episode highlighted persistent uncertainty surrounding Washington's mediation efforts and the prospects for protecting critical energy infrastructure.



BHARAT'S STRATEGIC AUTONOMY IN A FRACTURED WORLD

GEOSTRATEGIC

As rival powers collide, alliances fracture and regional conflicts intensify, Bharat faces a defining geopolitical test. Its greatest strength lies not in choosing sides, but in preserving strategic independence, managing contradictions and refusing to become anyone else's instrument of power.



AMBASSADOR DR. DEEPAK VOHRA, IFS (R) |
FOR THE NEWS ANALYTICS HERALD

Looking at the challenges that rising Bharat faces, I recall an unforgettable lesson I learnt in international relations: if you want logic and loyalty, go and buy a dog. I first looked at our neighbourhood and extended neighbourhood: West Asia, or what the buffoons in the West call the Middle East. This is an area of immediate concern to us, with a self-declared eternal enemy to our west and an increasingly assertive neighbour to our east.

THE TROUBLED NEIGHBOURHOOD

Bharat's brilliant foreign policy has isolated Jihadistan (aka Pakistan). Its moment of glory in the international media, when the Trump praised the mad, illiterate mullah who runs the country, passed very quickly when he was unable to deliver on his promises to Trump. The mullah appears more preoccupied with personal privileges and an expansive indulgence abroad than with his country's deepening instability even as his country

splinters without Bharati efforts.

Further to the west lies the Gulf region, home to a large Bharati diaspora and a major supplier of energy to us. Of the 60 kinetic conflicts said to be raging across our world today, several are in the extended Gulf region, pitting Muslim brother against Muslim brother. We import energy from Saudi Arabia and the UAE, and when they began calling each other names and shooting at each other, whose side should I have taken in terms of safeguarding my so-called 'strategic autonomy', whatever that means?

Strategic autonomy is not about choosing friends or enemies; it is about preserving Bharat's freedom to pursue its national interests.

We did what we do best. We kept cordial relations with both and continued our bilateral trade and investment activities. We did not open our mouths to criticise, only to suggest restraint.

Then I thought of Sudan, where I spent almost five years, and which is splitting at the seams. The national military and the rebel movement, once bedfellows, are blasting each other, with deaths running into the hundreds each day, and not just from bullets and shells. What are they fighting about? No one seems to know.



Ditto Libya, with two governments, two militaries and two capitals. We maintain contact with both. Our two friends in the region, Israel and Iran, have not sheathed their swords yet. We have not publicly taken sides.

GREAT-POWER RIVALRIES

Our neighbour, the big, bad dragon, wants to replace America as numero uno on our planet and periodically floats the idea of a New Delhi–Beijing–Moscow axis to throttle Washington. He wants a G2, with our planet divided between a Sinocentric system and a democratic one. He wants to use Bharat to hurt America.

We smiled politely and asked: what about my territory that you occupy and want even more of? Why should China–US rivalry be a threat to us? Quite to the contrary, it is an opportunity that grows by the day and enables us to strengthen our independence of choice.

We ignore the barbs from that fellow in the White House who cajoles and coerces us not to buy Russian oil, as the revenues keep Russia fighting in Ukraine. Ukraine, of course, gets NATO weapons, and some from the European Union, to prick Russia. We yawn and tell him that we will do what is in our best interests.

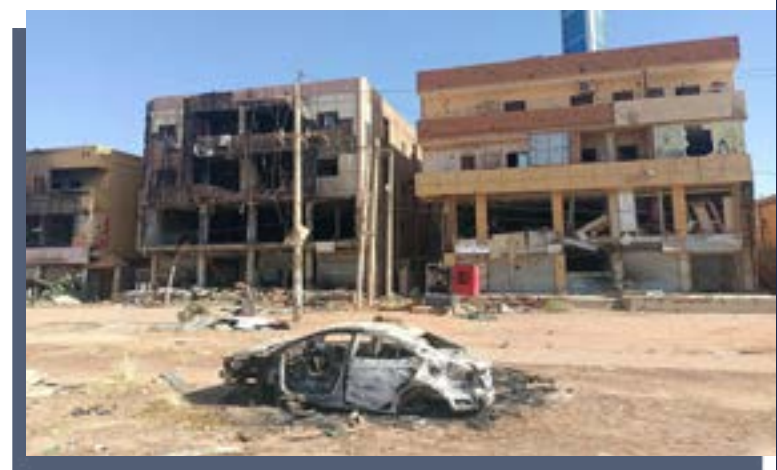
His sidekicks threaten us with perdition, until October 2026 rolls around and reports emerge of Shri Don the Trump considering diesel imports from Russia to cool soaring diesel prices at American pumps. An increasingly apprehensive President Zelenskyy strongly appeals to President Trump to abandon the proposed course of action.

'Never heard of you,' says Washington, in my imagined exchange. 'You have done your part in weakening Russia, ruining your country and losing hundreds of thousands in a war that you could never win, and it is time for your replacement.'

Zelenskyy then turns to Europe for support and is politely told that the looming Russian threat (arrant nonsense) prevents them from giving him arms and money. To preserve their cohesion, NATO and the EU need an enemy, and Russia appears in answer to their prayers.

Ukraine is a willing Sancho Panza, ready to die for his European masters if only they would let him into the situation room. He cries, begs and constantly bemoans the sacrifices that he has made to serve the anti-Russian agenda. No one listens or cares.

Rivalries among major powers create opportunities for Bharat, provided New Delhi refuses pressure, protects sovereignty and retains independent strategic judgement.



YEMEN'S DANGEROUS GAMBLE

I then looked at Yemen, a fascinating example of geopolitical calculations gone horribly wrong. The hardy Zaydi Shia Houthis from the mountains of northwestern Yemen, which I have visited more than once, resented their marginalisation and lack of development despite accounting for a substantial proportion of the population.

They resisted Saudi efforts to introduce Salafism and Wahhabism, hard-line Islamic ideologies, into Yemen. These ideologies remain at odds with the beliefs held by many Muslims. They emerged in the mid-2010s as a ragtag, flip-flop-wearing rebel movement opposed to the US, Israel and the Saudi-supported, hopelessly corrupt Sunni regime in Sana'a, the capital.

Breaking out of northwestern Yemen, the Zaydi Shia Houthis,

marginalised and ignored for decades, moved with lightning speed and amazing efficiency to seize the capital, displacing the Saudi and American supported government. Their advance also transformed the political position of longtime President Ali Abdullah Saleh, who had previously been supported by Saudi Arabia and America.

The Houthis consolidated their control and turned to Shia Iran for support. Iran happily gave them weapons, arms technology and money.



When Israel and Uncle Sam attacked Iran earlier this year, the Houthis and their Ansar Allah army jumped into the fray, latching on to the Palestine question to portray themselves as an interested party to the Gaza dispute. They fired their homemade missiles at Israel, hundreds of kilometres away, reportedly causing Israeli casualties. The test was successful.

Israel's response through aerial bombing was swift and severe, seriously degrading Houthi capabilities. Realising that they could not take on Israel backed by America, they reportedly reduced their attacks and rhetoric concerning Palestine and waited.

In the first week of October 2026, fighting in Yemen reportedly escalated sharply, and the decade-long Yemen conflict entered a new phase, with Saudi Arabia facing renewed security challenges.

I am told by my Houthi contacts that Mohammed bin Salman, whom they deeply dislike, has been seriously wounded in a Houthi missile strike on his favourite palace. This remains an unverified allegation and cannot be treated as established fact.

For some time now, Iran and America have not been directly attacking each other, while regional rivalries and shifting alignments continue to complicate the position of Saudi Arabia.

The Houthis are reported to control a substantial proportion of Yemen's population and roughly a quarter of its territory, although precise estimates vary. With their armed strength estimated by some accounts in the hundreds of thousands, they could become one of the biggest threats to peace in West Asia and should be ignored at one's peril.

Yemen demonstrates how neglected local grievances, foreign intervention and regional rivalries can transform an insurgency into a formidable geopolitical challenge.

BHARAT'S GLOBAL MOMENT

So, what do I foresee for India and its place in the world? As an influential, though unelected, voice of the so-called 160-member Global South of developing nations, Bharat has reserved its seat at the global high table.

In the next quarter-century, the doddering old granny in New York, also called the United Nations, will, I believe, die unsung and unlamented. Five nations will shape the world order, whatever that means. Bharat, America, Russia, Japan and China.

None of the other four trusts China, and each is wary of its duplicity. None of the others, except China, has major issues with Bharat, even though they might have challenges among themselves.

When Bharat speaks, the world listens. The world solicits Bharat's opinion on every major international challenge. This is the supreme success of our autonomous foreign policy.

(Ambassador Deepak Vohra, IFS (R) is a former Ambassador to Armenia, Sudan and Poland. He was also a special Advisor to the Government of South Sudan. The views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The News Analytics Herald.)

IN BRIEF

- *Bharat's strategic autonomy rests on independent choices amid competing geopolitical pressures.*
- *West Asian conflicts demand balanced diplomacy, energy security and sustained regional engagement.*
- *China-US rivalry offers Bharat opportunities to strengthen its independent strategic position.*
- *Yemen illustrates how regional grievances can escalate into wider security threats.*
- *Bharat's growing global influence depends on protecting sovereignty and diplomatic flexibility.*



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INDIA'S ENERGY SECURITY PARADOX

INSIGHT

Two wars have disrupted global energy markets, but India is turning volatility into strategic influence. Armed with expanding refining capacity, rising demand and pragmatic diplomacy, New Delhi is emerging as an energy swing power without controlling the world's oil reserves.



**DR. MADHUMATI DESHPANDE, ASSOCIATE PROFESSOR,
CHRIST UNIVERSITY | FOR THE NEWS ANALYTICS HERALD**

Recent wars and the energy crisis have highlighted vulnerabilities in energy security for several countries, including India. The volatility of energy prices and supply chains has triggered a race for energy sovereignty by any means. The Russia–Ukraine war disrupted oil supplies, which were rebalanced by West Asian countries. However, the new war between Iran and the United States has once again destabilised energy trade. Several oil refineries in West Asia were targeted by Iran in retaliation against the US. It is in this situation that India is emerging as an energy swing power.

An energy swing power is a country or group of countries that can influence the production, supply or price of global energy products. Saudi Arabia, OPEC countries and the United States have all been energy swing powers at different times. Their influence on production, supply and pricing has

India's growing energy demand and expanding refining capacity are transforming its position from a vulnerable importer into a global influencer.



shifted global energy balances, affecting non-oil-producing countries.

India, despite being heavily dependent on oil imports, is poised to become a modern global energy swing power. Unlike traditional swing powers, India cannot control the market through oil production, but it can influence it through increasing demand, refining capacity and pragmatic energy diplomacy.

FROM CONSUMER TO INFLUENCER

India's thirst for energy has soared with its population growth, industrial development and urbanisation. India has become the third-largest energy consumer over the last 30 years. Increasing electrification, LPG consumption and urbanisation have increased consumer demand, while



infrastructure projects, industrialisation and vehicle ownership have tripled the demand for petroleum and other hydrocarbon products.

India relied heavily on Gulf countries for energy supplies before 2020. Iraq, Saudi Arabia and the UAE were the main suppliers. Russia's share of India's oil imports was merely 2%.

India began developing alternative sources to reduce its dependence on a single region through diversification of both energy sources and suppliers. After 2022, Russia emerged as the single largest supplier of oil to India for geopolitical reasons.

Although the government has made concerted efforts to promote renewable energy, demand for fossil fuels continues to swell, making India a potential 'swing power' capable of influencing oil supplies and pricing.

The post-2022 oil supply rebalancing is an example of how India was able to purchase surplus Russian crude oil affected by US sanctions and redirect refined petroleum supplies

towards Europe, thereby helping to maintain global oil supplies and moderate prices.

INDIA'S REFINING ADVANTAGE

India imports almost 90 per cent of its crude oil requirements. It is the third-largest importer of crude oil in the world. At the same time, according to India's Ministry of Commerce, India's exports of petroleum products increased by 67.64 per cent in July 2026.

India's share of the increase in global crude oil demand is expected to reach 50 per cent by the mid-2030s. This demand is key to India's emergence as a swing power.

India's imports have grown not only because of domestic demand but also because of increasing refining capacity. India has the fourth-largest refining capacity in the world, catering to both domestic consumption and exports of refined petroleum products.

There are 22 operational refineries with a combined capacity of 258.1 million tonnes per annum. The Jamnagar refinery complex in Gujarat, owned by Reliance Industries, is the world's largest refinery complex. It has one of the world's highest Nelson Complexity Index (NCI) ratings, at 21.1, and the capacity to refine 216 distinct grades of crude oil. This enables India to import crude from different parts of the world and refine it.

Geopolitical compulsions forced Europe to stop buying oil from Russia from 2022, leading to increased demand for refined petroleum products, especially diesel and jet fuel. Europe continued to purchase refined petroleum products from India, including products processed from Russian crude. The Jamnagar and Vadinar refineries have maintained significant links with Russian crude supplies, with Vadinar associated with Rosneft, a Russian oil company. These refineries initially benefited from discounted Russian crude, while a substantial share of their refined petroleum products was exported to European countries that had imposed sanctions on Russia.

The trade was affected by tariffs imposed by the US and EU restrictions on petroleum products originating from Russian crude. However, the new war between the US and Iran in February 2026 had an even greater impact as supply chains were disrupted in the Strait of Hormuz.

According to data from Kpler, India's exports of jet fuel to Europe have risen to their highest level since 2025. The EU has imported around 62,000 barrels per day from Jamnagar to Italy. More recently, even Russia has started importing refined petroleum products as its refineries have been attacked by Ukraine.

India's refining infrastructure enables it to absorb crude from competing suppliers and redirect petroleum products towards markets facing supply disruptions.

Geopolitics and India's investment in refining infrastructure have made it a swing power by enabling it to absorb crude oil from different sources and sell refined products to countries facing supply shortages because of the two wars.

This has not only supported domestic energy stability but also given India an advantage in exporting refined petroleum products, further strengthening its position as a key player in global energy market.



CHALLENGES TO INFLUENCE

There are, however, several challenges that India must address to maintain its growing global influence.

As a nation heavily dependent on oil imports, India must secure its energy supply chains against global conflicts. It must also strengthen its export markets to prepare for the recovery of refining capacities in countries affected by conflict. Demand for India's refined petroleum products will then face renewed competition from traditional suppliers.

Increasing renewable energy capacity will also help India maintain its influence. However, battery storage capacity and distribution networks remain major challenges.

GEOPOLITICAL ENERGY PRAGMATISM

India's geopolitical pragmatism since 2022 has also been a key element in its emergence as an energy swing power. Although India previously yielded to international pressure to stop buying oil from Iran, in 2022 it resisted pressure to sanction Russia. India returned to its traditional approach of non-alignment and strategic autonomy to protect its national interests while maintaining relations with Russia.

India's imports of Russian oil increased from a meagre 2 per cent before 2022 to more than 30 per cent in 2026. This stance also helped global oil trade by absorbing discounted Russian crude, thereby influencing global oil prices.

West Asian countries continue to supply both LPG and crude oil to India. Even during the blockade of the Strait of Hormuz, India was able to leverage its diplomatic relations with Iran to secure passage for its ships and tankers.

India's pragmatic diplomacy has paid off in a volatile energy environment by maintaining working relations with the US, Russia and Iran despite the conflicts.

India's growing energy demand, which is expected to account for a substantial share of the increase in global demand, will keep it in the energy swing power category for the foreseeable future.

India's energy diplomacy demonstrates that strategic autonomy, diversified suppliers and flexible trade relationships can generate influence even without substantial oil production.

Pragmatic geopolitical diplomacy, strategic flexibility and diversification of energy sources will remain essential to balancing India's dependence on imported energy with its growing influence over global energy markets.

(Dr. Madhumati Deshpande, is an Associate Professor, Department of International Studies, Christ University (Deemed to be University). The views expressed are of the author and do not necessarily reflect the views of The News Analytics Herald.)

IN BRIEF

- India's expanding energy demand is increasing its influence over global petroleum markets.
- Advanced refining capacity enables India to process diverse crude grades and exports.
- Russian crude imports have strengthened India's role in global energy trade rebalancing.
- Strategic autonomy allows India to maintain energy partnerships across competing geopolitical blocs.
- Supply-chain security, renewable energy and export competitiveness remain critical to sustained influence.



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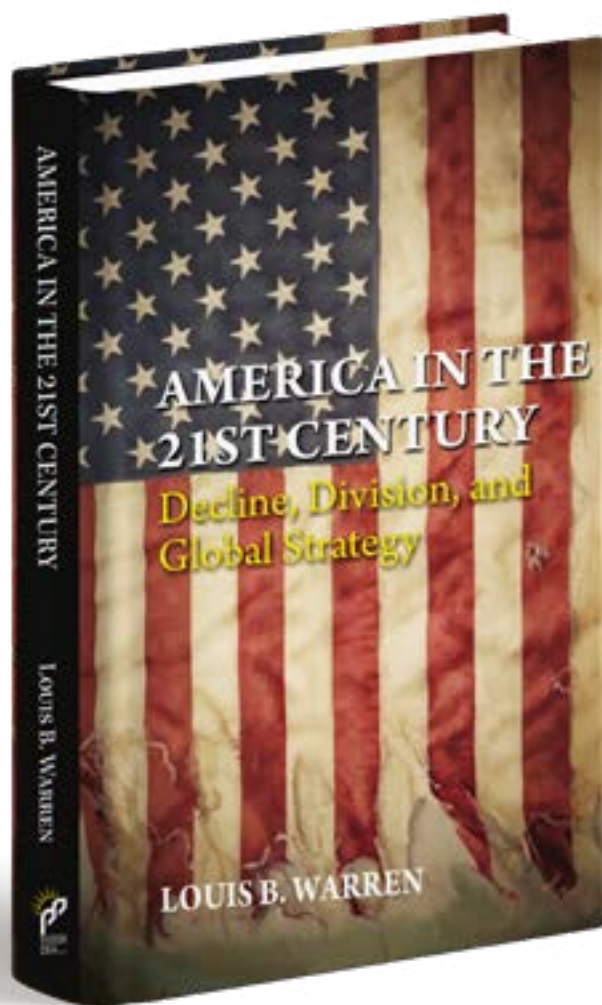
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THE FRACTURED SUPERPOWER

STRATEGIC READS



Former US diplomat Louis B. Warren examines the political divisions, institutional pressures and strategic choices reshaping American influence—offering Indian readers a timely perspective on the opportunities and uncertainties of partnership with Washington.



AMERICA IN THE 21ST CENTURY

Decline, Division, and Global Strategy

LOUIS B. WARREN



Publisher: Pentagon Press LLP



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Format: Hardcover



Price: ₹ 1,995/-



ISBN: 9788118020318

Louis B. Warren's *America in the 21st Century* asks a question with consequences far beyond Washington: can the United States sustain international leadership while its domestic political consensus weakens? Written from the perspective of a former American diplomat and naval officer, this book links America's internal divisions to the erosion of its once-unquestioned global dominance.

Warren begins with the transition from the post-Cold War unipolar moment to a more contested international system. China's industrial and technological ascent, Russia's strategic challenge and the erosion of long-held assumptions about globalisation form the external backdrop. Yet his deeper concern is domestic: political polarisation, cultural conflict, institutional distrust and the influence of technology companies on public life.

The book traces the origins of contemporary ideological disputes,

AT A GLANCE



DOMESTIC DIVIDE
Examines polarisation, cultural conflict and declining institutional trust.



GLOBAL TRANSITION
Tracks the movement from US predominance towards a contested multipolar order.



POLICY REVERSALS
Assesses how changing administrations reshape alliances, trade and defence priorities.



INDIA LENS
Explores the implications of Washington's unpredictability for India's strategic autonomy.

“
America's strategic credibility abroad is increasingly tied to its ability to restore political coherence at home.
 ”

the Vietnam War's lasting political effects, the rise of Donald Trump and the policies of the Biden administration. It then examines the second Trump presidency, including tariffs, alliances, defence priorities and the United States' approach to Europe and the Middle East. Warren argues that sharp reversals between administrations complicate long-term strategy and weaken confidence among partners.

His strongest contribution is the connection he draws between internal political stability and external strategic credibility. The chapters on defence, foreign policy and the movement towards multipolarity offer a useful framework for readers concerned with the future of

American power. Warren's experience in diplomacy gives particular weight to his discussion of how allies and competitors interpret Washington's choices.

The book is also unmistakably interpretative. Warren openly describes his standpoint as moderately conservative. Some judgements about political opponents, social movements and presidential decisions are expressed with greater certainty than the supporting analysis warrants. Readers should distinguish the author's assessments from settled historical conclusions. This is not a detached textbook, but an informed and frequently forceful argument about American decline and possible renewal.

For India, the subject is immediate. New Delhi must work with Washington on technology, defence and Indo-Pacific security while preserving room for independent decisions on trade, energy and relations with other major powers. American political volatility can complicate precisely those long-term partnerships on which strategic planning depends.

Warren's account is valuable because it encourages Indian readers to look beyond individual US presidents and examine the domestic pressures shaping American foreign policy. Its conclusions invite debate, but its central warning is difficult to dismiss: a country's influence abroad ultimately depends, in part, on its capacity to govern coherently at home.



ABOUT THE AUTHOR

Louis B. Warren brings decades of experience in military affairs, diplomacy and international economics. A Harvard graduate and former US Navy officer, he spent nearly three decades in the US Foreign Service, serving across Asia, the Middle East and North Africa. His appointments included Economic Counsellor in New Delhi, Consul-General in Mumbai and senior Washington roles involving nuclear non-proliferation, strategic technologies and development finance. His professional experience informs this assessment of America's political divisions and changing global position.

TNH TAKE

A provocative insider-informed assessment of America's domestic strains and changing global role. Its strongest insight is the connection between political cohesion and strategic credibility; its sharper partisan judgements deserve critical reading. For India, the book helps explain why partnership with Washington must be both ambitious and carefully calibrated.

READER'S COMPASS

Strategic Relevance	★	★	★	★	★
Analytical Depth	★	★	★	★	☆
Accessibility	★	★	★	★	☆
Originality	★	★	★	★	☆
Best For Policy • Diplomacy US Studies • Strategic Affairs		Read For American Polarisation • Multipolarity Trump and Biden • US Foreign Policy			

WHO SHOULD READ IT

-  Policymakers
-  Diplomats
-  Defence Professionals
-  Scholars
-  Business Leaders



THE BOOK IN ONE LINE

A critical examination of how America's internal divisions may reshape its power, partnerships and place in the world.



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QUANTUM'S RACE TO RELIABILITY

HI-TECH

Quantum computing's defining contest is shifting from qubit numbers to computational reliability. As nations race towards fault-tolerant machines, breakthroughs in error correction could transform scientific discovery, undermine existing cryptography and determine who commands the next frontier of technological power.



TECH DESK

THE NEWS ANALYTICS HERALD

For much of the past decade, quantum computing has been defined by a race for larger processors. Technology companies, research laboratories and governments competed to demonstrate increasing numbers of quantum bits, or qubits, presenting each advance as another step towards a computational revolution.

Yet the central challenge has changed. The industry is discovering that quantum computing's future depends less on how many qubits a machine contains than on how reliably those qubits can perform meaningful calculations.

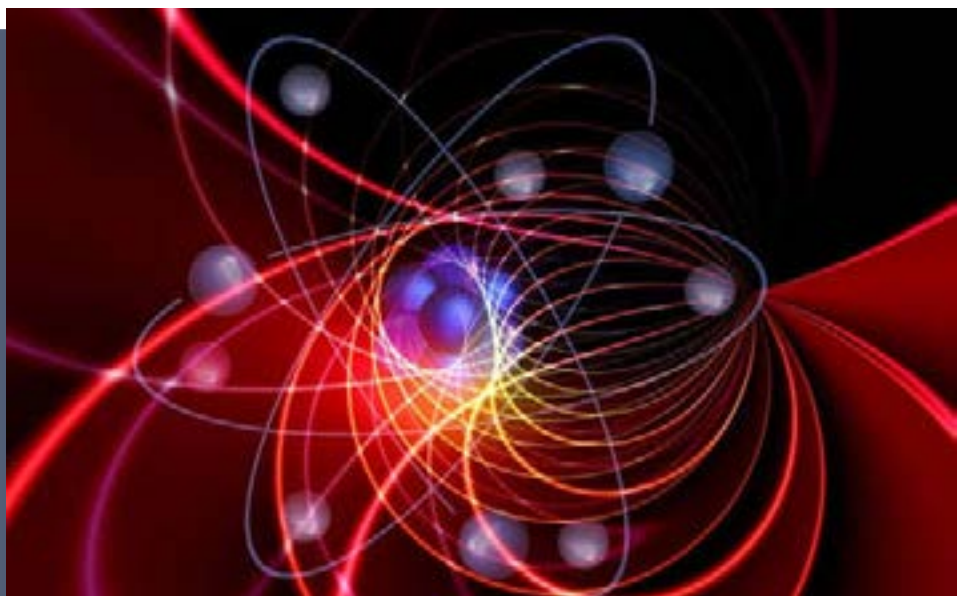
Unlike classical bits, which represent either zero or one, qubits exploit quantum phenomena such as superposition and entanglement. These properties allow quantum processors to manipulate information in ways fundamentally

different from conventional computers. However, their extraordinary computational potential comes with exceptional fragility.

Environmental interference, imperfect control signals and interactions between qubits introduce errors. As calculations become longer and more complex, these errors accumulate, potentially destroying the information required to produce a useful result.

The critical objective is therefore no longer simply building larger quantum processors. It is developing machines capable

Quantum supremacy will not belong to machines with the most qubits, but those delivering sustained, accurate computation despite persistent errors.



of performing sustained, accurate calculations despite the instability of their underlying components. Reliability, rather than raw qubit numbers, is emerging as the defining measure of quantum progress.

THE RELIABILITY BARRIER

Quantum error correction represents the essential bridge between experimental processors and practical quantum computers. In classical computing, errors can often be detected and corrected through redundancy. Quantum information presents a more difficult problem because unknown quantum states cannot simply be copied, and direct measurement can disturb the information being protected.

Researchers address this through quantum error-correcting codes, distributing information across multiple physical qubits to create a more reliable logical qubit. A logical qubit is therefore not necessarily a single physical device. It is

an encoded unit of quantum information protected through coordinated operations, measurements and error-correction procedures.

The distinction is fundamental. A processor containing hundreds or thousands of physical qubits may still possess limited practical capability if errors prevent it from completing sufficiently complex calculations. Conversely, a smaller number of high-quality logical qubits could eventually prove more valuable if they support dependable operations over extended periods.

The difficulty lies in the substantial hardware overhead. Depending on physical error rates, correction methods and computational requirements, useful fault-tolerant machines may require many physical qubits for every logical qubit. Reducing this overhead without compromising reliability has become one of the industry's most consequential engineering challenges.

Several technological approaches are competing to overcome these limitations. Superconducting processors, pursued by companies including IBM and Google, use fabricated circuits operating at extremely low temperatures. Their advantages include established manufacturing techniques and rapid gate operations, although maintaining coherence and controlling large systems remain demanding.

Trapped-ion systems, developed by companies such as Quantinuum and IonQ, manipulate individual charged atoms using electromagnetic fields and lasers. They offer attractive coherence and connectivity characteristics, but scaling control systems and operational throughput present challenges.

Neutral-atom platforms use arrays of atoms controlled through optical techniques, offering potentially flexible architectures and large qubit configurations.

Photonic approaches encode quantum information in particles of light, seeking advantages in communication and modular integration, while confronting difficult challenges involving loss, resource generation and fault-tolerant operations.

Other approaches, including silicon spin qubits and topological architectures, pursue different combinations of stability, manufacturability and scalability. No technological pathway has yet demonstrated a clear, comprehensive victory.

The decisive benchmarks will include logical error rates, gate fidelity, computational speed, correction overhead, system connectivity and the ability to sustain complex algorithms.

The quantum threat to encryption begins before powerful machines arrive, as today's intercepted secrets could become tomorrow's exposed intelligence assets.

The emerging race is therefore not merely between companies. It is between competing visions of how reliable quantum computation should be engineered.

THE ADVANTAGE QUEST

The next milestone is practical quantum advantage: demonstrating that a quantum system can solve a valuable problem more effectively than the best available classical alternatives. This is more demanding than demonstrating computational superiority on specialised benchmark tasks. A scientifically impressive experiment may have little immediate industrial application.



Google's Willow processor demonstrated an important error-correction milestone in 2024, showing that increasing the size of an encoded quantum system could suppress logical errors under tested conditions. It represented progress towards fault tolerance, not the arrival of a fully fault-tolerant computer.

IBM, meanwhile, has outlined plans for its Starling system, targeting 200 logical qubits and 100 million quantum gates by 2029. These remain engineering objectives rather than demonstrated capabilities.

Such developments illustrate the changing industry benchmark: the ability to execute increasingly demanding computations reliably, rather than simply announcing larger processors. Useful applications may emerge through hybrid architectures combining quantum processors with classical high-performance computing.

Quantum computing's most promising applications lie in understanding systems governed by quantum mechanics itself. Molecular interactions, chemical reactions and complex materials can become exceptionally difficult to simulate accurately using conventional computers. Reliable quantum processors could eventually help researchers investigate these systems more efficiently.

Potential applications include catalyst design, advanced batteries, pharmaceutical research, superconducting materials and industrial chemistry.

For energy industries, improved molecular simulation could contribute to more efficient chemical processes. For medicine, it could support aspects of drug discovery, although translating computational advances into approved treatments would remain a lengthy process.

Optimisation and financial modelling also attract commercial interest, but credible quantum advantage in these fields remains uncertain. The greatest early benefits may arise not from replacing classical computers, but from solving carefully selected problems beyond their practical reach.

CRYPTOGRAPHY'S COUNTDOWN

Quantum computing presents a different challenge for cybersecurity. A sufficiently powerful fault-tolerant quantum computer could undermine widely deployed public-key cryptographic systems, including RSA and elliptic-curve cryptography.

Although current machines cannot perform such attacks at the necessary scale, governments and enterprises must consider information requiring protection for decades.

Adversaries could capture encrypted communications today and attempt to decrypt them when more capable quantum systems become available. Consequently, cybersecurity planning cannot wait for a cryptographically relevant quantum computer to appear.

Quantum leadership will depend on industrial capability, secure supply chains and reliable machines, not scientific breakthroughs or national ambition alone.

The US National Institute of Standards and Technology finalised three principal post-quantum cryptography standards in 2024 and continues to urge organisations to begin migration.

The transition requires identifying vulnerable systems, replacing cryptographic components and ensuring interoperability across networks, financial infrastructure, government systems and industrial platforms. Quantum readiness is therefore already becoming a strategic security requirement.

THE SOVEREIGNTY CONTEST

Quantum computing is increasingly becoming an instrument of technological statecraft. The United States, China, Europe and other major economies are investing in quantum research, specialised infrastructure, talent and domestic supply chains. India's National Quantum Mission similarly reflects the strategic importance of developing indigenous capabilities.

The stakes extend beyond computing performance. Reliable quantum systems could influence advanced materials, defence research, secure communications and intelligence capabilities.

Leadership will depend on more than scientific breakthroughs. Cryogenic engineering, precision electronics, semiconductor fabrication, control software and specialised human capital will determine which countries can industrialise quantum technologies.

International partnerships will remain essential, but dependence on foreign hardware, intellectual property or critical components could introduce strategic vulnerabilities.

The quantum race is entering its most consequential phase. Experimental achievements must now become reproducible engineering capabilities, scalable architectures and commercially meaningful applications.

Progress will be uneven. Some technologies may demonstrate superior logical-qubit performance, while others offer advantages in manufacturing, connectivity or operational cost. No single breakthrough guarantees practical supremacy.

Ultimately, the winners will be those capable of combining error correction, scalable hardware, reliable software and sustainable industrial ecosystems.

Quantum computing's future will not be determined by the largest announced processor, but by the machine that can consistently deliver useful answers. The decisive quantum advantage will be reliability itself—and the nations mastering it could shape the next generation of scientific, economic and strategic power.

IN BRIEF

- *Quantum computing's decisive challenge is shifting from qubit counts towards sustained reliability.*
- *Error correction and scalable logical qubits will determine practical fault-tolerant computing capabilities.*
- *Reliable quantum machines could accelerate scientific discovery, advanced materials and pharmaceutical research.*
- *Future quantum attacks threaten existing encryption, demanding immediate post-quantum security preparations.*
- *Technological leadership will depend on resilient supply chains, engineering capabilities and sovereignty.*

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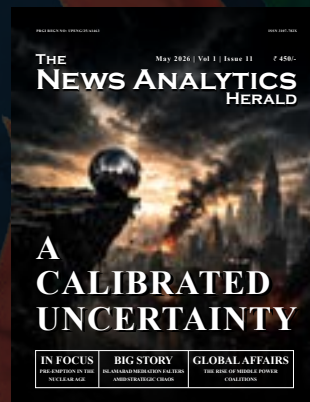
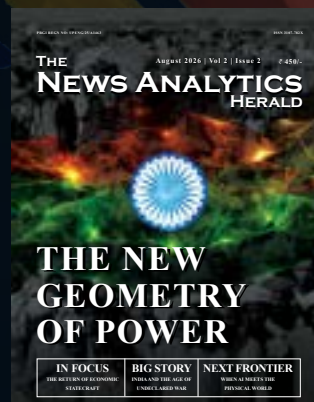
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